The Dissertation Committee for Leah Elina LeFebvre Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**Examining Individual and Joint Sense-Making
in Stressful Relational Narratives**

Committee:

René Dailey, Supervisor

Mike Allen

David Buss

Erin E. Donovan

Matthew S. McGlone

**Examining Individual and Joint Sense-Making
in Stressful Relational Narratives**

by

Leah Elina LeFebvre, B.S., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

Dedication

"If you want to know me,
then you must know my story,
for my story defines who I am"
(McAdams, 1993, p. 11).

Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. René Dailey. Thank you for being an exemplary role model and mentor. Every research project, every research team, and every opportunity to collaborate with you has been a priceless learning experience. My success is due to your unwavering support of my ideas. This allowed me to grow my scholarship and continues to push me to express full and comprehensive ideas. My dissertation would not exist without your support and encouragement and I will be forever grateful and proud to be part of your academic lineage. Thank you.

Next, I would like to thank my committee members. Dr. Mike Allen – thank you for being a constant guiding model for research and friendship. Dr. David Buss – thank you for stretching me to further conceptualization and application of interdisciplinary and controversial perspectives. Dr. Erin Donovan – thank you for being an inspiring and confident committee member. I began my journey on relational turbulence my first semester of your Interpersonal Communication Theory course. I am ever appreciative of your constant support and assistance. Dr. Matthew McGlone – thank you for being a reassuring confidant. I appreciate your guidance and encouragement to persist through personal and professional obstacles.

Also, I would like to thank Dr. Steve Duck, Dr. Leanne Knobloch, Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas, and Dr. Denise Solomon. I hold your scholarship contributions in high esteem and my research could not exist without standing on the shoulders of my academic mentors in the field of interpersonal communication.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my participants for candidly sharing their relational stories. I appreciate my participants' courage to bravely and freely offer their personal stories about relational stressors with a researcher; I would not have a dissertation without their willingness.

I would additionally like to thank my friends, Nick Brody, Laura Brown, Randy Cox, Jane Damron, Emily Richardson, Josh Scacco, and Charee Thompson, who gladly aided in my dissertation through their rigorous reviews, coding contributions, methodological and results questions, intellectual insights, and constant friendship.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my family and those I consider my family: my brothers, Jesse and Luke LeFebvre, Geoff Masanet, Ben Bernell, Kate Blackburn, and my parents, Robert and Joan LeFebvre. I want to thank my brothers for their encouragement. I would like to thank Luke who paved the path for the first communication doctorate in our family as well as provided the resources to ensure I had willing and eager participants. I would like to thank Jesse for his support and reassurance from afar. I would also like to thank Geoff Masanet who was a constant supporter during the longest and latest hours of the journey. I would like to thank Ben Bernell for helping

me find my interior strength, providing empathy when I needed an ear, encouraging me when I felt lost, and offering continual solace. I would like to thank Kate for I could not have endured without you. You were always there and I cannot even begin to thank you for all you have done professionally and personally and continue to do for me. Lastly, I would, most like to thank my parents, Joan and Robert, for everything. I would not be on this path without your enduring support, guidance, encouragement, and love as well as your endearing yearning for and pursuit of education that you both modeled and bestowed in me. Thank you all!

Examining Individual and Joint Sense-Making
in Stressful Relational Narratives

Leah Elina LeFebvre, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: René Dailey

Abstract

This dissertation examined individual and joint storytelling as a communicative process to explore relational turbulence about stressful events. Response to change in romantic relationships inherently involves a degree of instability as individuals alter their thoughts and actions. The instability and chaos that results when transitions impact interpersonal relationships is *relational turbulence* (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). The theoretical focus is the relational turbulence model (RTM) that serves to illustrate the ambiguity and complexity embedded in relationship experiences and the negotiation of behavior. Examination of stories showcased the representational relational state (i.e., uncertainty) and cognitive activities (i.e., partner interdependence) present in the relationship. First, the dissertation further positioned the influence turbulence has on individual and relational communication to negotiate discomfort, negative emotions, and difficulties that ensued during transitions. Second, this study examined expressions individuals chose to highlight, through storytelling, that apply to relational turbulence mechanisms: relational uncertainty and interdependence. Third, this dissertation examined identity development and/or fluctuation as a byproduct of turbulence exhibited through stories exploring another potential relational turbulence mechanism. A review of literature discussed the theoretical framework for the relational turbulence model and storytelling content and structure. The exploration of stories and storytelling was reviewed as a means for investigating RTM, followed by analysis procedures outlining individual and relational storytelling processes. Results revealed 14 transitional events categories and 23 subcategories. Additionally, qualitative themes and subthemes that emerged for relational uncertainty, partner interdependence, individual and relational identity. Results for relational uncertainty triangulated previous scholarship while also identified two new themes. Partner interdependence results indicated more specificity in forms of partner interference and facilitation. Identity emerged as a third mechanism and preliminary investigation found static and dynamic forms. Quantitative results analyzed significant correlations and comparisons between narrative completeness in individuals' and relational partners' storytelling experiences. The dissertation highlighted how relational turbulence influenced the storytelling content and structure of individual and joint stories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Our uncertainty about ourselves and our partners waxes and wanes during the life of relationships (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Interpersonal relationships are fraught with uncertainty, especially dating relationships. The meanings people derive from their communication help determine their understanding of relationships and simultaneously their associated uncertainty (Duck, 1995). Individuals' experience uncertainty over their own and partner's feelings as well as ambiguity over appropriate relational behavior (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Thus, in order for most relationships to persist, it is important that the individuals involved in the relationships consistently update their knowledge about themselves, their relational partner, and their relationship (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Knobloch, 2008b; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).

The process of seeking and reducing information surrounding similarity or difference between relational partners occurs naturally as they respond to change. Relationship change whether prompted by internal or external sources can be perceived as encompassing positive and/or negative outcomes. Change in close relationships can arise from a variety of sources including within an individual (e.g., individual growth), within the dyad (e.g., relational development), or within the environment external to the partnership (Solomon & Theiss, 2011). As a result, a variety of individual responses are possible when it comes to relationship change including how partners and the overall relationship respond to change. As individuals respond to change, they are faced with making sense of their emerging relationships and processing transitional events. As such,

uncertainty stimulates the potential to further increase uncertainty about a relationship. The resulting ambiguity may present a centrifugal force to pull the relationship apart while simultaneously being balanced by a countervailing need for order and predictability (Conville, 1991). Therefore, uncertainty serves as an impetus for navigating relational processing within developing and perpetuating relationships.

The response to change in romantic relationships can been labeled a transition. Whether minor or major, transitions inherently involve a degree of instability as individuals alter their thoughts and actions as a response to their new circumstances. The instability and chaos that results when transitions impact interpersonal relationships is referred to as *relational turbulence* (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). The relational turbulence model serves as the centralized theoretical focus for this dissertation. Transitions can cause relational turbulence, and this turbulence is uncomfortable and natural part of relationships. My dissertation captured a specific stressor that caused turbulence (that likely included a transition of some type). Often times you cannot accurately forecast turbulence, but there are ways to avoid or reduce it. Nonetheless, turbulence encountered as negative can be visible in both positively and negatively valenced relationship events (Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010) and experienced as both positive and/or negative outcomes. The first goal of this dissertation is to further position the influence turbulence has on individual and relational communication. It is valuable to examine how individuals and relationships negotiate discomfort, negative emotions, and difficulties that often ensue during times of change.

Throughout the process of understanding everyday events as well as turbulent experiences, people tell stories about them (Koenig, 2002). Relationship stories indicate depictions of behavior and reports of perception – these stories become our primary source of knowing about relationships (Conville, 1997). An overarching dissertation goal will explore storytelling, as a communicative process, which is valuable to understanding how turbulence impacts individual and relational communication in stories. Many of the exchanges in everyday conversation are storytelling of one form or another (McAdams, 1993). The ways in which people construct meaning via their telling and retelling of relationship stories provides key insights into their individual and relational health (Frost, 2013). Chapter 3 explores basic stories that may carry ambiguity and therefore leave openings for negotiation of meaning (Czarniawska, 1998). Because stories are a main mode for sharing human knowledge (Bruner, 1986, 1990) as well as that of communication (Fisher, 1984), this chapter examines the importance of investigating how relational turbulence themes appear within everyday communication such as storytelling.

> "A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both" (Gallie, 1968, p. 22).

Hence, stories are a primary way individuals make sense of their experiences (Bruner, 1990). Stories we create influence the stories of others, those stories give rise to other

stories, and we find meaning and connection within a web of story-making and story-living (McAdams, 1993).

Narrative approaches capture how individuals make and give sense to their actions, experiences, events, and relationships (Weber, Harvey, & Stanley, 1987). A relationship is a merger of unique autobiographies (Conville, 1991), and, as the relationship evolves, descriptions and explanations operate as mirrors to reality. These shared autobiographies often reveal personal meanings whereby individuals craft deliberate descriptions to tell their stories. "Stories and relationships thus are inextricably intertwined in that people come to define themselves and others through the stories they tell" (LaRossa, 1995, p. 555). Stories about the relationship evidence its reality; the more stories the greater ability we have to claim that a relationship exists. Thereby, we create the realities of a relationship through and by the stories we tell about them (Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Koenig Kellas, Willer, & Kranstuber, 2011). A relationship story contains the essence of the relationships by representing relational partners' lived experience as well as revealing relationships in story form (Conville, 1997). This dissertation continues to expand a relatively recent scholarship validating stories as a means for accessing people's attitudes toward their personal relationships (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillman-Healy, 1997; Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999). Thus, viewing communication narratively illustrates how people are participants in producing and processing their messages (Fisher, 1989). Individuals share narratives to communicate their interpretation of the world (Polkinghorne, 1988) to make sense of an uncertain world (Browning & Morris, 2012).

People often utilize stories as a way to cope with stressful, traumatic, or difficult life experiences (e.g., Holmberg, Orbuch, & Veroff, 2004; Riessman, 1993). Storytelling is one way individuals make sense of difficulty (e.g., Koenig Kellas, Trees, Schrodt, LeClair-Underberg, & Willer, 2010; McAdams, 1993; Weber et al., 1987) in relational initiation, maintenance, dissolution, and discord. Storytelling displays a structure that allows individuals to organize events and actions into a whole form. The apparently disconnected and independent elements are conceptualized as related parts of a whole. This, in turn, attributes significance to particular actions and events according to their effect on the whole (Polkinghorne, 1988). Therefore, the story form encompasses linguistic expressions used to hold thought together but also the human effort to cope with the untoward and unexpected in life (Bruner, 1986). More specifically, a second dissertation goal focuses on the particular expressions individuals choose to highlight within their stories that apply to two relational turbulence mechanisms: uncertainty and interdependence. Communication in relational development reflects individuals attending to problems that represent ambivalence, uncertainty, ambiguity, change, expectation, consensus, and recall; these concepts are then represented as entities in narratives (Burnett, 1987). Given the ambiguity and complexity embedded in relationship experiences (i.e., uncertainty) and the negotiation of behavior (i.e., interdependence), examining stories may showcase the representational relational state and cognitive activities present in the relationship as a result of the transition. Additionally, because transitions can lead to changes in roles, behaviors, and expectations, these can lead to identity adjustments within individuals and relationships

(Berger & Bradac, 1982); therefore, this dissertation further examines identity development and/or fluctuation as a byproduct of turbulence exhibited through stories.

Some "stories are harder to tell (e.g., conflict, divorce, death, or illness) than others because the experience itself is so fragmented and full of chaos that fixing meaning or imagining coherence is fictive" (Boje, 2001, p. 7). Thus, lived experiences of chaos require reflection and consequently have an effect on storytelling. Meanings are not static; rather, they change over time. As individuals and relationships respond to new experiences, particularly stressful experiences, new responses are necessary from the person or dyad. Utilizing narrative analysis opens up a naturalistic form of telling about an experience, not simply to provide the content, but also to understand why the story was told that way (Riessman, 1993). Therefore, the third goal of this dissertation is to examine how relational turbulence within relationships influences the storytelling structure used in individual and joint stories. Difficult experiences may shift between individual to joint processes, as such an interdependent and collaborative nature creates a new set of exigencies for sense-making (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). As a result, joint storytelling forces couples to navigate content and process discrepancies and differences.

In sum, this dissertation examines individual and joint storytelling as a communicative process to explore relational turbulence displayed in relational stories about stressful events. As couples make sense of the events in their lives through storytelling, the narratives will be examined to understand how their relationship and communication have been influenced. Additionally, I will examine an understudied approach to identifying communication behaviors that accompanies and helps to

17

differentiate sense-making processes in individual and joint stories in dating couples. Sense-making refers to degree to which someone shares something about oneself or the relationship by reflecting on past events. Since sense-making has been found to be associated with normal transition events, such as relationship formation (e.g., Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989; Wamboldt & Wolin, 1989), I will engage in an investigation that combines (1) a review of the theoretical framework for relational turbulence model and (2) an examination of the content and structure of individual and joint relational storytelling.

Thus, I highlight the organization structure that will follow. Chapter 2 begins with the origins of uncertainty and leads to the formation of the relational turbulence and its subsequent research and relevance including the specific mechanisms, relational uncertainty and partner interdependence. Chapter 3 leads into the exploration of stories and storytelling as a means for investigating Relational Turbulence Model through naturalistic expressions. Chapter 4 details the methods and analysis procedures for studying individual and relational storytelling. Specifically, I discuss the methodology for collecting and analyzing the stories' linguistic expressions through thematic analysis as well as depicting the process for completing the questionnaires to substantiate comparisons for similarities and differences within the individual and joint stories. Results will be discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 revealing the qualitative relevant themes that emerged for relational uncertainty, interdependence, and identity as well as the quantitative findings through correlations and comparisons between storytelling experiences. Chapter 7 will discuss the findings through theoretical and practical

implications, strengths and limitations, and future directions. Chapter 8 will conclude the

dissertation.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Overview

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how romantic relationship partners experience and manage uncertainty and the influences it has onto interactions occurring within the bonds of intimacy. In this section of the literature review I examine the emergence of uncertainty as a theoretical root to interpersonal communication and its underpinnings evident in the emergence of relational uncertainty. Then I discuss how relational uncertainty acts as a predictor to communicative processing in relationships.

Positioning Uncertainty

Uncertainty in interpersonal relationships constitutes a lack of confidence about how an interpersonal encounter will proceed; it involves the inability to describe, explain, predict, and perform behaviors within an interaction where it is difficult to predict future outcomes (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty scholarship evolves from its predecessors: information acquisition, attribution theory, and social comparison theory. These theoretical perspectives provide foundations for conceptualizing uncertainty, or the inability to either predict or understand the meaning exhibited in attitudes, behaviors, or outcomes (Afifi & Afifi, 2009). This classic conceptualization surmises that people are motivated to reduce uncertainty and desire certainty instead (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). Individuals experiencing uncertainty often exhibit difficulty in deciding how to behave, anticipating their partner's responses, and predicting what is going to happen next (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). While uncertainty exists as a psychological state, it is through

communication that individuals attempt to navigate their questions and acquire

knowledge. As such, uncertainty marks a prominent place in the field of interpersonal

communication.

Uncertainty Theoretical Frameworks

Initially, the field of communication investigated the transmission of information

(e.g., Shannon & Weaver, 1949) considering information acquisition between senders

and receivers. This information exchange then promoted the consideration of the role of

uncertainty exhibited within message exchange. Two prominent uncertainty frameworks

emerged to explain uncertainty in interpersonal interactions: uncertainty reduction theory

and predicted outcome value theory. Each emerged at the onset of uncertainty

scholarship and eventually led to the establishment of relational uncertainty—uncertainty

we have regarding our personal relationships.

Most notably, uncertainty reduction theory (URT) is the pioneering framework

for exploring ambiguity within acquaintance or initial interpersonal interaction theorizing

that uncertainty shapes people's behaviors (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger &

Gudykunst, 1991). Utilizing a post-positivist perspective, URT highlights uncertainty as

a causal force shaping communication behavior and advances predictions about how

people behave when they are uncertain (Knobloch, 2008b). A major assumption of URT

is that individuals attempt to reduce uncertainty and consequently increase their

predictability within the interaction. For instance, people often exhibit difficulty

predicting future interactions when they are unsure why an event happened. As a result,

individuals attempt to resolve uncertainty by seeking, planning, or hedging information through verbal and nonverbal communication.

After a decade of research on uncertainty reduction, another framework emerged, the Predicted Outcome Value Theory (POV) (e.g., Sunnafrank, 1986, 1990) which challenged URT. POV argued that individuals choose to interact by maximizing rewards and minimizing costs. Sunnafrank (1986) asserted that the goal of anticipating advantages and disadvantages outweighed individuals' necessity to dispel uncertainty in burgeoning relationships. By employing a social exchange perspective, (e.g., perspective utilizing cost-benefits ratio and comparison of alternatives), this theoretical framework argued that reducing uncertainty assisted individuals' evaluation about whether to further interact with an acquaintance; therefore, dispelling uncertainty costs and increasing rewards prior to an investment into an advantageous interaction (Knobloch, 2010). Basically, if future interactions appear rewarding, people will continue developing that relationship. Although, POV does not have an expansive body of work (Solomon & Vangelisti, 2010), its premises about anticipating advantages and disadvantages in future interactions did provide a contribution to uncertainty scholarship.

There is theoretical distinction between URT and POV. Both theoretical frames suggest that individuals who are uncertain have difficulty anticipating the consequences of their actions (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). URT argues that uncertainty drives individuals' communication whereas POV posits that communication is motivated by resource acquisition (Knobloch, 2008b). In the POV perspective, uncertainty reduction is subservient to experiencing positive relational outcomes (e.g., Sunnafrank, 1990). For

22

example, imagine a scenario in which two individuals meet for the first time. URT predicts that these individuals would communicate by asking questions and monitoring nonverbal behavior to decrease uncertainty, whereas POV predicts that these individuals would also communicate by asking questions and monitoring nonverbal behavior but for the purpose of deciding whether the relationship would be worth pursuing further. Even though these theoretical frameworks highlight differences for initiating interactions, they laid the groundwork for examining communication outcomes.

Uncertainty Measurements

Even with competition between these two notions of uncertainty (URT and POV), both frameworks utilized the same Clatterbuck Uncertainty Evaluation Scale (CLUES) to explore communication in acquaintance relationships (e.g., Clatterbuck, 1979). CLUES evaluated individuals' ability to gauge uncertainty by asking them how confident they were in their ability to make attributions about their conversational partner's behaviors. Sample items included: (1) How confident are you of your general ability to predict how your partner will behave?, and (2) How accurate are you at predicting the values your partner holds? This scale paralleled partner predictability questions addressed with URT and POV.

Turner (1990) then adapted uncertainty by applying it to a more established relationship, the context of marriage. Within this study, she reconstructed CLUES to formulate a new relationship-focused measure of attributional confidence (RECLUES) about how individuals felt about their present relationship (e.g., marriage). Sample statements included: (1) How confident are you of your general ability to predict the

future of your relationships?, (2) How sure are you about the closeness of your relationship?, and (3) How confident are you in your ability to describe and define your relationship in the same way that your spouse would? These scales prompted further investigations into measuring uncertainty within and beyond initial interactions.

Ultimately, these two competing perspectives (e.g., URT and POV) utilizing uncertainty conceptualizations and operationalizations provided grounds to expand research beyond initial interactions (e.g., Afifi & Reichert, 1996; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988; Turner, 1990). Initially, uncertainty was broadly applied to emphasize virtually anything in initial interactions (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975); however, as it continued to evolve, it became more narrowly defined while simultaneously being expanded to other relationships stages. Uncertainty research branched out to encompass relationship phases from entry to exit, continually expanding its scope to include numerous interpersonal relationship interactions, which led to the conceptualization of relational uncertainty.

<div align="center">

Explicating Relational Uncertainty

</div>

Knobloch and Solomon (1999) emphasized that "URT is a hypo-deductive causal theory that explains communicative behavior within interpersonal episodes in terms of individuals' inability to understand both their own and their partner's attitudes, feelings, and behavior" (p. 261). Knobloch and Solomon further conceptualized uncertainty by narrowing the scope from URT and POV (Knobloch, 2010) through the development of the relational uncertainty measurement encapsulating this URT conceptualization. Their conceptualization of uncertainty was then expanded to include certainty about an

24

individual at any point in the relationship (Knobloch, 2008b) switching from theorizing

about partner predictability issues to that of relational involvement issues (e.g., Afifi &

Reichert, 1996; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). They specifically directed their

uncertainty scope to intimate interpersonal relationships and the predictability associated

with traversing communication central to any transition.

Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) conceptualization of relational uncertainty

identified both behavioral and cognitive sources of uncertainty. Behavioral uncertainty

refers to not knowing what to say or do within an interaction and relates to the norms for

appropriate behavior consisting of the right way to act (e.g., relationship etiquette), the

behavior appropriateness (e.g., proximity rules), and the boundaries within which the

action takes place (e.g., social context). Cognitive uncertainty derives from not knowing

how to handle a particular context (Berger, 1979) and translates into questions and doubt

about the value of the relationship (e.g., degree of intimacy), the goals for the relationship

(e.g., short-term or long-term commitment), and how well a person understands the

definition of their relationship (e.g., friends or lovers). The unknowns produced from

behavioral and cognitive ambiguity are accentuated in how individuals communicate

within interpersonal encounters. In summary, uncertainty ensues when individuals lack

the necessary information about themselves and others (Knobloch, 2007b).

Knobloch and Solomon (1999, 2002a) argued that uncertainty generally could be

applied to any issue with another person but relational uncertainty applied specifically to

doubts individuals exhibited about participating in a relationship. For instance,

ambiguity may include doubts such as: "How should I go about communicating my

feelings for my partner?," "Does my partner have similar feelings?," or "What does the future have in store for us?" They articulated relational uncertainty as "the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within close relationships" (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 264). Thus, Knobloch and Solomon (1999, 2002a) reconstructed uncertainty more specifically to encompass all intimate interactions including romantic, familial, and friendship. In the next sections I will delineate how relational uncertainty involves various content, levels, and sources.

Content and Levels of Relational Uncertainty

Knobloch and Solomon (1999) developed the conceptualization and operationalization for relational uncertainty to assess its content and levels. They were able to achieve this by utilizing an umbrella term, relational uncertainty, to refer to questions emerging from multiple sources of uncertainty about any content arising in romantic relationships. Therefore, it is important to explicate what scholars considered uncertainty content as well as levels that prompt ambiguity.

Content. Researchers acknowledged that variation about content occurs within each dyad because the participation in relationships depends on whether partners are in dating or established relationships (e.g., Knobloch, 2008a; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002; Turner, 1990). For instance, Knobloch (2008a) found that only commitment doubts occurred in both dating and marriage, whereas many other content areas emerged for more established relationships (e.g., sex, health, finances, etc.).

Levels. More recently, relational uncertainty has begun to extract the level of uncertainty. This refers to the level of abstraction associated with the conceptualization

of uncertainty. For instance, does the uncertainty stem from a general or specific ambiguity? Knobloch (2007a) argued that relational uncertainty is conceptualized on two levels – global and episodic. The global level assumes people's general uncertainty about participating in the relationship (e.g., Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006) and has received the greatest research attention because it is useful for predicting message production and processing most applicable to a variety of communication contexts (Knobloch, 2006; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005). The episodic level pertains to the ambiguity stemming from a discrete event (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2003a) and is more often measured utilizing retrospective or hypothetical events. Global relational uncertainty is useful in predicting message production and processing (Knobloch, 2006; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005) and episodic refers to specific questions people experience due to discrete events (Knobloch, 2005; Knobloch & Solomon, 2003b). Both levels of uncertainty are apparent in dating and marital partners (e.g., Knobloch, 2005, 2008a; Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006; Turner, 1990), although most relational uncertainty research continues to examine a global level about participating in relationships.

My dissertation examines all three sources of relational uncertainty emerging from various contents at the episodic level. Although ambiguity may arise from a variety of content arenas, relational uncertainty is said to emerge from three sources.

Sources of Relational Uncertainty

Knobloch and Solomon clearly delineate the three unique aspects of source uncertainty. The main elements of an interpersonal relationship—self, partner, and

relationship—capture relational uncertainty (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Knobloch and

Solomon's (1999) tripartite of sources encompassed questions people have about their

own involvement in the relationship (e.g., self uncertainty), their partner's level of

involvement (e.g., partner uncertainty), and the nature of the dyadic unit (e.g.,

relationship uncertainty).

Three content issues arise for self or partner uncertainty surrounding the

relationship: desire, evaluation, and goals (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Self uncertainty

contains an individual's self doubts and insecurities about his or her involvement in the

relationship. The content of self uncertainty within courtship include: desire (e.g., "How

certain are you about how much you want this relationship right now?"), evaluation (e.g.,

"How certain are you about whether or not you want to maintain your relationship?"),

and goals (e.g., "How certain are you whether or not you want this relationship to last?").

Partner uncertainty appeared to have analogous factors to self uncertainty and contains

measures involving doubts an individual has regarding his or her partner's current

involvement and future potential for continuation of the relationship. This content alters

the focus about desire (e.g., "How certain are you about how much your partner wants

this relationship right now?"), evaluation (e.g., "How certain are you about whether or

not your partner wants to maintain your relationship?"), and goals (e.g., "How certain are

you about whether or not your partner wants this relationship to last?"). (See Knobloch

(2007b) for a comprehensive listing of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty within

courtship). The content issues focus on the present, comparisons, and future intentions,

whereas that self and partner uncertainty are both structured around a person's doubt but stem from different sources.

Relationship uncertainty includes four constructs: behavioral norms, mutuality, definition and future. First, the behavioral norms emphasized acceptable and unacceptable actions within a relationship (e.g., "How certain are you about how you can or cannot behave around your partner?"). Second, mutuality assessed the reciprocity of feelings within the relationship (e.g., "How certain are you about whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him or her?"). Third, the definition focused on the current status of the relationship (e.g., "How certain are you about whether or not this is a romantic or platonic relationship?"). Fourth, the future focused on the long-term outcomes of the relationship (e.g., "How certain are you about where this relationship is going?"). Knobloch and Solomon (1999) explain relationship uncertainty as the uncertainty an individual experiences about the present and future status of the relationship.

Knobloch and Solomon have delineated the sources of uncertainty as all interrelated yet distinct constructs (Knobloch, 2007a, 2010). Multiple studies showcase their bivariate correlations range from $r = .65$ to $r = .85$ (Knobloch & Carpenter-Thuene, 2004; Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002, 2005). However, strong correlations conceal more complex associations between the sources (Knobloch, 2010). Sources for self and partner uncertainty are associated to a direct represented source attributed to a specific individual (e.g., you or your partner). In comparison, the cognitive representation through which partners come to perceive

29

themselves within a relationship causes relational uncertainty to stem from an indirect nonrepresentational source, which is less detectable or concrete than self and partner uncertainty. Although self and partner uncertainty are empirically distinct, relationship uncertainty appears to encompass blended associations with self versus partner depending on the study (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Self and partner uncertainty were found to have negative association whereas relationship uncertainty covaried with both sources of uncertainties (Knobloch, 2007a). This may occur because uncertainty about the state of the relationship exists at a higher order of abstraction in comparison to uncertainty about the individual or partner predictability, which often makes it more difficult to separate sources (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Therefore, individuals experiencing self uncertainty may accrue power, and partner uncertainty may generate dependence; therefore, sources of relationship uncertainty may facilitate divergent outcomes (Knobloch, 2007a) and blur the association between the sources of uncertainty in particular contexts.

Under the umbrella of relational uncertainty, all three sources can emerge creating ambiguity about the predictability about future interactions. These complexities emphasize that identifying the specific conditions and contexts of relational uncertainty is important to analyzing people and their relationships. More specifically my dissertation assesses relational uncertainty as it contributes to understanding communicative exchanges that happen from distinct recalled events and the impact those recollections have on participants' present relationships.

Model of Relational Uncertainty

Interpersonal relationships are fraught with uncertainty. The previous historical overview showcases how uncertainty influenced and has led to more recent contributions and applications beyond the initiation of a relationship. Since its origination from URT and POV, relational uncertainty has flourished becoming a framework for understanding personal relationships. More specifically, Knobloch (2007a, 2010) offers a framework (e.g., model of relational uncertainty) outlining predictors and outcomes of relational uncertainty in initial and ongoing romantic relationships. Within my dissertation, the outcomes (e.g., cognition, emotion, and communication) are the focus versus the predictors (e.g., individual characteristics, relationship qualities, and feature of situations) of relational uncertainty.

Uncertainty can lead to communicative outcomes and communication can also assist in reducing uncertainty. The influence of relational uncertainty impacts communicative outcomes because uncertainty exists as cognitive and emotional states. These states simultaneously affect and are affected by communication. Uncertainty may exist without communication in a prelinguistic form; however, its significance and implication becomes known through communicative interactions (Bradac, 2001) whether attributing to or reducing of uncertainty. Thus, communication offers a platform for traversing unknowns through language. It is important to acknowledge that relational uncertainty serves both functions but my focus is how relational uncertainty influences communication. In this next section, I delineate how relational uncertainty has acted as a predictor variable specifically for communicative production and processing outcomes.

Relational Uncertainty and Communicative Outcomes

The field of interpersonal communication has begun to understand how individuals and relationships interpret messages under conditions of uncertainty (Berger, 2002; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005). Relational uncertainty complicates communication between partners and high uncertainty levels strain fragile relationships. The communicative ability to negotiate uncertainty creates the opportunity for positive or negative consequences. Message exchange about relational uncertainty can affect senders and/or receivers; therefore, it is important to examine how people produce and process messages through communicative exchanges.

Message Production and Processing

When it comes to message production about relational uncertainty, partners are left to a myriad of potentially embarrassing outcomes that can unfold for individuals or relationships. These may include disappointment, dependence, discomfort, and relational damage or jeopardy (Knobloch, 2010; Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). Hence, construction and management of communication about relational uncertainty harbors risk and vulnerability for relationship participation and continuance.

Production. Initially, relational uncertainty might be detrimental to effective message production by encouraging avoidance, elevating face threat, and impeding planning (e.g., Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). Previous research has found when it comes to relational uncertainty individuals avoid relationship conversations (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), withhold information (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), or employ indirect communication (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) because they do not want to broach potentially

unpleasant or risky outcomes. For instance, Knobloch (2006) found when individuals were asked to leave date requests for their partners, those that had relational uncertainty experienced complicated communication production of messages. This investigation of date requests represented a common communicative request task within initial stages of development relationships that was affected by the impending ambiguity about the how it would be perceived from receivers.

In contrast, a limited number of research studies have investigated the influence of relational uncertainty on communicative processes for relational partners. In one such study, Theiss and Solomon (2008) found that partners who openly communicate their experience of relational uncertainty reported increases in intimacy development. They suggested that as intimacy increases, the relational context enables partners to more openly engage in communication with each other and clarify relational ambiguities that arise. Theiss and Solomon's (2008) research suggests that open communication offers advantageous results for individuals and relationships when utilized. As such, partners engaging in relational communication are better equipped to define their relationship status (Baxter, 1987), withstand troublesome times (Baxter & Bullis, 1986), and report more positive emotions (Acitelli, 1988). Even so, this study does not change the fact that numerous relational partners are often still reluctant to explicitly discuss uncertainty and, in turn, prefer implicit approaches to reducing uncertainty through information acquisition. There is a need to study the implicit ways in which individuals are communicating about their relational uncertainty and how this influences relationship dynamics.

Processing. People's propensity to guard against displeasing knowledge equally influences message reception within relationships (Knobloch, 2007a) by diminishing confidence, heightening negative attributions, and promoting biases (e.g., Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). Knobloch and Solomon (2003a) initially explored relational uncertainty by investigating people's capacity to identify and interpret information about relationships as well as their perceptions of difficulty in communicating how relational uncertainty interferes with conversational message production. They found that individuals under conditions of relational uncertainty lack the information necessary to recognize and realistically decode dyadic cues. Thereby, the capacity to accurately interpret partners' messages may become skewed by bias, insecurity, or simply misinformation. This heightened communicative strain is further elevated for individuals who seek to reduce it because: (1) they are the least able to retrieve it, and (2) those that adapt to their partner's expectations, rather than communicate, create more unpredictable behaviors (Knobloch, 2007a). In a sense, individuals who experience relational uncertainty are also unable to sometimes appropriately decipher communication.

Relational uncertainty from partners affects the communicative message production and processing occurring between partners. Theiss and Nagy (2013) examined partner responsiveness and relational communication across cultures. They found that relational uncertainty was negatively associated with the perceived partner responsiveness and enacted relationship talk. Additionally, relational uncertainty was positively associated with the threat of relational talk. Thus, with heightened relational uncertainty, partners have difficulty developing an appropriate plan for interaction (e.g.,

34

message production) and anticipating the outcomes of conversation (e.g., message processing) (Theiss & Nagy, 2013). They argue that individuals experiencing relational uncertainty cannot accurately predict outcomes their communication will have; therefore, conversations about the nature and status of the relationship are particularly difficult.

The aforementioned literature illustrates the significant role uncertainty can play in the construction and management of communication. Those partners who choose to work to avoid relational uncertainty often experience destructive consequences whereas those who choose to resolve it may have positive individual and relational ramifications (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). Therefore, it is essential to research how particular individuals navigate questions they have about participation in their interpersonal communication.

In this first section, I explored the historical development of the concept of uncertainty with its foundational frameworks, URT and POV, and next, I explained how these frameworks flourished into Knobloch and Solomon's relational uncertainty. Their research evidenced an early understanding of how intimate relationships are affected by the content, sources, and levels of relational uncertainty. Additionally, the burgeoning arena of relational uncertainty scholarship leads us to consider how it impacts communicative outcomes. In the next section, I explore how relational uncertainty has mapped onto the relational turbulence model research leading into more specific questions about how individuals in relationships communicate relational uncertainty through transitions.

Emergence of the Relational Turbulence Model

Some degree of dyadic-level relational uncertainty is always present within relationships (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Honeycutt, 1993). Relational uncertainty researchers began by delineating the uncertainty individuals confront as they move a relationship from noncommittal to mutual commitment in dating relationships (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Relationships subsequently create uncertainty that may lead people to experience cognitive, emotional, and communicative outcomes, which is even more heightened when relationships are in flux (Knobloch, 2010; Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006). Uncertainty reflects questions partners have as the status of their relationship changes. Relational uncertainty begins as a cognitive or emotional state, and then becomes an interpersonal mechanism through communicative or behavioral exchanges. Contrary to URT and POV, relational uncertainty argues that uncertainty continues as the relationship moves beyond initiation.

Although a body of research exists in and of itself on relational uncertainty, Knobloch and Solomon (2004) proposed a new theoretical framework that encompassed it as well as the interdependence experienced within the development from being single to becoming a couple. Solomon and Knobloch (2001) further argued that the interpersonal process of negotiating interdependence is equally important to understanding and navigating any relationship. They argued that examination of relational uncertainty and interdependence is central to the communicative process of interpersonal relationships. Typically, this development disrupts normative behaviors and routines to which couples are accustomed in their daily lives (Nagy & Theiss, 2011).

This model speculates that relational uncertainty continues as relationships grow and necessitates both psychological and communicative processes. The tumultuous experience(s) that may occur as a result of transitional events (e.g., move from casual to serious dating) was labeled turbulence and was expanded into the theoretical framework (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). This framework, coined the *relational turbulence model (RTM),* "focuses on transitions within close relationships as moments that make the interpersonal communication relevant to relational outcomes" (Solomon et al., 2010, p. 117).

The RTM starts with the premise that individuals experience turmoil as they negotiate periods of transition in their interpersonal relationships (Knobloch, 2007b). Relational partners may undergo turmoil as turbulence – a key to normative relationship progression (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b). Turbulence surfaces negativity and as such partners respond to changing internal and external circumstances that affect their relationships (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007). Turbulence can arise from any positive or negative controllable or uncontrollable event(s). As partners individually and jointly undergo transitional experiences, they may rethink and reorganize their identities, roles, relationships, or behaviors in an effort to manage events and implications of those events (Solomon et al., 2010).

Solomon and colleagues (2010) acknowledge that relational turbulence centers itself as a reaction to change within relationships rather than as a change in the relationships themselves. The latter conceptualization of relational turbulence refers to the "instability and chaos that people experience when transitions render previously

37

functional dyadic systems ineffective" (Solomon & Theiss, 2011, p. 200). Thus, the

former conceptualization assumes "relational turbulence as a by-product of emerging

intimacy in romantic associations" (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004, p. 796). In more recent

conceptualizations, Solomon et al. (2010) depict relational turbulence through a

metaphorical concept similar to that of turbulence in flight. The pilots represent the

relational partners (e.g., co-pilots) and the plane symbolizes their relationship. While in

flight, planes may experience turbulence, much like relationships – both need to respond

to changing conditions inside and outside the aircraft in order to maintain its course,

especially at particular altitudes and speeds (e.g., courtship). Disruption occurs in flights

and relationships as both adjust or move through conditions. Turbulence is as a result of

relational transitions, whether minimal or extreme, is a normative experience in the

relationship development process.

Initially, the RTM focused on courtship. This is a period where ambiguity fills

individuals with doubts about the permanence and tentativeness of the relationship

(Knobloch, 2010). Therefore, the majority of relational turbulence research has explored

dating relationships. Several scholars have begun to examine more established

relationships, such as married couples (e.g., Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007;

Turner, 1990) and family relationships (e.g., Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). This may include,

but is not limited to, the following life-experiences: first sexual encounter, meeting

parents, moving in together, purchasing a home, becoming parents, facing

unemployment, coping with a serious illness, attending holiday gatherings, or marriage.

This research contributes to the notion that turbulence and its subsequent mechanisms exist within all forms and processes of intimacy.

The relational turbulence model (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004) identifies two mechanisms inherent to relationship development and explains how turbulence occurs. The first mechanism, *relational uncertainty,* emphasizes how life changes can prompt intrapersonal doubts and questions about an individual's involvement within a relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Relational uncertainty, as I described above, is particularly prominent in the emergence of the relational turbulence model. The remainder of this review is devoted to further understanding relational turbulence through its second mechanism, *partner interdependence.* This mechanism explains the challenges partners face in finding balance between partners in the midst of changing circumstances (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004).

Explicating Partner Interdependence

The second theoretical mechanism that drives turbulence, *partner interdependence,* emphasizes behavioral interactions from a partner's influences during turbulence. This develops as partners allow each other to impact one another's actions. Interdependence exists when partners coordinate their behavior in ways that help them accomplish their goals (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In relational development, the transition from independence to interdependence transpires as partners negotiate their behaviors and schedules.

Initially, Solomon (1997) investigated how intimacy was associated with the explicit communication of messages people crafted to solicit a date in developing

39

relationships. She found that explicitness and intimacy have a curvilinear association. Additionally, she concluded that further research must explore communication throughout the relational development process. As such, she began to conceptualize relational communication as a fluid process reflecting the nature of relationships that deviated from prior stages of intimacy. Previous models (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Duck, 1982; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005; Rollie & Duck, 2006) describe how intimacy escalates and deescalates over the course of the relationship; however, these models did not truly take into consideration the magnitude of relational communication. The models served to construct broad frameworks that allowed for explanation and some degree of prediction (Rollie & Duck, 2006) but the role of communication in transition between stages is not emphasized in these models. Communication is the vehicle that creates interpersonal relationships and is the only mechanism through which relationships develop and dissolve (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009; Solomon et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to conceptualize the link between interpersonal communication and personal relationship on both global processes and the specific local message features (Solomon et al., 2010).

RTM centralized relational communication within the development of intimate relationships. Solomon and Knobloch envisioned components of developing interdependence as a process interacting within intimacy (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). In order to acknowledge the nuance and complexity of intimacy, they drew from both the emotional investment and social exchange perspectives.

40

Berscheid's (1983) emotional investment framework proposed that individuals create organized action sequences to accomplish goals for a relational integration process. Explaining that, as relationships develop, individuals consciously or unconsciously activate behaviors that incorporate their partners into their own sequences. The incorporation establishes an interdependent rather than an independent system. Interdependence is defined as the ability to influence and affect the other person's behavior, typically for the mutual benefit of both partners. Therefore, establishing an interdependent system begins when individuals allow their partners to influence their everyday activities either through interference or facilitation. Interference implies impeding or hindering; facilitation suggests assisting or supporting. Berscheid argued that the emotional investment measure is how susceptible a person is to interruptions from a partner (e.g., date nights, household chores, or attending events). Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989) found that the strength of people's influence over daily activities coincides with a desire for increasing intimacy. The more emotionally invested in a relationship, the greater the risk of experiencing favorable or unfavorable interruptions from a partner (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). This establishes an interdependent rather than an independent system whereby individuals permit their partners to influence their everyday activities.

The emotional investment and social exchange perspectives link interdependence and intimacy at earlier stages with relational development. The social exchange perspective, as previously mentioned, emphasized the notion of rewards-cost ratio and a comparison of alternatives. When partners become more invested in a relationship, there

41

are increased rewards and costs associated with growing intimacy. Social exchange emphasizes how rewards and costs contribute to stability and satisfaction in relationship interaction. This perspective highlights how individuals make decisions about relationship continuation suggesting that rewards outweigh costs for maintenance (relative to alternatives). Aligning the social exchange perspective alongside the emotional investment perspective, Solomon and Knobloch were able to articulate that partners enacted relationship behaviors that established rewards over costs.

Mutual influence continues to develop over time and reaches a threshold as each partner's ability to complete common behavioral routines becomes contingent upon the actions of the partner (Kelley et al., 1983; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Consequently, partner disruption subsides and is replaced with partner coordination. Thus, coordinated patterns of interdependence are beneficial because they are responsive to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual conditions for the relationship (Solomon & Theiss, 2011). In other words, as conditions change, the previously established patterns may need to be altered to adjust to the changing circumstances with newly renegotiated patterns. Solomon and Knobloch (2001, 2004) deduced from emotional investment and social exchange perspectives that behavioral modification reflects the integration of three interrelated processes (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2004) – influence, interference, and facilitation.

Partner Influence

The first process, *partner influence,* involves interdependent partners' ability to influence each other's everyday activities. Originally conceptualized by Berscheid

(1983) and adapted by Solomon and Knobloch (2001), partners influence the amount of time spent with friends, time devoted to school work, ability to achieve the everyday goals set forth for self (e.g., exercise, diet, studying, entertainment, etc.), and whether they were able to complete the things they need to do that day. A partner's participation can interfere with or facilitate an individual's actions, which lead to the second and third processes.

Partner Interference

The second process, *partner interference,* refers to the degree to which an individual perceives a partner undermining, deviating, or swaying the other's personal actions and outcomes (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001) from that which would have normally occurred if the individual were a singular unit. Infusing the two people's actions, individuals must rewrite behavioral scripts to incorporate the other person into their lives. For example, a source of interference may be as simple as having to wait to shower in the morning. The partner impedes on the normative routine. These concepts involve the partner interfering with: the plans I make, my plans to attend parties and other social events, the amount of time I spend with my friends, how much time I devote to my school work, and the things I need to do each day. As interdependence increases, partners respond with actions that impede, or interfere, with each other's goals.

Partner Facilitation

The third process, *partner facilitation,* occurs when partners interrupt in ways that assist or support individuals to accomplish everyday functions or relationship norms (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Growing interdependence within a relationship can also

43

facilitate and extend the goals and desired outcomes individuals possess, creating the

potential for outcomes that may not have been achieved to the same degree without the

relationship. For example, a partner may purchase groceries and make dinner while you

complete another task. In this case, the partner simultaneously expedites the goal to

complete your task and prepares dinner. Infusing the two people's actions, individuals

rewrite behavioral scripts to incorporate partners into their lives.

Application of Partner Interference and Facilitation Processes

The relational turbulence model utilizes partner influence to propose that

interference and facilitation from partners may be a basis of turmoil (Knobloch &

Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). In the early stages of a relationship, there

are limited opportunities for interference with low levels of interdependence because

partners are only beginning to incorporate each other into their routines. As partners

become more intimate, they allow each other to participate in previously autonomous

routines (Solomon et al., 2010). Individuals consciously or unconsciously activate

sequences that incorporate partners into their own lives. However, as individual action

sequences are merged and a mutual action sequence arises, opportunities for interference

and facilitation may increase.

Interference is curvilinearly associated with intimacy (e.g., Knobloch & Donovan-

Kicken, 2006; Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Partners' interference is highest at moderate

levels of intimacy within dating relationships (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001) when

configuring the relationship logistics and routines. A positive association between

intimacy and partner interference was evident across low levels of intimacy and a

negative association was evident across high levels (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006), despite the fact that even at the highest levels of interdependence, interference always exists.

Knobloch and Solomon's (2004) study on influence predicted that partners take each other for granted as the relationship progresses, often overestimating interference at moderate levels and underestimating facilitation at high levels of intimacy. Interference subsides as intimacy further increases, whereas facilitation increases gradually across levels of intimacy, superseding interference as relationships progress (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). It may be possible that interference is more readily recognizable in the beginning stages of a relationship, whereas facilitation becomes engrained in the fabric of a relationship and becomes more subconscious and less noticeable to partners during turbulence (LeFebvre, 2011). Growing interdependence within a relationship makes individuals readjust their behaviors creating the potential for outcomes that may not have been achieved or completed without their relational partner. As partners merge their respective lives, they often convert interference behaviors into facilitation behaviors. Nonetheless, partner influence continues to fluctuate throughout the relational process suggesting that turbulence always occurs to some degree.

Conclusion

My goal for this dissertation will be to extend the previous scholarship of relational turbulence to encompass the features of communication that embody relational uncertainty and partner interdependence in courtship. In the next chapter, I will identify

the specifics for addressing these queries to extend understanding of communicative

properties involved with relational turbulence mechanisms.

Chapter 3

Examining Relational Turbulence Model Communicative Stories and Storytelling

Two persons operate as the principal actors and the relationship emerges from a set of interactions and, as a result, stories about their personal relationships occur based on their interaction(s) (Conville, 1991). The relationship materializes from both individuals' beliefs about continuity and their interactions– such beliefs "are founded on shared stories about the nature of the relationship, shared beliefs about the nature of the relationship, and shared beliefs that a relationship exists" (Duck, 1995, p. 537). Accordingly, stories about the personal relationship serve to highlight interactions between the individuals, displaying either congruence or incongruence about the interactions as relational transitions.

"Discrepancies of interpretation – even between close partners – are an inevitable part of everyday social life" (Duck, 1986, p. 92). It is important for relational partners to share experiences that then develop into stories that are not too discrepant; Weber and colleagues (1987) argue that the degree of discrepancy at all relationship stages acts as an index about relational quality and intimacy. Partners' differences may become highlighted especially as a response to information seeking behavior prompted by change (Marineau, 2005). The process of seeking and reducing information surrounding similarity and difference occurs particularly as relational partners respond to change. If partners agree with each other on their versions they construe and compare, they in turn validate understanding as well as their relationship (Weber et al., 1987).

My dissertation responds to Knobloch's (2007a) call to action for expanding research to the complexities of conversation by examining the features of communication through message production and processing about transitional events. The specific investigation of conversation will be explored through storytelling because it offers sense-making, identity construction, and coping while simultaneously providing paradoxical, dialectical, and functional ambivalence (Koenig Kellas et al., 2011). Basically, storytelling functions to offer positive as well as negative outcomes; thus, the communicative process of storytelling serves as a productive form of meaning-making that may be accompanied by difficulty.

In this chapter I will explore how individuals and relational partners articulate narratives both through the story and storytelling about stressful experiences, and more specifically: (1) RTM themes that emerge as stressful experiences, (2) extension of a third RTM mechanism involving identity in individuals and relationships, and (3) individual and joint storytelling intersection that informs relational outcomes through narrative structure. I present my research questions and hypotheses that are intended to identify communicative expressions articulated through relational storytelling.

Stories and Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication highlights the importance of individual's thoughts about relationships intertwined within their talk about relationships (Solomon & Theiss, 2007). The relationship is maintained through the language (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991). Stories people express about their interpersonal romantic relationships reflect a sense of meaning regarding their relationships (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Fiese & Grotevant,

2001; Fiese et al., 1999; Fiese & Spagnola, 2005; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010; Orbuch, Veroff, Holmberg, 1993; Veroff, Sutherland, Chadia, Ortega, 1993a, 1993b; Vangelisti et al., 1999). Stories are often told within a narrative framework and involve verbal recounting of past event(s) (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999); accordingly, it is important to note that the terms, story and narrative, encompass similarities and distinctions, they can be used interchangeably throughout narrative research (LeFebvre & Blackburn, 2013; Riessman, 2008) and I already have and will throughout my dissertation.

I will utilize a narrative approach to study interpersonal communication and understand relationships by focusing on the everyday stories people tell about their lives. Baxter (1992) notes that applying narrative approaches to interpersonal communication processes affords us an alternative to the dominant psychological approaches that consume the study of interpersonal communication. The processing nature of stories is not fully conceptualized without the exchange of information because narratives are inherently a communicative phenomenon (Maines, 1993). The employment of a narrative approach as a methodology in relational studies enables an understanding how people make sense of their experiences, interact within their relationships, and struggle to determine meanings in their actions.

Narrative approaches capture how individuals make and give sense to their actions, experiences, events, and relationships (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Weber et al., 1987). As previous narrative research suggests, individuals use narratives or storytelling to interpret social interactions and make sense of the relational

49

world (Bruner, 1986). "Sense-making goes beyond simply recounting the events and involves drawing conclusions about the experience and its impact, significance, and/or effect" (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006, p. 54). Sense-making generated because of and shared through stories can be potentially beneficial for individual health and well-being (Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010; Kranstruber & Koenig Kellas, 2011). The sense-making that occurs through narrative descriptions offers self and others information about past actions, and the development of storied accounts gives meaning to the behavior (Polkinghorne, 1988). These then offer individuals: (a) greater sense of control and understanding of their environment, (b) increased ability to cope with events, (c) certain sense of closure, (d) more order to their daily experiences, and (e) greater hope for the future (Orbuch, 1997). Narratives offer a way for individuals to identify their role(s) within the interactional context. Ultimately, individuals share narratives to communicate their interpretation of the world (Polkinghorne, 1988). The stories highlight meaning and connection within our relational understanding; therefore, what is communicated impacts the world we live in and creates how we make sense of it (McAdams, 1993).

The goal of this dissertation is to test how relational uncertainty and interdependence between partners exist within people's stories of turmoil. This application can afford both theoretical affirmation and pragmatic rationale for supporting the current conceptualizations about individuals' communication. The theoretical framework of RTM has been supported through empirical testing; however, it is missing the bridge between laypersons' expressions of relationship progression and theoretical

research (Baxter, 1992). I will examine the themes of relational turbulence mechanisms to see how partners negotiate tumultuous transitions within relationships through their language and relationships.

Relational Turbulence Themes

The relational turbulence model is a framework that illustrates change in relationships (e.g., Knobloch, 2007b, Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006; Knobloch & Theiss, 2008; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004).   My dissertation continues to explore the initial context (e.g., dating relationships) of RTM by utilizing stories to identify relational turbulent content.

Previously, Knobloch and Solomon (1999) conceptualized the content of relational uncertainty for the self, partner, and relationship in their original measurement. This outlined three content issues for self or partner uncertainty for the relationship: desire, evaluation, and goals. Additionally, they identified four content issues for relational uncertainty: behavioral norms for the relationship, mutuality of feelings between the partners, current definition of the relationship, and future of the relationship. This content led to the relational uncertainty measurement and is explicated on a more abstract-level rather than denoting particular events.

To continue, Knobloch (2008a) then conducted a follow-up examination of relational uncertainty content in marriage. More specifically, she identified 13 content areas including: children, communication, career issues, finances, health, commitment, extended family, sex, retirement, religious beliefs, leisure time, household chores, and miscellaneous. The content area delineated is concrete and stems from a particular event.

Knobloch further notes in her investigation that the only content area replicated was commitment in both dating and marital relationships. Knobloch (2008a) did not conceptualize content themes in a similar fashion; therefore, the argument that commitment is the only area "conceptually redundant with the content of relational uncertainty prominent in dating relationships" appears premature. She argues that spouses may grapple with different kinds of ambiguity than dating partners, and I contend that more research must investigate content at the same level of abstraction before this assumption can be supported.

Transitional Events as Turning Points

Therefore, in the context of dating relationships it is important to establish a foundation of what romantic partners conceptualize as content of turbulence, or transitional events, in their relationships more similar to Knobloch's (2008a) study (e.g., definite events). Transitions often make communication salient for partners. The relational turbulence model focuses on transitions within close relationships as critical moments that make relational communication relevant to partners. Unfortunately, the distinction between turning points and transitional events is blurred; therefore, previous relationship scholarship on turning points may have been considered due to missing overlap in indistinct conceptualizations.

In an effort to establish the transitional events, I reviewed previous scholarship on turning points (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Bolton, 1961; Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Bullis, Clark, & Sline, 1993; Dailey et al., 2013; Graham, 1997; Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981; Koenig Kellas, 2008;

Lloyd & Cate, 1984; Planap & Honeycutt, 1985; Surra, 1984, 1985; Surra et al., 1988; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Bolton (1961) originally defined turning points as a transformative event that alters a relationship in some way. Later Baxter and Bullis (1986) defined turning points as a substance of change (e.g., an event, occurrence, or incident) within relationships. More recently, Solomon and Theiss (2011) defined transitional events as responses to change and suggest that romantic relationships evolve through partners' experience of "turning points and transitions" (p. 198). Existing turning point research identifies a range of events that transforms and propels the relationship toward greater or lesser commitment (Baxter & Bulls, 1986; Baxter & Pittman, 2001). Turning points by their definition events and actions that are steeped in communication and relational meaning (Baxter & Bullis, 1986) and make people reinterpret what their relationship means to them (Graham, 1997).

For instance, Baxter and Pittman (2001) identified four primary categories of turning points. Similar to others, their depiction of turning points closely reflects relational turbulence components. To further explain, the first category reflects intrapersonal or normative processing of events, actions, or occurrences in which individuals cognitively evaluate the relationship, which is similar to relational uncertainty. The second category examines the dyadic events or interaction between partners or partner interdependence (e.g., interference and facilitation). The third and fourth categories reflect external demands that put pressure on the internal working of the relationship. Thus, there are direct parallels between turning points and relational turbulence that demand further examination.

These turning points emphasize transformation or change as implied in relational transitions. Thus, relational turbulence scholarship should further examine how turning points either articulate or differentiate from transitional events. Utilizing thematic analysis to examine specific turbulent stories may reflect the concerns of couples; I explore specific content perceived as a transitional event associated with turbulence beyond what has been established in the context of relational uncertainty. To begin it will be important to identify what relational partners classify as stressful experiences utilizing previous understandings in both transitional events and turning points. Thus, the following research question is posited:

RQ$_1$: What transitions do couples characterize as stressful experiences (e.g., as involving turbulence) in dating relationship stories?

Several studies chronologically articulated (e.g., Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; LeFebvre, 2011; Nagy, 2011) highlight the expansion of RTM through thematic investigations into new contexts. For example, LeFebvre (2011) explored the dyadic experience married, aging couples undergo as they transition through menopause. Nagy (2011) analyzed individuals' communicative and psychological manifestations of the empty-nester phase. Knobloch and Delaney (2012) investigated individuals' online discourse about the dynamics of depressive symptoms in romantic relationships. These investigations prompted relational researchers to continue examining relational turbulence themes in new contexts utilizing participants' communication about their experiences in their own words. My dissertation continues to explore thematic investigations into stories utilizing a naturalistic mode of communication, stories, to

54

examine RTM mechanisms. The following research questions are posited about individual storytelling.

RQ$_{2A}$: What themes of self uncertainty emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{2B}$: What themes of partner uncertainty emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{2C}$: What themes of relationship uncertainty emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{3A}$: What themes of interference from partners emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{3B}$: What themes of facilitation from partners emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

Additionally, numerous qualitative studies (e.g., Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; LeFebvre, 2011; LeFebvre & Damron, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber & Solomon, 2008) have assessed relational turbulence through communicative exchanges using analysis for singular persons on qualitative relational perspectives. For instance, Steuber and Solomon (2008) investigated infertility as a transformative relationship experience. Weber and Solomon (2008) examined the effects of breast cancer on marriage by looking at the presence of this illness as a conduit of turbulence. Weber and Solomon (2008) and Steuber and Solomon (2008) focused on online discussion forums that offered personal accounts from individuals experiencing cancer or infertility, revealing only one partner's perspective from anonymous postings. Although

much of the research on the RTM assesses individuals' perceptions, evaluating whether

partners agree on their perceptions of relational turbulence is important as well (e.g.,

Knobloch, Miller, Bond, et al., 2007; Solomon & Theiss, 2011). The following research

questions are posited about joint storytelling.

RQ4A: What themes of self uncertainty emerge in joint stories about their

stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ4B: What themes of partner uncertainty emerge in joint stories about their

stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ4C: What themes of relationship uncertainty emerge in joint stories about their

stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ5A: What themes of interference from partners emerge in joint stories about

their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ5B: What themes of facilitation from partners emerge in joint stories about

their stressors within romantic relationships?

Additionally, when relationships are in flux and turmoil (i.e., experiencing

relational turbulence), communication about the nature or status of the relationship is

particularly difficult (Theiss & Nagy, 2013); therefore, it would be presumed that

individuals can more freely express uncertainty and interference within their individual

storytelling experience. Previous research has found when it comes to relational

uncertainty individuals avoid relationship conversations (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985),

withhold information (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), or employ indirect

communication (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) because they do not want to broach potentially

unpleasant or risky outcomes. Hence, individuals experiencing uncertainty may be unwilling to explicitly discuss their uncertainty openly with their partner; nonetheless the uncertainty may become evident in their individual stories. Furthermore, how relational partners manage the joint storytelling experience introduces complexities about the possibility of differing perspectives that are not at work in individual storytelling (Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009). The contingencies that exist with others makes individual and joint storytelling a significant one that influences that ways in which partners create meaning about self and their relationship through narratives (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). Thus, it is important to examine the differences that arise during individual and joint storytelling themes – the following research questions reflect the need for that comparison.

RQ$_{6A}$: What similarities and differences about themes of self uncertainty emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

RQ$_{6B}$: What similarities and differences about themes of partner uncertainty emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

RQ$_{6C}$: What similarities and differences about themes of relationship uncertainty emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

RQ$_{7A}$: What similarities and differences about themes of interference emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

RQ$_{7B}$: What similarities and differences about themes of facilitation emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

RTM Theoretical Extension

Stories about individuals and relationships confirm their existence. They can be thought of as a collection of stories embedded with meaning and sense-making (Gergen & Gergen, 1983, 1987), which is significant for constructing individual and relational identities. The construction of relational identity is the transformation from being two separate individuals into being one couple (Seider, Hirschberger, Nelson, & Levenson, 2009). The cognitive significance of incorporating the other during intimacy develops as partners come to see their identities overlapping (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). This is especially important because identities are fluid and reflected in narratives – stories people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not. Thus, a duality of identity of both individual and relational identities should be reflected in narratives especially during the transition from relational initiation to intimacy (Riessman, 2008).

As I highlighted in Chapter 2, relational uncertainty and patterns of interdependence are prominent mechanisms that coincide with transitions in romantic relationships. Any transition can lead to changes in partners' identities and how partners see themselves as well as their relationships (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Traumatic experiences, typically viewed as disruptions of continuity in relationships, may pose a challenge to the re-establishment of identity (Bamberg, 2009). Identity in this study is conceptualized as an internalized and evolving story that expresses a way of telling about the self through story (McAdams, Diamond, de St Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). Identity is particularly revealing in stories that function to relate occurrences between past

experiences, present orientation, and anticipation for future plans in the face of uncertainty (Stueve & Pleck, 2001). Consequently, Solomon et al. (2010) stress that future research must consider the identity issues that confront couples in turbulent transitions in order to better understand how and why some individual and relational identities shift, while others strengthen their relational bonds.

My dissertation argues that it is vital to consider identity, which is open to development and fluctuation throughout the life of relationships; thus, I initiate the exploration of identity as an integral third mechanism in the relational turbulence model. Then I highlight how previous contexts and RTM studies converge on and approach identity themes before postulating the importance of identity within individual and relational storytelling.

Constructing Identity through Story

Within everyday conversation, narration plays a constitutive role in the formation and navigation of identities (Bamberg, 2009). Narrative acts as both a tool for examining identity development as well as a vehicle for which identity is constructed (e.g., McAdams, 1993; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). Stories tell about our lives and are true to the flux of experience reflecting our changes (Frank, 1995). The act of storytelling is a dual affirmation – both affirming the teller's identity and relationship identities.

Initially, I address the importance of identity because it appears to be an emerging area of research for individuals in relationships that have been addressed in several areas (e.g., health, dissolution, and family). To begin, two health studies (Eriksson &

59

Svedlund, 2006; Ohman & Soderberg, 2004) assessed partner stories focusing on identity in the illness context and found that illness generated uncertainty regarding their customary partner roles. Narratives help manage uncertainty by enabling individuals to voice their concerns about who one is, what uncertainty means, and what life will be like (Goldsmith, 2009). The coordination and development of identity in narratives provide understanding to handling distress and reflection; thus, my dissertation continues to emphasize greater attention be given to narratives (Goldsmith, 2009). By substituting illness with transitional change in a relational context it may be possible to investigate if transitions have similar impacts to undergoing non-health related experiences.

Additionally, relationship dissolution offers an opportunity to see the separation of identity. In the process of accounting for their relationship termination, individuals change their identity from a member of a couple to that of a single person (e.g., Duck, 1982). This identity shift is displayed as individuals publicly share their breakup and accompanying story within their social networks. Dissolution forces individuals to negotiate new identities through their narratives. For instance, Hopper (1993) found that divorce stories, told months after the decision, were less motivated by actual events, intentions, and feelings that occurred during the relationships and instead driven by the storyteller's identity in the divorce process (e.g., initiator or non-initiator). Identity construction highlights an important function *we* and *I* play in how individuals attribute action and adapt to traumatic experiences that result in changes in pronoun usage with premarital breakups (e.g., Blackburn, Brody, & LeFebvre, 2013). Thus, dissolution

60

narratives operate to develop, maintain, and reorient identity in relation to our sense of self and our relationships based on stressful experiences.

Furthermore, Koenig Kellas (2005) and Koenig Kellas and Trees (2006) explored storytelling in families. Koenig Kellas (2005) examined how meaning and identity are negotiated communicatively through the act of storytelling. Because the opportunity to enact and stabilize individual and relational identities (e.g., Linde, 1993; McAdams, 1993) emerges through everyday talk, Koenig Kellas (2005) examined how family members utilized inclusiveness (e.g., family statements) versus separateness (e.g., selves-in-family) language choices within their identity statements. These are defined as any statements made during the storytelling that describe or evaluate family roles, characteristics, traits, attitudes, or abilities (e.g., We love going on family picnics every summer weekend.). She found that family stories communicated family identity (i.e., inclusiveness) and confirmed each other's perspectives during joint storytelling interactions, which contributed to higher feelings of family cohesion, adaptability, satisfaction, and overall family functioning. Additionally, Koenig Kellas and Trees (2006) identified the patterned ways in which families jointly told their stories, which emphasized their identification as a family unit rather than as individual personas. Therefore, Koenig Kellas and colleagues' studies highlight the importance of exploring interpersonal communication storytelling and afford a window to gauging relational climate and explicating identity construction.

Third Mechanism – Identity

A third mechanism*, identity,* is postulated to extend the relational turbulence model. Four research studies (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; Nagy, 2011; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber & Solomon, 2008) have noted identity as an issue, and began to conceptualize it. Weber and Solomon's (2008) study revealed the theme of integrating old and new identities, which highlighted women's struggle to reconcile their changing sense of self throughout their cancer experience. Steuber and Solomon's (2008) study of infertility as a transformative event within marriages indicated identity development as a third mechanism. They found two identity-related themes – strengthened relational identity and personal identity shift. The former theme suggests the robust parental yearning to have a baby increases relational togetherness, and the latter emerges as individuals realize biological parenthood would never occur for them. As such, Steuber and Solomon (2008) postulated a third mechanism of RTM, *identity development*.

Similarly, Nagy (2011) found that identity as a source of relational uncertainty influenced the empty-nest transition. She found a theme, new roles and identities, that emphasized the uncertainty individuals reported for shifting roles in their own and their partners attempt to redefine spousal roles. Additionally, Knobloch and Delaney's (2012) study of depression found identity emerged as a common theme connected to the oscillation with self and partner uncertainty.

LeFebvre (2011) studied another health-related life transitional experience, menopause, to explore how this naturally occurring transition impacts relationships. She redefined identity development as *identity fluctuation* (i.e., an adaptation), which seems

to more appropriately characterize the hypothesized third mechanism. Whereas Steuber and Solomon (2008) did not suggest how identity should be incorporated within their study, LeFebvre (2011) expanded the utility of the relational turbulence model by conceptualizing identity fluctuation. She identified that identity fluctuation occurs throughout a relationship, and uncertainty about one's self, partner, and/or the relationship may evoke changes in individual and relational identities.

My dissertation begins to incorporate the fluctuation of identities embodied within narratives as they correspond to turbulent experiences – both individual and relational identities. People construct identity (multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within their stories (Orbuch, 1997; Somers, 1994). Clarifying the role of identity during transitions may assist our understanding of identity initiated by turbulent processes or represented as adaptive changes in personal and relational identities (Solomon et al., 2010). Because identity has only been speculated and briefly explored in previous RTM scholarship it is necessary to further explore it as a third mechanism. As such the following research question is posited:

RQ$_{8A}$: What themes of individual and relational identity emerge in partners' stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{8B}$: What themes of individual and relationship identity emerge in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships?

RQ$_{8C}$: What similarities and differences about themes of individual and relational identity emerge in comparing in individual and joint stories?

Storytelling and Interpersonal Communication

Storytelling forces individuals to conceptualize and articulate their understanding of events. Individuals participate in storytelling to understand the actions of themselves and others. "The goal of storytelling is meaning, sense, and understanding" (Weber et al., 1987, p. 123). For instance, as an individual learns the purpose of another's actions, the ability to create a socially acceptable response increases, or a social narrative is created that is in line with the others' expectations. Essentially, the act of storytelling can assist individuals to construct a sense of understanding and control (Weber et al., 1987) for self and relationships.

Storytelling helps draw out implicit relationship understanding through its telling masked in explicit relationship conversation. Although conversation about the relationship is a key communicative process that can predict individual and relational health, many people are unwilling to discuss their relationship when grappling with relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). Inability to directly communicate or withholding thoughts of uncertainty may be identified through stories people tell. Storytelling provides information about the relationship and how it emerges in communication (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). Utilizing stories to interpret psychological components, like uncertainty, we are able to then turn thoughts into communicative elements shared through the act of telling. Researchers are able to gain understanding of meaningful aspects of individual and relationship experiences by examining what is said and how the stories are told via its inclusion in their narratives (Frost, 2011). Thus, stories are the narrative frames that offer windows into relationships

that would otherwise not be observed or as openly expressed (Bochner, 2002). Capturing people's stories can be particularly relevant when it comes to information gathering as well as noticing the manner people use to communicate about a relationship, thereby providing both psychological and relational information.

For instance, Knobloch (2007b) began to examine perceptions of turmoil within courtship. In Knobloch's study, participants completed measures on intimacy, relational uncertainty, and interference. Raters assessed participants' perceptions of turmoil from an open-ended item asking them to describe their romantic relationship in their own words and to include any feelings or thoughts about the relationship in such a way that a stranger could understand. These open-ended written descriptions, noted as narratives, prompted turbulence, instability, and negativity descriptions. This study utilized narrative approach principles to begin investigating how narratives convey relational turbulence processes.

The narrative approach enables us to see how relationships develop communicatively by giving meaning to experiences depicted within the stories (Bochner, 2002), including stressful events and development of a relationship that encompasses uncertainty and interdependence. Narration may reveal a storyteller's experiences in different ways than answering explicit questions about that experience. Stories provide a rich source of information for finding out how people think and feel about their relationships (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Orbuch et al., 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Veroff, et al., 1993b). Some stories depict clearly how individuals feel or think about their partner or relationship, whereas others reflect unclear and

clouded representations (Vangelisti et al., 1999). Since narratives provide and contain knowledge that permits the use of past understanding as well as responding to potential future experiences (Wigren, 1994), they relate to investigating the ambivalences, uncertainties, and ambiguity in day-to-day dating relationships.

<div align="center">**Individual and Joint Storytelling**</div>

Many empirical investigations have explored the storytelling experience as individuals make sense of their own experiences   When relating to RTM, Knobloch (2006) recommended research must continue to examine the stream of conversation between couples in the back and forth flow of interaction in both individual and dyadic perspectives. For individual perspectives, there has been a recent call for psychological narrative study and interpersonal communication research approaches to incorporate dyadic investigations examining the relational stories of both partners in a couple – told separately – to determine the extent to which similarities and differences exist in their narrative construction (Frost, 2013).

Additionally, by examining the dyadic perspective between partners, we can also increase the understanding of relational level processes. As Knobloch (2007b) points out, it is important for scholarship to extend our understanding of individuals through couple-oriented data about their own perceptions of intimacy, relational uncertainty, interference, and turmoil. The questions "How much do partners agree on their perception of intimacy, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners?" and "Does congruence between people's perceptions predict the experience of relational turbulence?" (Knobloch, 2007b, p. 381) may be used to initiate further research. The former question

inspires researchers to examine the overlap contained within the relational mechanisms, while the latter question begets the notion of similarities and differences embodied by those experiencing the same transition through storytelling.

Storyteller's Perspective

Research on storytelling contributes to showcasing tellers' feelings of understanding, exhibiting control, and revealing meanings to their relationships and experiences. My dissertation focuses on relational turbulence that assumes psychological and communicative message production from the individuals reflecting on events that created turbulence.

To further this point, it is essential to harken back to Solomon et al. (2010) metaphor of turbulence – where they emphasize that pilots must navigate transitions from within the aircraft. The insiders' perspective is essential to understanding how the pilots (e.g., individuals) and aircraft (e.g., relationships) are affected by impending turbulence. In comparison, an outsider can observe the path of an airplane but may not be aware of the underlying operations taking place in the internal (e.g., cockpit) or external (e.g., wind) factors affecting the aircraft (e.g., relationship). Thus, participants' stories may provide meaningfulness of individual experiences through their articulation of the parts as whole or complete narrative that an outsider may not possess.

Consequently, in order to best understand turbulence as told through stories, I argue that we must have the relational operators assessing their own perceptions. For turbulence may be best conceptualized as a "multi-faceted, subjective experience of changes in and/or preoccupation with a relationship" (McLaren, Solomon, & Priem,

2008, p. 8). The subjective perspective offers a fresh approach from previous research (e.g., Koenig, 2002; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010; see Fiese & Spagnola, 2005) which examined narrative structure from an indirect or researchers' perspective (or more accurately an audience's perspective) rather than the storytellers' perspective(s).

The study of narrative allows us to observe how individuals impose order and subjectively produce meaning on their experiences (Orbuch, 1997). When interpreting meaning in experience expressed in language there are three conditions that can be explored: ideational (e.g., what is said), structural (e.g., how a narrative is said), and interpersonal (what role relationships are expressed) (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999). For that reason, several previous scholars have examined themes, structure, and interactions (e.g., Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Labov & Waletsky, 1967; Sorensen, Russell, Harkness, & Harvey, 1993; Weiss, 1975). This dissertation continues this investigation by examining the relationship stories that individual and couples tell together by considering the semantics, syntax, and pragmatics of stories that emerge in the absence and presence of relational partners. This next section explores how the syntax in organized through structure.

Narrative Structure

Narratives that reveal nonconscious motives and meanings illustrate individuals' interpretations in social and personal contexts through language (Orbuch, 1997). Narratives are social acts that either directly or indirectly reflect sense-making through content and form (Veroff et al., 1993b). Operating as communicative process,

68

individuals reveal their personal and relational lives by putting their experiences into narrative form (Koenig Kellas et al., 2010) that contains narrative fidelity (believability) and narrative probability (coherence).

Narrative fidelity. Fisher (1989) argues humans are storytellers and narrative probability exists within their stories. Narrative probability constitutes fidelity, the degree to which it appears reasonable and coherent, with the formal features that convey a discrete sequence of thought or action.

Fidelity is classified under the narrative paradigm and has been less focused within narrative research. Bochner et al. (1997) argue fidelity is concerned with what 'really' happened; yet, this perspective has been ignored because stories emphasize the reality individuals create for themselves, which is more important to understanding sense-making. Stories are not therefore right or wrong rather they are adaptive to our relational meaning (Sternberg, 1995). Stories convey the teller's evaluation of what happened. Typically audiences accept stories to be accurate and readily accept the narrator's depiction, recognizing he/she was a participant in the story (e.g., Strine & Pacanowsky, 1985). Holmberg and colleagues (2004) further clarity fidelity, such that people's stories may not always reflect reality because stories may vary based on contextual and situational factors – the individual telling the story subjectively constructs narrative. Individuals do not recall memory similar to a videotaped transcription of the actual event, rather it is blurred with inaccuracies; for a narrative may or may not require that it reflect accurately an individual's true experience (Weber et al., 1987). Additionally, as Holmberg and colleagues argue, narratives are critical psychological realities and not

69

always reflections of reality. Although previous relational scholars (e.g., Bochner et al., 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Spence, 1982) have studied fidelity, this dissertation does not. The ability to tell whether narratives represent reality or are accurately depicted would attempt to discover narrative or psychological truth based on an objective perception. Instead, it is the role played by stories in the functioning of the individual that I emphasize in order to see how the perceived reality communicates meaning through its structure based on the coherence side of narrative probability.

Narrative probability. Narrative probability displays coherence provided a story reflecting an internal consistency reflecting how well the different parts form a cohesive whole or the glue that holds the pieces together (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999). Coherence focuses on the "integrity of a story of a whole" (Fisher, 1987, p. 105). Coherence is exhibited as an integration of individual sequences that provides a sense of unity and purpose. Correspondingly, coherence delineates "that the identified textual parts all contribute to a whole which is communicatively effective" (Toolan, 2009, p. 44). Greater coherence is said to reflect greater mastery and convey clarity about the lived events (Koenig Kellas et al., 2010). Additionally, as couples attempt to weave their disparate events together into a coherent whole, the meaning established potentially creates relationship security and makes past events more readily understandable and future events more predictable (Orbuch et al., 1993).

Incoherence thus is the incomplete integrity of the story – which typically evidences negative consequences. Those individuals experiencing incompleteness or

70

incoherence may indicate an influence of uncertainty, confusion, or distress. Previous

research highlights that incoherence might inhibit higher adjustment levels (Koenig

Kellas & Manusov, 2003), engagement in satisfying life events (Gergen & Gergen,

1987), and relational/familial satisfaction and well-being (Koenig Kellas et al., 2010;

Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009).

In order to understand narrative structure, I will delineate how previous empirical

scholarship has examined narrative structure, coherence, in interpersonal processes.

Initially, Weiss (1975) found the development of a narrative was vital to achieving

closure about the relationship loss and motivation to move forward with life. He found

that individuals' inability to construct more coherent narratives reflected a deeper

awareness and understanding following their marital separation. Weiss (1975) articulated

that clearer understanding substantiated more emotional adjustment. Those who

construct incoherent narratives have more difficulty detaching from the distressing

circumstances for those still adjusting cannot as easily organize a structure to assist in

attributing responsibility and understanding the events.

Similarly, Orbuch et al. (1993) argued that coherence reflected a joint integration

and understanding of a partnership's relational development prior to marriage. Orbuch

and colleagues found joint storytelling by newlyweds that produced coherent stories

positively related to marital well-being. Later Fiese and Spagnola (2005) found that

coherence in recounting negative experiences (i.e., conflicts, dilemmas, problems, and

points of tension) is commonly a core element of narratives and may be particularly

essential because it calls for individuals to process challenging situations and reflect on

71

how they, as individuals, couples, and families, have resolved situations. "In terms of coherence, there is no reason to believe that narrative of more emotionally negative experiences would be more disorganized, and the less coherent, than narratives about more positive experiences" (Fivush, Hazzard, Sales, Sarfati, & Brown, 2003, p. 4). Fivush and colleagues found that children recount more thoughts and emotions when narrating negative experiences. As such individuals' ability to sense-make and formulate a coherent narrative form may be an artifact of their role in a given relational problem (Koenig Kellas et al., 2011), which impacts narrative completeness.

Narrative Completeness

Around the same time Sorenson et al. (1993) began to build upon the conceptualization of narrative completeness in relationship dissolution accounts, which appears analogous or encompassing of coherence. Sorenson and colleagues investigated the completeness by rating accounts individuals offered regarding their "understanding of why the relationship ended." Their examination of completeness found that participants with more complete accounts expressed greater control over their recovery process. Similar to relationship dissolution distress, Wigren (1994) later explored narrative completion in the treatment of trauma. Narratives formed during and after traumas frequently are incomplete suggesting that trauma disrupt narrative processing. This previous research on incomplete narratives evidences distress or trauma and clouds the ability to formulate coherence.

Likewise, Koenig Kellas and Manusov (2003) investigated narrative completeness in an examination of relationship dissolution adjustment and developed a

72

scale to specifically target attributions associated with potentially traumatic and significant relational events. They operationalized "a complete narrative as one that clearly and extensively (1) segmented the experience episodically/sequentially, (2) represented causes and consequences in the explained events, (3) developed characters relative to the story, (4) evoked and made sense of affect, (5) drew meaning from the events in the narrative, (6) provided a coherent narrative, and (7) attributed responsibility to the characters in the story" (Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003, p. 294). They utilized several trained raters to analyze written breakup stories and the seven elements delineated (e.g., sequence, causes, character development, affect, meaning, coherence, and attribution). Additionally, a composite narrative completeness score was also calculated across the seven elements. They found that coherence and sequential ordering were positively related to breakup adjustment, and participants with more complete narratives reported higher self-worth. They also developed a new scale for measuring and assessing narrative structure in relationships. As Koenig Kellas and Manusov (2003) note, this scale draws on literature from interpersonal relationships and specifically targets traumatic and significant relational events, not merely breakups. They highlight the necessity to broaden how story completion relates to other individual and relational variables. In the context of relationship dissolution, individuals must make sense of what happened in their relationship before they could then communicate control of their understanding in a coherent structure.

Within my dissertation, I expand narrative completeness extending it to the storytellers' perspective utilizing Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) framework. My

dissertation argues that it is appropriate to have those telling the story assess their own understanding of their narrative completeness upon recalling their experience. Information conveyed in narrative yields evidence to how the storyteller sees the events that compromise his or her story (Vangelisti et al., 1999). Therefore, audience members could easily overlook turbulence and misattribute narrative completeness. We should not discount the inconsistency or conflict that arises rather these properties are worth studying because they tell us something that about the way individuals bias their perceptions of relationships (e.g., Duck, 1985; Duck & Sants, 1983; Fiese & Spagnola, 2005; McGhee, 1987). As a result, the individuals who had and tell about their experience are best able to assess their own understanding of their relationships and the communication of that understanding through their stories. Therefore, I will utilize both self-report and narratives for analysis. Although, participant self-reporting may be host to a number of biases (e.g., social desirability and faculty recall) and narratives are individual interpretations created in the meaning-making processes, there are few, if any, relationships between these measurements (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). As Fiese and Spagnola (2005) go on to posit, it is important to carefully specify which narrative aspects should be logically related to global self-report scales. This is fulfilled because instead of training raters "in an attempt to increase accuracy and objectivity of somewhat subjective criteria" (p. 295), I will have storytellers' assess their own stories after their individual and joint storytelling experiences.

Completeness in individual storytelling. My investigation of narrative completeness examines turbulence in relationships surrounding stressful experiences.

Because narrative completeness evidences cognitive and communicative understanding, individuals and relationships experiencing turbulence as uncertainty or interference may exhibit lack of completeness or coherence in their stories. As discussed previously, narrative completeness is a multidimensional construct which the narrative clearly and extensively: 1) segmented the experience episodically/sequentially, (2) represented causes and consequences in the explained events, (3) developed characters relative to the story, (4) evoked and made sense of affect, (5) drew meaning from the events in the narrative, (6) provided a coherent narrative, and (7) attributed responsibility to the characters in the story. I will utilize Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) conceptualization to test assumptions about narrative structure and relational turbulence in dating relationships. Narrative completeness has only been empirically tested once in a different relational context, it is important to test whether specific narrative completeness is associated with relational turbulence. Thus, the following research questions are proposed regarding composite narrative completeness in individual storytelling of stressful experiences.

> RQ$_9$: What is the relationship between relational uncertainty, (RQ$_{9A}$) self uncertainty, (RQ$_{9B}$) partner uncertainty, and (RQ$_{9C}$) relationship uncertainty), and the composite narrative completeness in individual storytelling?
>
> RQ$_{10}$: What is the relationship between interference and the composite narrative completeness in individual storytelling?

RQ$_{11}$: What is the relationship between facilitation and the composite narrative

completeness in individual storytelling?

Completeness in joint storytelling. Individual and joint storytelling experiences

ideally afford attributing meanings to behaviors and clarifying understanding. Joint

storytelling functions similarly to individual storytelling in that stories enact relationships

(Mandelbaum, 1987), express identity (Blum-Klulka, 1993; Koenig, 2002; Koenig-Kellas

& Trees, 2005, 2006), and reflect relationship qualities. While no two individuals tell the

story in the same way, during joint storytelling by both partners, couples cannot each

build their own separate versions of how their relationship works; rather, they must

construct a joint meaning by amalgamating both perspectives (Holmberg et al., 2004).

Consistent with focusing on narrative coherence, narrative interaction focuses on

the building of couple's co-construction of meaning between partners (Fiese & Sameroff,

1999). Joint storytelling involves an interactive collaborative construction of telling an

account about a particular event (Mandelbaum, 1987). During joint storytelling couples

must integrate and intertwine their sense-making to reflect a co-construction about the

merging of information through the emergence of narrative completeness through

communication (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). This concerted experience recounts

events in a way that helps the tellers and listeners make sense of and give meaning to the

events as well as to the relationship within which they are told (Koenig Kellas, 2008).

Wamboldt (1999) asserted that individuals who perceive their relationship with less

uncertainty and more stability should be more prone to engage in relationship talk in

comparison to those individuals who perceive their relationships as more uncertain and

76

risky. He went on to articulate that "Individuals who can more coherently articulate their past and present 'reality' should be better at promoting the development of a shared, conjoint 'reality' with their partner" (Wamboldt, 1999, p. 38). Similarly, Weber et al. (1987) argued that stories are ongoing throughout the relational narrative, and if partners agree with each other in the versions they construe through storytelling, they in turn validate their relationship.

Storytelling demonstrates the active, transactional process individuals experience as they construct and share perceptions of their relational reality. Romantic relationships are inherently dyadic; therefore it is imperative to continue to investigate "the relationship characteristics, processes, and perceptions from the perspective of both partners" (Theiss & Knobloch, 2008, p. 515). My dissertation continues to pursue the examination of dyadic interactions that embody the nature of interpersonal relationships. To date, previous studies focused on the perceptions of a singular partner, and recently several relational turbulence studies have examined the dyadic interaction (e.g., Knobloch & Theiss, 2008; LeFebvre, 2011; Knobloch & Solomon, 2003a, 2005; Theiss & Knobloch, 2008; Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009).

Connecting completeness in joint storytelling to RTM. Relational turbulence investigations have begun to include actor-partner interdependence model approaches (APIM; e.g., Theiss & Knobloch, 2009). These investigations assess data from both relational partners. In particular, actor-partner interdependence models highlight the interconnectedness between partners emphasizing the interactional and interdependent nature of interpersonal relationships. Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) describe APIM as

the actor and partner effects as equal in a couple-oriented model so that a person is affected as much by his or her behavior as by his or her partner's. Statistical testing expands the ability to understand the interaction and interdependence between partners through tumultuous experiences.

Because interpersonal relationships are influenced by the actor's communication as well as the partner's communication, through APIM relational turbulence research we can examine actor effects, partner effects, and the actor-by-partner or relationship effects (Kenny et al., 2006). For instance, Theiss and Knobloch (2008) explored the actor and partner effects of relational characteristics on people's appraisals of irritations, and Knobloch and Theiss (2011) investigated the interplay between relational uncertainty and relationship talk. These studies articulate interpersonal relationships are affected by both persons (e.g., actor and partner). Furthermore, Theiss and Knobloch (2009) found that actor and partner interdependence is complicated by relational uncertainty, severity of irritations, and directness of communication about irritations. Their results indicated individuals' perceptions of relational uncertainty and interference from partners were positively correlated with the appraised severity of the actor's own irritations. Theiss and Knobloch's findings further suggest that direct relational communication about irritating circumstances may not always be beneficial to relationships and indirect communication strategies may be useful in appraising irritations. This type of dyadic level analysis enables researchers to predict outcomes influenced by the relational turbulence mechanisms.

For instance, Grotevant, Fravel, Gorall, and Piper (1999) found evidence to suggest implications about coherence when constructing stories in individual and joint settings. They argued that greater overall coherence among couples in joint relational interviews significantly related to less relationship dissatisfaction. Also, they found that coherence exhibited by each partner in couple interviews was positively related to greater confirmation and greater collaborative styles. This suggested that satisfactory relationships reduced partners' vulnerability to psychological risk (Cowen, 1999).

Furthermore, Grotevant and colleagues (1999) found evidence that different levels of coherence arose when partners told their stories to an interviewer than when constructing stories with their partners. For some couples, coherence increased when they constructed their narratives in the presence of their partner, while for others their individual coherence decreased. This finding was especially evident for women who were able to construct more coherent narratives in the presence of their partners rather than individually interviewed. Thus, the story and storytelling process may differ when constructing individual versus collaborative stories. This evidence demonstrates clues about the relationship itself and the ability to either directly or indirectly construct stories in particular contexts.

The examination of partners negotiating aspects of their relationship through storytelling may yield understanding as to how they conceptualize their relationship. Several researchers have previously examined relationships between self-reported measures of relational variables and thematic content in stories (e.g., Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992; Oppenheim, Wamboldt, Gavin, & Renouf, 1996; Veroff et al.,

1993b; Wamboldt, 1999). This process has implications for understanding both individuals' perspectives about the relationship as well as relationship interactions. Previous research studied narrative completeness and coherence constructed by an individual, and my dissertation continues to extend the construction to a couple-level narrative completeness. This allows for discrepancies between individual and joint narrative completeness to be analyzed. Therefore, examining the individual and joint storytelling structure should provide insights into the similarities and differences occurring between story versions. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed regarding narrative completeness in joint storytelling for both actors and partner effects:

H_{1A}: An individual's self uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her narrative completeness.

H_{1B}: An individual's self uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her partner's narrative completeness.

H_{2A}: An individual's partner uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her narrative completeness.

H_{2B}: An individual's partner uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her partner's narrative completeness.

H_{3A}: An individual's relational uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her narrative completeness.

H_{3B}: An individual's relational uncertainty is negatively associated with his/her partner's narrative completeness.

80

H_{4A}:   An individual's partner interference is negatively associated with his/her

narrative completeness.

H_{4B}:   An individual's partner interference is negatively associated with his/her

partner's narrative completeness.

H_{5A}:   An individual's partner facilitation is positively associated with his/her

narrative completeness.

H_{5B}:   An individual's partner facilitation is positively associated with his/her

narrative completeness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the communicative process underlying the relational

turbulence model through stories and storytelling. I argue that RTM needs to be explored

utilizing naturalistic expressions that highlight uncertainty, influence, and identity

through stories, while simultaneously investigating the individual and joint storytelling

process that fashions narrative completeness. I offered research questions linking

narrative content and structure. In Chapter 4, I will explain my methodology for

capturing stories and analyzing the storytelling themes and processes.

Chapter 4

Method

Recruitment

Participants who were enrolled in a Department of Communication Studies courses earned extra credit or opted to receive a gift certificate for their participation in the research study. An announcement targeted relationship courtship, those involved in less intimate to those in more intimate relationships prior to marriage. This announcement, modeled in Knobloch and Solomon's (2005) recruitment procedures, was:

> I am interested in relationships that have some degree of romantic
>
> involvement and/or romantic relationship history. If you are currently
>
> involved in a dating relationship, then you should bring your partner with
>
> you to the study.

Sampling

The sample ($N = 47$ couples) encompassed at least one undergraduate student, from two large universities in the United States. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 29 ($M = 20.54$, $SD = 1.72$). Ethnicities of participants included: 61 (64.9%) Caucasian, 15 (16%) Asian or Pacific Islander, 8 (8.5%) Latino/a or Hispanic, 3 (3.2%) Black or African American, 2 (2.1%) Middle Eastern, 1 (1.1%) Native American, and 4 (4.2%) other or multiple ethnicities. See Table 1 for participants' demographic proportions for females, males, and total participants.

Age of participants ranged from 18 to 29 ($M = 20.54$ $SD = 1.72$). University 1 age of participants ranged from 18 to 25 ($M = 20.75$, $SD = 1.65$) and University 2 age of participants ranged from 18 to 29 ($M = 20.45$, $SD = 1.75$). The majority of both samples were analogous mainly comprised of 20 and 21 year olds. Additionally, ethnicities of participants comparing analogous reports showed Caucasians (66.7%) and (64.3%) respectively and the other one-third split amongst other ethnicities. Because the study is examining stressful events in romantic relationships in young adult relationships, these demographics indicated that the samples did not represent differing populations. See Table 2 for differences between samples collected from the two large universities in participants' demographic proportions.

Additionally, all couples that participated were in heterosexual relationships although that was not a requirement. The relationship length ranged two weeks to 6 years and 67 days ($M = 696.34$ days or 1 year and 331 days, $SD = 544.66$, $Mdn = 577.5$); partners within couples did occasionally report differences about their relationship length as well as relationship status. Participants characterized their current relationship as: casually dating 5 (5.3%), seriously dating 16 (5.3%), long-term committed relationship 66 (70.2%), engaged 4 (4.3%), and domestic partnership 3 (3.2%). Additionally, 22 (23.4%) participants considered their relationship an on-again/off-again relationship. See Table 3 for participants' relational statuses for females, males, and total participants.

Procedures

Participants arrived with their romantic partner to the behavioral laboratory or conference rooms on the college campus and engaged in individual and joint storytelling.

All participants initially were instructed about the study. Participants read and asked questions about the study, then clicked "agree to participate" on the online consent form, before completing any surveys or storytelling. After agreeing to participate, the participants were informed that they would complete four distinct surveys on separate computers without any interaction before and after participating in storytelling. These measurements are outlined in the subsequent pre-relationship story elicitation, relationship story elicitation, and post-relationship story elicitation sections.

Pre-Relationship Story Elicitation

Participants were first instructed to complete pre-relationship story elicitation surveys about individual and relational demographics as well as the perceived relationship quality component (PRQC) on separate computers where they were not able to observe their partner's answers. The second survey contained questions about their individual and relational demographics (see Appendix A) and the PRQC Inventory (see Appendix B).

Measurements

Perceived relationship quality component (PRQC) inventory. This measurement consists of 18 items (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). Each perceived relationship quality component (i.e., relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love) was assessed by three questions (see Appendix B). Each statement was answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not At All to 7 = Extremely). Participants rated the current partner and relationship on each item. Cronbach's α across all items was .94 ($M = 6.19$, $SD = .46$). Cronbach's α for specific relationship quality

components was: relationship satisfaction .91 ($M = 6.25$, $SD = .81$), commitment .95 ($M = 6.48$, $SD = .90$), intimacy .82 ($M = 6.20$, $SD = .76$), trust .78 ($M = 6.41$, $SD = .77$), passion .82 ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.19$), and love .92 ($M = 6.36$, $SD = .98$). Table 4 indicates the proportions and reliabilities for females, males, and overall participant totals for the subscales as well as the overall PRQC measurement.

Relationship Story Generation

After completing their initial surveys, both partners were guided by the primary researcher to individually generate a list of meaningful stories about turbulent events – emphasizing stressful experiences – that have occurred during their romantic relationship. The written prompt read (modified from Koenig, 2002; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Koenig et al., 2010):

> As an individual and couple storyteller, please think of a time your
> relationship had a stressful experience. I would like you to think of a
> *specific story* to then share this stressful event (as opposed to 'stress' in
> general). Both individuals in the relationship should have working
> knowledge of the story (e.g., know enough about it to be able to tell it).
> For your story selections please consider relevant information including
> what led up to the story, what happened, and what happened as a result.

The researcher asked each partner to individually generate a list of potential topics on their separate computers to avoid having couples begin to tell their stories while generating ideas. They were instructed to type a few prompt words that would identify the stressful experience. Participants generated between 1 and 7 stories ($M = 2.24$, $SD =$

1.31, *Mdn* = 2). See Table 5 for females, males, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and medians.

Warm-Up Conversation

For the purpose of this study, couples orally shared their stories because stories are more often told than written and this design reflected the nature of interactive storytelling. The warm-up conversation included narrowing down potential stories brainstormed individually as they decided which story to share. The warm-up helped facilitate a comfortable and realistic atmosphere as well as allowed them to familiarize themselves with the equipment and taping procedures (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2003a, 2005).

After several minutes of individual brainstorming about specific stories involving stressful events the researcher instructed the couple to share their separate lists of topics. Couples discussed their story topics and selected one specific story that they both shared individually and jointly. Then participants were asked to rate each story using a 5-point Likert-type scale in terms of its stressfulness (1 = Not At All to 5 = Extremely Stressful). On average participants rated their selected story as 3.66 (*SD* = .97, *Mdn* = 3.67). See Table 5 for females, males, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and medians.

Next, the participants individually completed the relationship story elicitation measurements on relational uncertainty (See Appendix C) and partner influence (Appendix D) on their specific stressful story experience. See Tables 4 and 5 for proportions, reliabilities, and bivariate correlations amongst measurements.

86

Measurements

  Relational uncertainty. This measure assessed self, partner, and relationship uncertainty using items developed by Knobloch and Solomon (1999). These measurements have shown evidence of both reliability and validity in previous studies (see Knobloch, 2007a, 2010).

  Participants were instructed to recall their specific stressful experience when answering these measurements rather than general uncertainty. Often times the stressful events were retrospective; therefore, asking participants to complete these measurements reflected the stressful experience rather their current relationship state.

  Participants responded to a 6-point Likert-type response scale (1 = Completely or Almost Completely Uncertain to 6 Completely or Almost Completely Certain) to assess their response to items with the stem "How certain are you about…?" See Appendix C. Self uncertainty contained 18 items, four such items are: (1) how you feel about this relationship, (2) your view of the relationship, (3) your goals for the future of this relationship, and (4) how important this relationship is to you. Cronbach's α for self uncertainty items was .98 ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .15$). Partner uncertainty contained 18 items with parallel wording four such items are: (1) how does your partner feel about this relationship, (2) your partner's view of this relationship, (3) your partner's goals for the future of this relationship, and (4) how important this relationship is to your partner. Cronbach's α for partner uncertainty items was .99 ($M = 2.41$, $SD = .11$). Lastly, relationship uncertainty also included 16 items, four such items are: (1) how you can or cannot behave around your partner, (2) the current status of this relationship, (3) the

definition of this relationship, and (4) the future of the relationship. Cronbach's α for relationship uncertainty items was .97 (M = 2.57, SD = .25). The items were reverse-scored to measure relational uncertainty with higher scores indicating more uncertainty. Cronbach's α across all items was .99 (M = 2.35, SD = .2). See Table 6 for self, partner, and relationship uncertainty means, standard deviations, and reliabilities.

The three sources of relational uncertainty demonstrate strong positive bivariate correlations for total participants (see Table 7) and for females and males (see Table 8). Previous research (e.g., Knobloch, 2006, 2007b) found that these three sources did not form a single factor according to their confirmatory factor analysis results; therefore, I treated them as separate variables.

Partner influence. These items indexed partner's capacity to interfere and facilitate within an individual's outcomes (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Participants were directed to recall the disturbances or assistance generated by their partners during their stressful event. Participants reported their agreement with statements that offered potential descriptions of their partners' influence utilizing a 6-point Likert response scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). Five items measured a partner's interference and a parallel set of five items measured a partner's facilitation. See Appendix D. Cronbach's α across all partner interference items was .90 (M = 2.45, SD = .2). Cronbach's α across all partner facilitation items was .83 (M = 4.5, SD = .2). See Table 6 for interference and facilitation means, standard deviations, and reliabilities.

Relationship Story Elicitation

Individual storytelling sessions took place first followed by the joint storytelling session. For their individual stories, partners were in different rooms so their partner could not hear, even though both partners knew they would be separately talking about the same event. They were each asked to individually give an oral account of their story to a single audience member operating the video recording equipment.

Prior to beginning the recording for both individual or joint storytelling sessions, the researcher read the following prompt to initialize the storytelling session (modified from Koenig, 2002; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006):

I would like to begin by stating this is an informal setting and I hope that you feel comfortable to share and act as you normally would. Please tell me your *specific story* that describes a stressful event in your relationship (for approximately 10 minutes). Feel free to use your own words and provide as much detail and relevant information including what led up to the story, what happened, and what happened as a result. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story.

Then participants were acquainted with the audio and video recording equipment process and instructed to talk to the researcher rather than the video recorder during the storytelling session. For the joint storytelling, couples were asked to provide an account of the event together as they naturally would interact to share a story.

Additionally, participants were told that the researcher would not ask any additional probing questions nor seek further information until the completion of their stories. The researcher (representing an audience) minimized comments and thus

89

avoided directing the story. The researcher "responded naturally to the stories through appropriate facial expressions, head nods, and back channeling" (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006, p. 57) while conducting the recordings to maintain audience similarity and reduce nonverbal inconsistency. The entire content of the participant's stories—from the start of the videotape (just after the participant was read the prompt) to when they stopped speaking—were considered as data for analysis. There were no boundary conditions set for excluding information provided by the participants. Just as the researcher did not wish to ask additional probing questions and influence the participants' story, the researcher did not wish to set boundary conditions or otherwise exclude information provided by the participants. Thereby no information shared by the participant from the start to the stop of the videotape was excluded because the participants deemed this sufficiently salient to share (and part of their story).

Individual stories on average lasted 220.29 seconds ($SD = 128.04$, $Mdn = 174$) or three minutes and forty seconds. Both female and male individual stories ranged between 60 seconds (i.e., one minute) and 717 seconds (i.e., 11 minutes and 57 seconds). Joint stories on average were 291.51 seconds ($SD = 147.27$, $Mdn = 240$) or four minutes and fifty-one seconds. See Table 9 for individual story times for females, males, and overall participants.

Participants upon the completion of their story answered questions about how they told their story as well as several questions about its content. Participants were asked if they had questions for clarification about the procedure or process before beginning the next task.

Post-Relationship Story Elicitation Measures

Upon the completion of each story, individuals and couples were thanked for sharing their stories and then asked to complete post-relationship story elicitation surveys for his/her/their stories in order to assess understanding of their narrative structure. The singular storyteller completed a separate survey by him/herself upon the completion of storytelling. The couple completed a survey together upon the completion of their joint storytelling. The surveys contained the same measures; however, the only difference was one survey was about their individual stories and the other survey about their collaborative story. After all the stories were told, participants were asked to answer post-relationship story measures that included narrative: completeness, repetitiveness, accuracy, intensity, and responsibility (as discussed next). Participants were asked to complete these same post-relationship story elicitation measures after individual and collaborative stories.

Measurement

Participants completed narrative completeness, accuracy, and repetitiveness measures after both individual and joint storytelling. Additionally, participants completed narrative intensity and responsibility measures but only after their individual storytelling.

Narrative completeness. I developed a self-report scale to capture the nuances of storytelling. Participants completed an adapted version of Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) narrative completeness measurement that operationalized "a complete narrative as one that clearly and extensively: (1) segmented the experience

91

episodically/sequentially, (2) represented causes and consequences in the explained

events (3) developed characters relative to the story, (4) evoked and made sense of affect,

(5) drew meaning from the events in the narrative, (6) provided a coherent narrative, and

(7) attributed responsibility to the characters in the story" (p. 294). These were

correspondingly conceptualized as: (1) sequence (items 1-4), (2) causes (items 5-7), (3)

character development (items 8-10), (4) affect (items 11-13), (5) meaning (items 14-18),

(6) coherence (items 19-22), and (7) attribution (items 23-25). This new measurement

was modified to generate a self-report storyteller's perspective of narrative completeness

as no narrative completeness study has had storytellers rate their stories. The

measurement was in a layperson's vernacular, rather than for a trained coder, and was

administered immediately after participants completed their storytelling experience. See

Appendix E.

A principal components analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation was

conducted to assess the underlying structure for twenty-five items for narrative

completeness. These twenty-five items were originally conceptualized to index seven

constructs from previous narrative completeness scholarship. After rotation, six

constructs emerged (see Appendix F) with 68.57% of the total amount of variance

explained. Table 10 displays the correlations between items and Tables 11, 12, and 13

displays the factor loadings for total participants, females, and males' rotated factors.

Loadings less than .40 were omitted to improve clarity.

The first factor appeared to combine items from meaning and coherence

constructs; therefore, it might be more apparent to consider that drawing meaning from

92

the events is subsumed within a coherent narrative. Hence, the first factor represents *coherence*. The second factor also appeared to combine affect and meaning. This second factor subsumes that meaning is simultaneously occurring with the portrayal of emotions and feelings; thus, the second factor represents *meaningfulness*.

The third, fourth, and fifth factors reflected their original conceptualizations. The third factor indexed *character development* with high factor loadings. The fourth factor indexed *attribution* with high negative factor loadings. The fifth factor indexed *sequence* with high factor loadings.

The sixth and final factor primarily represented causes and consequences but also included one item that asked about the overall point. The item asked about the overall point conceptually fits with understanding causes and consequences; although, initially conceptualized as meaningfulness, participants' inclination to have it with causes and consequences provided an equally compelling rationale. Therefore, the item was included within this subscale. Even with the additional item, this factor represents *causes* with all high factor loadings. See Appendix F again for the new configurations of scale items.

Each subscale of narrative completeness was calculated as well as a composite narrative completeness factor score. The analysis for females and males were similar, and therefore, warranting them to be treated similarly when creating narrative completeness factors. See Table 14 for female, male, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of both individual and joint completeness.

It should be noted that this dissertation *does not* assess outsiders' perspectives of

narratives, rather only the subjective perspective of the participants. My dissertation focuses on relational turbulence that assumes psychological and communicative message production from the individuals reflecting on events that created turbulence. To further this point, reflect back to Solomon and colleagues (2010) metaphor of turbulence – where they emphasize pilots must navigate transitions from within the aircraft. The insiders' perspective is essential to understanding how the pilots (e.g., individuals) and aircraft (e.g., relationships) are affected by impending turbulence. Consequently, in order to best understand turbulence as told through stories, I argue that we must have the relational operators assessing their own perceptions; thereby, I emphasize the subjective insider understanding of the path of turbulence by those that experienced it.

For that reason, I am examining the subjective participants' perspective, this offers a fresh approach from previous research (e.g., Koenig, 2002; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010; see Fiese & Spagnola, 2005) which examined narrative structure from an indirect or researcher perspective (or more accurately an audience's perspective) rather than the storytellers' perspective(s). The storytellers' perspective(s) are specifically addressed in this dissertation.

Narrative repetitiveness. Participants completed two questions about whether they previously told their stories and if so, how many times, following both their individual and joint stories. For individual storytelling participants, 57 (60.6%) previously told their story. Participants previously told their stories once ($n = 17$, 18.1%), 2 to 4 ($n = 32$, 34%), 5 to 9 ($n = 8$, 8.5%), and more than 10 times ($n = 1$, 1.1%). For joint storytelling participants, 52 (55.3%) previously told their story. Participants

previously told their stories once ($n = 8$, 8.5%), 2 to 4 ($n = 33$, 35.1%), 5 to 9 ($n = 9$, 9.6%), and more than 10 times ($n = 2$, 2.1%). See Table 15 for narrative repetitiveness of females, males, and overall participant proportions.

Narrative accuracy. Participants completed a statement on how accurate their story was to the actual event on a 5-point Likert response scale (1 = Inaccurate to 5 = Accurate). For their individual stories participants on average answered 4.49 ($SD = .65$, $Mdn = 5$), whereas for their joint stories participants on average answered 4.37 ($SD = .59$, $Mdn = 4$). A paired t-test indicated there was no statistical significance between individual and joint narrative accuracy t (92) = -1.872, $p = .08$. See Table 16 for narrative accuracy of females, males, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and medians.

Narrative intensity. Participants completed three statements about the intensity of the experience for them, their partner, and relationship on a 5-point Likert response scale (1 = Not Very Intense to 5 = Very Intense) to assess their response to items with the stem "How intense was the experience in the story...?" Participants rated the intensity for *them* on average as 3.91 ($SD = 1.05$, $Mdn = 4$). Participants rated the intensity for *their partner* on average as 3.91 ($SD = 1.07$, $Mdn = 4$). Participants rated their intensity for *their relationship* on average as 3.90 ($SD = 1.07$, $Mdn = 4$). See Table 17 for narrative intensity of females, male, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and medians.

Narrative responsibility. Participants completed two statements on whether the stress was caused by internal or external factors on a 5-point Likert response scale (1 =

95

Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess their response to "When thinking about responsibility in the story, what caused the stress?" Participants were asked to determine whether they felt like their stressors were caused by "internal factors" and "external factors." No specifics were given to delineate what constituted internal and external factors. Rather determination was left up to the participants' discretion. On average participants rated internal factors as 3.75 ($SD = 1.06$, $Mdn = 4$), and external factors as 4.14 ($SD = .92$, $Mdn = 4$).

Additionally, participants answered three questions about the responsibility for the stressor, or accountability, in regards to them, their partner, and the relationship. Participants rated accountability on average for them as 3.52 ($SD = 1.19$, $Mdn = 4$), their partner 3.06 ($SD = 1.36$, $Mdn = 4$), and their relationship 2.86 ($SD = 1.3$, $Mdn = 3$). See Table 17 for narrative responsibility of females, male, and overall participant means, standard deviations, and medians.

Debrief

Finally, partners were debriefed together about the purpose of the study and asked if they had any final questions. They were compensated for their participation with either Communication Studies extra credit or $15 gift card, and again thanked for their participation.

<div align="center">

Qualitative Thematic Analysis Procedures

</div>

Knobloch and Delaney (2012) argue that relational researchers should continue to examine relational turbulence themes in new contexts utilizing participants' communication about their experiences in their own words. My dissertation continues to

explore thematic investigations into stories utilizing a naturalistic mode of communication, stories, to examine RTM mechanisms.

To begin the thematic story analysis, themes were identified from the storytelling sessions by reviewing the videotapes transcribed after several iterative listening sessions for unanticipated and pre-existing RTM related themes. Two coders reviewed the transcripts while simultaneously viewing the video to ascertain emerging themes. To address the research questions (RQ$_{1-8}$), the researcher and a trained independent coder qualitatively analyzed the stories for thematic qualities utilizing analytic induction (e.g., Bulmer, 1979). "Although analytic induction involves abstracting categories from the data without a priori classification, Bulmer (1979) argued for an interplay between data and classification that is unavoidably guided by the researchers' own notions, as well as previous research" (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006, p. 58).

Transitional Events as Stressors Analysis

To address RQ$_1$ the whole narrative was used to identify stressors as transitional events to establish categories. Coders then met to collapse, integrate, and finalize a coding scheme. Within the narratives, several transitional events emerged; therefore, prompting rigorous discussions amongst the coders. To be true to the data the coding of multiple stressors emerged (rather than a forcing that data into a singular stressor) that appeared salient to whole narrative. Qualitative coding is the process of defining what the data (e.g., stories) are about (Charmaz, 2006). RQ$_1$ focused on stressors (multiple emerged). I did not emphasize one or another in stories because the research questions were attempting to assess any stressor; thus, I did not enact data reduction nor privilege

one stressor or another in participants' narratives. RQ_1 results thus reflect more than one category per story.

Additionally, individual and joint stories did not always match; thus, sometimes events differed between partners as well as between individual and joint stories. Coders discussed similarities and differences among the categories and referenced previously established turning point categorizations (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Dailey, Brody, LeFebvre, & Crook, 2013; Koenig Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008) that appeared to parallel transitional events. Discrepancies were addressed through discussion on all categories between the coders. Codes were exhaustive.

Relational Turbulence Mechanisms Analysis

To address RQs_{2-8}, thought units (e.g., complete thoughts/sections of their conversational turns) were used to identify themes emerging from the language within the stories provided by both individuals and couples. Although open to the nuances of our own data, we were also guided in this preliminary step by previous literature identified in relational turbulence model RTM mechanisms (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Tracy & Munoz, 2011). We also allowed for other unanticipated themes to emerge based on participants' content.

The researcher and coder listened to all of the individual and joint stories; upon hearing their stories, these coders created an initial set of themes for both sets of stories. The coders met, discussed, and combined their set of themes into a final coding scheme separately for individual and joint stories. These revised schemes were used to code all stories by both coders.

Relational uncertainty. Based on prevailing conceptualizations of uncertainty in relational communication literature (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001; Weber & Solomon, 2008), we retained messages that communicated ambiguity, confusion, doubt, indecision, hesitancy, and difficulty sense-making for relational uncertainty. Many declarative statements included "I don't know," "I'm not sure," "I didn't really understand," and others were statements such as "I wondered," and "I was really confused." These were coded into relational uncertainty subthemes as previously identified through quantitative measures by Knobloch and Solomon (1999). Self and partner uncertainty included *desire, evaluation*, and *goals*, whereas relationship uncertainty included *behavioral norms, mutuality, definition,* and *future*. Although codes were initially utilized for categorization, additional themes were also allowed to emerge that did not fit the pre-existing themes, *perceived network involvement* and *retrospection*.

Partner interdependence. Utilizing Solomon and colleagues' (2010) previous conceptualizations to define interdependence, we retained messages that explicitly articulated influence or change in their behaviors. Partner interdependence develops as partners allow each other to impact one another's actions. In relational development, the transition from independence to interdependence transpires as partners negotiate their behaviors and schedules. Therefore, messages regarding partner interdependence were categorized as either (1) interference, meaning behaviors or actions taken by their partner disrupted, impeded, interfered, swayed, deviated, and undermined the other partner, or (2) facilitation, meaning behaviors or actions taken by their partner that assisted, supported, helped, extended, or expedited the other partner. The messages represented

99

activities that would not have occurred without interdependence due to the romantic

relationship. Additionally, when coding partner interdependence, coders were instructed

not to apply inherently negative valence to interference and positive valence to

facilitation; even though, more often interference is viewed negatively and facilitation

positively.

No previously identified themes existed; therefore themes and subthemes

emerged solely from participants' stories in open coding. Then we refined the themes

utilizing axial coding to organize them into themes and subthemes. Partner interference

comprised six themes, *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled*

relational standards, time management, and *withholding*, between individual and joint

stories and 14 subthemes. Partner facilitation comprised four themes, *affect,*

agreeableness, conversation, and *time management,* and nine subthemes within

individual and joint stories.

Identity. Because this was postulated as an emerging mechanism in relational

turbulence, we retained messages that spoke to a sense of self as well as fluidity within

and between individual and relational affiliations. The act of storytelling is a dual

affirmation – both affirming the tellers' identities and relationship identities. Relational

narratives fundamentally communicate both individual and relational identities. People

construct identity (multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within

their stories (Orbuch, 1997; Somers, 1994). Clarifying the role of identity during

transitions may assist our understanding of identity initiated by turbulent processes or

represented as adaptive changes in personal and relational identities (Solomon et al.,

2010). Storytellers spoke about their perceptions about who or what their relationship symbolized to them, to their partners, or their relationships. These statements exhibited declarative statements (e.g., I've never had a relationship prior to him) and did not invoke doubt, ambiguity, unlike self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (e.g., I was not sure I wanted this relationship).

With only initial acknowledgement and exploration of identification of identity in previous scholarship (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; LeFebvre, 2011; Nagy, 2011; Steuber & Solomon, 2008), we allowed identity statements to emerge through open coding. Then we refined the themes utilizing axial coding to organize them into themes and subthemes. Identity in individual and joint stories two themes emerged: *static* and *dynamic identities* with five subthemes.

Research questions (RQ$_{1-5}$ and RQ$_8$) delineated these themes and subthemes that emerge through segments and holistic stories. Besides exploring the diversity within these themes, analysis also included the comparison with which themes emerged in stories. Examining the diversity and emergence enabled the examination of qualitative and quantitative discrepancies that arose in individual and joint storytelling themes (RQ$_{6-7}$).

Quantitative Analysis Procedures

Individual and Joint Storytelling Analysis

To assess how relational turbulence mechanisms (i.e., relational uncertainty, interference, and facilitation) operated as the independent variables in relation to narrative completeness, the dependent variable, in individual storytelling, I conducted

bivariate correlations for (RQ$_{9-11}$). More specifically, to address research questions (RQ$_{9,}$ $_{10, 11}$) each element of narrative completeness was summed to produce a composite score to conduct correlations between completeness and relational uncertainty, partner interference, and partner facilitation.

In order to explore the hypotheses (H$_{1-5}$) after the joint storytelling experience, both partners together completed a post relationship story elicitation survey about the narrative completeness of their story. These surveys were assessed with actor-partner interdependence models (e.g., Kenny et al., 2006) assessing pre- and post-relationship elicitation data between RTM mechanisms and the actor's narrative completeness.

The hypotheses regarding actor effects (H$_{1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A}$) explored the actor's RTM mechanisms associated with narrative completeness. The hypotheses regarding partner effects (H$_{1B, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5B}$) explored the actor's RTM mechanisms associated with the individuals' narrative completeness. I employed multilevel modeling (MLM) which accounts for interdependence in nested designs among couples (i.e., treats each participant as independent) while simultaneously assessing both actor and partner effects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explicated the methodology for conducting and analyzing the capturing stories and analyzing the storytelling themes and processes. The findings will be presented in Chapters 5 and 6. I first explore the qualitative thematic analysis in Chapter 5 and will explore the quantitative analysis between actor and partner variables in the storytelling themes and processes in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

Results I

In this section I explore the qualitative results that emerged in the individual and joint stories by examining their unique themes and the similarities and differences between them. To begin I delineate how relational uncertainty involves various content and levels (RQ_1) from individual and joint stories. Next, I investigate relational turbulence themes: relational uncertainty (RQ_{2A-2c}) and partner influence (RQ_{3A-3B}) in the individual stories. Then I consider how these same themes, relational uncertainty (RQ_{4A-4C}) and partner interdependence as interference and facilitation (under RQ_{5A-5B}) emerge in joint partner stories. After that the similarities and differences between both individual and joint stories are further explored (RQ_{6A-7B}). Lastly, I report how identity, the newly explored theoretical contribution to relational turbulence, materializes in individual and joint stories (RQ_{8A-8C}).

Relational Turbulence Content

Knobloch and Solomon (1999) developed the conceptualization and operationalization for relational uncertainty to assess its content and levels. I first examined what dating couples considered stressful events, or transitions, as relational turbulence content.

Research Question One (RQ_1)

RQ_1 asked couples what transitions they characterize as stressful experiences in dating relationship stories. Within the stories, 73 overall types were identified resulting in 14 categories and 27 subcategories (see Table 18 for categories listed by highest to

lowest frequencies). Similarities and differences that arose in the categories paralleled

pre-existing literature on turning point categorizations (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Dailey et

al., 2013; Koenig Kellas et al., 2008). Many of the major categories overlapped to some

degree (e.g., *career/academic-related obstacles, relational de-escalation, social*

networks, external relational threats, relational escalation, relational transgression,

physical encounters, get-to-know you time, personality characteristics, realization about

the relationship, and *special events*). Other transitional events (e.g., *social networks,*

health, career/academic related obstacles, finances, and *pets*) emerged as categories or

subcategories that had not been previously been established among dating relationships.

This sample of a collegiate population's stressful experiences (which may

subsume turning points) appeared to yield additional relational experiences that can affect

turbulence within the developmental process of young adult romantic relationships. The

following descriptions highlight all categories and subcategories (regardless of

frequency) as highlighted in qualitative research so that everything salient to romantic

relationships in their characterization of stressful experiences is represented (even those

events with only one exemplar).

Career/Academic-related obstacles. The major category, *career/academic-*

related obstacles, (24.7%) involved skills or experiences leading up to future

employment or impacted current employment. Dailey and colleagues (2013) found three

subcategories (e.g., *employment status, relocation,* and *employment demands*) in on-off

relationships comparable to dating relationships in this study as have other studies

indicating physical separation as a turning point (e.g., Baxter & Pittman, 2001). The first

subcategory, *employment status*, refers to stressful experiences where participants either chose new or different employment. The subcategory, *relocation*, refers to moving away. This was particularly prominent for this sample because the majority of collegiate students moved away or out of their homes for college. Many stressful experiences described the separation from their high school sweethearts as one moved to college a year sooner or to a college a distance away from their significant other. This created numerous stories about the stressful experience during the transition to college; often, this was compounded by the fact it changed their face-to-face relationship to a long-distance relationship (which most had never experienced). The third subcategory, *employment demands*, described changes in the relationship due to external occupational demands placed on one or both partners (e.g., working long hours or applying for graduate/law school).

In addition to these three, the current data also showed three minor career/academic-related obstacles (e.g., *temporary relocation, distraction,* and *employment choice*) that materialized as transitional events for dating relationships in this study. The first subcategory, *temporary relocation*, refers to a short-term or nonpermanent move. Students are often a transient population who relocate for internships or studying abroad. Also, students frequently transition between their collegiate community and their familial homes during winter, summer, and holiday breaks. This temporary relocation interrupts or suspends normative relational routines and communication. This subcategory is similar to relocation but differs because relational partners understand this is not a permanent change. The second subcategory,

distraction, refers to tension between career and leisure. Participants spoke of their

partners' leisure activities disrupting their routines, relationship, and/or future career

aspirations (e.g., video games). The last new career/academic-related subcategory,

employment choice, refers to relational partners' disapproval or disagreement about

future occupational paths. In one particular story, one partner explicitly disagreed that

her partner should become a police officer. She believed that a blue-collar service job

was not an admirable career choice. Additionally, in another story, another young

woman attempted to dissuade her partner from entering into a particular division of the

military. As young adults in college began to plan their career/academic-related paths,

relational partners did not always agree with the choices and relational lives that they saw

forthcoming; therefore, this caused stress as they attempted to change directions of their

partners and relationships.

Relational de-escalation. The next most prominent category, *relational de-

escalation*, (16.4%) embodies three subcategories, *relationship dissolution, conflict,* and

quality time. Relational de-escalation represented a decrease in intimacy either leading to

a decrease in time between couples, single or multiple occurrences of fighting, or

initiating termination of the relationship. This categories and these subcategories

appeared in previous turning point literature as: disengagement (Baxter & Bullis, 1986),

conflict (Baxter & Pittman, 2001), or de-escalation (Dailey et al., 2013). The first

subcategory, *relationship dissolution*, was a reoccurring subcategory for young adult

couples adjusting to their transitioning and evolving lives from high school to college to

careers. Often times, couples experienced breakups as a result of their changing lives and

106

then reconnected when in proximity of one another or re-evaluated their relationships as desirable. The second subcategory, *conflict*, represented the single, or multiple occurrences of fighting as episodic and global events leading to couples feeling less intimacy. One episodic story surfaced over whether drink lids should be utilized on cups, whereas another global story discussed intimacy (e.g., sexual frustrations) leading to continuous fighting in all aspects of their relationship. The final subcategory, *quality time*, refers to a decrease in opportunities to engage in relational time together, mainly caused by other factors, long distance relationships, career/academic-related obstacles, or lack of resources (e.g., time or finances). This parallels previous research by Baxter and Bullis (1986) on competing demands distracting from increasing romantic relationship intimacy.

External relational threats. The category, *external relational threats*, (13.7%) paralleled previous work on turning points (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Dailey et al., 2013). This category suggests that external relational partners, whether previous partners or new potential partners, cause stress in current relationships. The subcategory, *previous partners*, reflected tension about feelings for, communication with, or interaction beyond friendship with a previous boyfriend, girlfriend, or hook-up. Rivals from the previous relationship caused concern because their current partners thought they would return to their previous partner. Or, a partner struggled with the inability to end communication and interaction with a former partner. In one instance, a partner changed the name on his phone to read a friend's name to decrease suspicion and continue to court his previous partner while pursuing the current

relationship. Similarly, the subcategory, *new potential partners,* refers to the appearance of a third-party romantic rival (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Other times potential new partners, not previous partners, influenced relationships. For instance, upon moving to college there is an increase in uncertainty about the certainty of the current relationship with numerous new prospects available.

Social network. The category, *social network*, (13.7%) refers to the circle of family and friends that connected to participants and participants' partners. There are five subcategories under social network: two subcategories (e.g., *meeting family and/or friends* and *network disapproval*) derived from previous literature as well as three new subcategories (e.g., *family relocation, family and/or friend disruptions* and *negative association*) that emerged within the participants' stories.

The *social network* category emerged with two similar subcategories within courtship, which other previous turning point literature on on-again/off-again (on-off), and marital relationships (e.g., Dailey et al., 2008; Surra, 1985; Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988; Surra & Hughes, 1997) found. Particularly similar to Dailey and colleagues (2013), the meeting family and/or friends caused stress either through the interaction or absence of interaction. Additionally, the disapproval of the social network was analogous to Dailey and colleagues' turning points. In this study, it emerged as either parents' dislike of their son or daughter's relational partner or the partners' decisions. This is a particularly prominent category because young adults are in the process of establishing their identities while simultaneously mitigating their relationship with their parental figures and friends.

The social network category also encompassed three other subcategories (e.g., *family relocation, family and/or friend disruptions,* and *negative association*) previously unrecognized in the turning point literature. The first subcategory, *family relocation,* suggested an external stressor that then influenced the internal dynamics of the relationship. These collegiate-age dating relationships had to manage change when their parents chose to move away from their familiar familial hometowns while the students were away at college. The relocation of their social networks from a previously known location affected the stability of individuals and, in turn, their relational partners and relationships. The second subcategory, *family disruptions,* reflected change within familiar familial or friend structure (e.g., parental divorce or friends' breakup) and altered their normative relationship. This often changed their ability to communicate and interact between and within their social networks. For instance, participants talked about their parents experiencing divorce. These participants could no longer simply talk to their parents jointly rather they had to create time and energy to engage with both. Additionally, depending on how the separation occurred, often times they were forced to take sides and mediate the communications resulting in a disruption in their own relationships based on the stress from their primary networks. This often caused participants to question their own relationship security and longevity – for if their parents or friends' relationships they admired could not endure they were uncertain their own could. The third subcategory, *negative association,* related to stress caused by associations to particularly negatively perceived friendship, colleagues, or acquaintances (e.g., birds of a feather flock together). Mainly, one partner did not like or approve of

who the partner was hanging around with. The negative association differs from disapproval because the former related to friendship(s) or indirect connection to the significant other and the latter related to perception of the social network of the significant other.

Relational escalation. The category, *relational escalation,* (8.2%) refers to an attempt to create closeness, more intimacy, or higher personal level within an already initiated relationship (Dillard & Knobloch, 2011). This is a commonly identified category in turning point literature in romantic relationships. In these stories, there was only one escalation situation that appeared, as a discussion of the relationship. This involved both partners communicating about feelings of increasing intimacy under this category and led to increased intimacy on their first date.

Relational transgression. The category, *relational transgression*, (6.9%) emerged as serious infractions of relational rules and norms (e.g., *general transgression*, *infidelity*, and *lying)* rather than slight violations. This paralleled Dailey and colleagues (2013) categories for on-again/off-again relationships. The subcategory, *general transgressions*, was related to differences in expectations with the relationship, particularly at the initiation and early stages of escalation. For instance, one partner did not buy any Christmas presents for his partner, which in turn caused questions about the stability and reciprocity that could be achieved in their relationship. The other two subcategories, *infidelity* and *lying*, were blatant and almost led to relationship termination. *Infidelity* refers to cheating or adultery with another person outside the relationship, whereas *lying* is intentionally misleading regarding what had occurred

(typically with an external relational threat). These acts infringed upon the trust in the relationship decreasing relational commitment.

Health. The category, *health*, (4.1%) included subcategories (e.g., acute health conditions, chronic health conditions, and family-related health conditions). No previous turning point literature included health conditions affecting changes in relationships; however, participants described how health conditions caused stressful experiences in their dating relationships. Health issues were particularly stressful because often times the participants had not previously provided medical care for anyone. Additionally, health conditions are not typically a concern for young adults. The first subcategory, *acute health conditions*, attributed stress to short-term ailments (e.g., concussion or broken ankle). Within the acute conditions both partners perceived a timeframe where the health condition would no longer be in existence or impede their lives. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these acute health conditions lasted for months. Partners had to adjust their typical schedules and often provided assistance or treatment for the recovery of their partners. The second subcategory, *chronic health conditions*, attributed stress to long-term ailments (e.g., recurring seizures or mental impairments). Chronic health conditions continuously affected both relational partners and their relationship to some degree. Lastly, *family-related health conditions*, involved participants' family members (e.g., mother's diabetes). Oftentimes, these young adults would become the caretakers for their familial members even while attending college and attempting to maintain their dating relationships. The external stress from their social networks' health conditions surfaced subsequently impacting their own relationships.

Finances. The next new major category, *finances*, (2.7%) emerged as a transitional event causing stress for relational partners. In one story, a partner did not have the sufficient funds to accommodate the needs and/or activities in which the relational partners were participating, whereas in another overspending by both partners on a vacation caused stress. The financial constraints of young adults with college expenses and limited expendable income caused embarrassment or frustration for one or both partners.

Physical encounters. The major category, physical encounters, (2.7%) emerged as hook-ups, the colloquial term for describing casual romantic or sexual activity on one or more occasions without the arrangement of an official relationship (Paul, Wenzel, & Harvey, 2008). Partners were unclear especially since hooking up outside the relationship, by one or both partners, did not infer or guarantee any commitment inside the relationship.

Get-to-know you time. This category (1.4%) represents partners' getting-to-know each other for the first time on their first date. This was not escalation because it represented the initiation of the relationship and the stress that ensues at the onset. Typically represented as a turning point (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986) – similarly in this story this stressful transitional event symbolized a high-stakes situation because one or both partners could terminate any future interaction.

Personality characteristics. This category (1.4%) refers individual attributes exhibited by one or both relational partners. In this particular instance, both partners had difference in personality that led to discussions and disagreements about how to navigate

events in their relational lives.

Realization about the relationship. This category (1.4%) reflected personal considerations about how and if the relationship should continue. In this story, the partners discussed how they had been together since high school and felt as if their relationship choices were dictating their professional and personal relationships. One partner felt as if the relationship was clouding opportunities or the evaluation of other possibilities. This realization caused stress and eventually a breakup; although, upon further consideration he felt the relationship was equally as valuable for his, her, and their future.

Pets. This major category, *pets,* (1.4%) reflects participants' supervision of one partners' pet and caused stress when the rules and procedures for safety were not communicated or followed. The care and respect shown for another's animal may reflect how partners perceived each other and the relationship.

Special events. Lastly, this major category (1.4%) often led participants to re-evaluate their relationships based on their inclusion or exclusion in events (Dailey et al., 2013). In this particular story, Monica was a bride's maid for her friend's wedding. She had questions about whether to invite or exclude her current boyfriend to her best friends' wedding, where she was standing up for her friend. A secondary issue arose in association with the special event for Monica, since the groom's best man was her ex-boyfriend (an external rival). Monica did choose to invite her boyfriend, Mike, but then ultimately excluded him asking him to stay home to avoid tension for the bride and groom. The hesitation to choose to invite, not invite, or be reluctant to decide causes

stress about what the relationship symbolizes in a social setting. These special events often indicate partners' feelings towards each other and their relationship.

Relational Uncertainty in Individual Stories

Expressions of uncertainty were examined in individual narratives. Embedded naturalistic language shows relationships are maintained through the language (Duck et al., 1991). As they told their stories, participants intertwined their individual thoughts with talk about their relationships (Solomon & Theiss, 2007) and were not interviewed or probed with additional questions, and thus, were enabled to freely express themselves. The stories people expressed about their interpersonal romantic relationships reflected a sense of meaning, including uncertainty, regarding their relationships.

RQ$_{2A-2C}$ relational uncertainty as applied in Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) pre-established themes observed in prior qualitative and quantitative scholarship to individuals' stories involved in courtships. Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) tripartite of sources encompassed questions people have about their own involvement in the relationship (e.g., self uncertainty), their partner's level of involvement (e.g., partner uncertainty), and the nature of the dyadic unit (e.g., relationship uncertainty). More importantly, these themes further evidenced the validity through induction and deduction approaches triangulating that relational uncertainty exists in the communication (as shown) and not just cognitively as assessed in the scales.

After several iterations with the stories, it was apparent for the codes that the pre-existing conceptualizations by Knobloch and Solomon (1999) emerged and were used as a framework guiding the analysis; however, additional grounded analyses suggested

additional themes. These themes assist in validating the pre-existing conceptualization as well as expanding them (see Methods for further discussion).

Thus, these results provided a triangulation of previous scholarship while simultaneously reinforcing the three content issues (e.g., desire, evaluation, and goals) that arise in self and partner uncertainty and four content issues that arise in relationship uncertainty (e.g., behavioral norms, mutuality, definition, and future). These themes further evidence the validity of relational uncertainty themes exhibited in communication (as shown through numerous examples) rather than cognitively assessed in scales. The next section discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged in individual stories (see Table 19).

Self Uncertainty (RQ2A)

RQ2A examined self uncertainty themes that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Self uncertainty contains an individual's self -doubts and insecurities about his or her involvement in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Previously, self uncertainty included questions people had about desire, evaluation, and goals. *Desire, evaluation*, and *goals* all emerged within individual narratives as well as *perceived network involvement* (e.g., Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006). I provide exemplars, utilizing participant's language, to understand how these manifest in stories about stressful experiences.

 Desire. This subtheme, *desire*, centers on the storyteller's feelings and commitment to the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Often storytellers, both men and women, expressed questions about devotion for the relationship because they

115

did not feel committed. As Robert expressed, "I still feel a little uneasy about the whole thing [relationship]" or similarly Alisha articulated, "I was not aware of what I wanted just yet. I told him not to wait on me. I don't know what I want." Self-doubt echoed in storytellers about their own desire to be in their relationship.

Evaluation. This subtheme, *evaluation*, examines storytellers' value or definition of their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). More specifically, storytellers' spoke to the importance, personal involvement, and investment in their relationship. Xavier said,

> "I was still kind of in a situation where I was a little confused. I was wondering…I came here to focus on school. At the time I was trying to play football so I was doing that too. I still had my relationship that was dying off with my ex back home. I was still talking to her so it was very confusing."

He spoke about weighing his options in his current circumstances. Self uncertainty through evaluation reflected a comparison to another relationship and life stressors. For instance, Rachel was in the Army going through boot camp when she experienced her stress within the military and between relational partners. "I wasn't sure who I liked. I liked both of them. I didn't even know if I wanted to be in a relationship because it was so stressful on top of all the military stress." Uncertainty came when evaluating the juxtaposition of options available to young adults experiencing new relationships and life transitions (e.g., college, job opportunities, distance).

116

Goals. The subtheme, *goals*, examines storytellers' questions surrounding the future of their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Less apparent than desire and evaluation in self uncertainty individuals felt ambiguity about the long-term success of their relationship. In one particular relationship, Melanie had created a vision about her romantic relationship future and applied this to her current relationship that did not match according to her vision. She fell for Charles who had dreamed about and worked for a military career that would put him in dangerous situations. Melanie, frustrated and doubtful, spoke about whether or not this relationship would work.

> He'd be gone for a long time. Training would be two and a half years straight out of college after he graduated. He wouldn't be able to see family or myself much. That's just not what I had pictured for my life. I knew the STO (Special Tactics Officer) was what he really wanted. But as I thought about that more I was like I don't know. I love him to death but if I'm never going to see him, you know, and it's very dangerous. It's scary and stressful.

The inability to reconcile between current feelings and future goals created self uncertainty for individuals in their retelling of stressful events.

Perceived network involvement. This new subtheme, *perceived network involvement*, emerged in relation to self-certainty. Previously, Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) extended perceived network involvement as a mechanism influencing relational turbulence. They indicated that social network members' appraisals of their partner and/or relationship affected relationships. Storytellers' perceptions of their

117

perceived network involvement surfaced either as uncertainty prompted from their own networks or from their partner's networks. Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) suggested that it is plausible that individuals may inject their perceptions of network involvement into the courtship and experience relational uncertainty. Their assumption emerged as individuals spoke about how their networks influenced their own relationship introducing self uncertainty.

Individuals spoke about how their own networks influenced their relationship desires. Samantha said, "I'm not really sure. I wasn't really committed to it [relationship] because I'd listen to my parents all the time." These young adults evidenced perceived network involvement self uncertainty as they attempted to transition from parental pressures and exposure and learn to trust themselves.

Additionally, the next example illustrated perceived network involvement emphasizing uncertainty about the partners' network. Brandon talked about the necessity of meeting her family for the first time. He was eager to demonstrate his desires and become integrated into her network. Unfortunately, Brandon's partner did not provide support to reduce his uncertainty because she had not terminated her own self uncertainty. Brandon shared the following:

> I wasn't sure if her parents or her sisters were going to get involved. I
> wasn't 100% sure what to expect. It's really not that big of a deal. I think
> they like me. I hope so at least.

Self uncertainty emerged because Brandon knew how important it was to his partner that her network liked and approved of him as a partner. Nevertheless, this new self

uncertainty subtheme, perceived social network involvement, appeared to influence individuals own participation in the relationship.

Partner Uncertainty (RQ2B)

RQ2B examined the themes of partner uncertainty that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. *Desire, evaluation*, and *goals* subthemes emerged within individual narratives. Partner uncertainty appeared to have analogous factors to self uncertainty and contained measures involving doubts an individual had regarding his or her partner's current involvement and future potential for continuation of the relationship. This content alters the focus about desire, evaluation, and goals. These subthemes paralleled the definitions given under self uncertainty but in these instances related to uncertainty individuals had about their partners.

Desire. The most prevalent partner uncertainty subtheme, *desire*, examined storytellers' questions about partners' feelings or commitment conveyed through their communication or behaviors or in some instances the lack of communication and behavior. More often storytellers spoke about their partners' uncertainty rather than the uncertainty they caused for their partners. Additionally, women more commonly expressed concerns for their partners' commitments. Angelica conveyed questions about her partner in a broad, abstract manner. "He became distant in our relationship. He wasn't sure about the relationship." On the other hand, Laura simply stated, "I don't know what he was doing. I miss him and I don't trust him. I don't know what he's really doing." Laura was unable to effectively evaluate her partner's commitment. The inability to determine their partners' feelings and commitment levels were commonly

119

expressed in their stories about stress.

Evaluation. The partner uncertainty subtheme, *evaluation*, examined storytellers' questions related to partners' involvement, interest, or importance given to their relationship. This was conveyed through comparison whether they communicated or showed continual relational investment. For example, Carver said, "She was not sure if she wanted to settle down or if she wanted to do the party thing in college," whereas Jasmine stated, "His priority to the relationship was not matching mine." Storytellers indicated their partners were not demonstrating the care necessary to their relationship either due to external pressures (e.g., partying or college) or internal comparisons to their relational feelings and/or behaviors (e.g., not matching mine).

Goals. The least evident partner uncertainty subtheme was *goals* or questions about partners' long-term orientation toward the relationship. More often tellers were concerned with the current desire and evaluation rather than the long-term relational future. For if the relationship was not stable enough to maintain its current status then questions about the future were irrelevant. In one relationship, both partners, Melanie and Charles, individually expressed concern for their futures and the doubts concerning each of them. Melanie said,

> He just said that it was hard to see, to picture our futures. Because when I
> picture our futures with us it's so easy to see. I can see it pretty clearly. I
> guess for him it didn't come as clearly and he wasn't sure what to make
> of that.

Melanie had already confirmed her feelings and sought a relationship with Charles; she did not have self uncertainty instead expressed partner uncertainty questioning whether Charles reciprocated that future.

On the other hand, Charles also expressed partner uncertainty. "The particular field [career] didn't set well with her for obvious reasons like I stated before—the danger, the time away, and the uncertainty—and I totally agree. It's not the best environment for a relationship." Charles was equally uncertain about her feelings when his future goals did not harmonize with Melanie's.

Both partners in their individual stories communicated questions about whether their relationship goals could become their partners' goals. In the meantime, many storytellers continued to wonder whether their relationships could stand the test of time in their partners' eyes.

Relationship Uncertainty (RQ$_{2C}$)

RQ$_{2C}$ examined the themes of relationship uncertainty that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. According to Knobloch and Solomon (1999) relationship uncertainty includes four constructs: behavioral norms, mutuality, definition and future. These same subthemes, *behavioral norms, mutuality, definition, and future* (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) emerged as well as a new subtheme, *retrospection*, within individual narratives. In comparison to self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty was a far less expressed theme. In their individual stories, participants focused more on self and partner than relationship uncertainty.

Behavioral norms. The first and most occurring relationship uncertainty

subtheme, *behavioral norms*, emphasized acceptable and unacceptable actions, rules, or boundaries within a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Individuals did not speak of establishing new or appropriate norms; rather they talked about the change to their routines. Many stories included stressors about their transitions such as moving to college or into temporary or permanent long-distance relationships. The adjustment necessary to reestablish routines mutually satisfactory to both partners took time, which generated questions about relationship stability.

Two partners shared individual concerns about their changing behavioral norms. Jillian spoke about her relationship uncertainty. "When we were in high school we had more time for each other. When we came to college it was different. It was hard to balance friends and our relationship." The adjustment to new environments threw relationships into turmoil as they attempted to create a new norm. Simultaneously, Jillian's partner, Conrad, talked about new routines with college:

> I didn't know how it was going to work out. It was weird having to adjust
> to having a roommate always around…and having a lot more
> homework…finding a balance was tough in the beginning but I think
> we've done a pretty good job.

Normative routines were regularly interrupted with transitions to new circumstances, whether temporary or long-term, causing uncertainty about how to reestablish or develop mutually acceptable norms.

Mutuality. The second subtheme, *mutuality*, assessed the reciprocity of feelings within the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). In these instances individuals

122

spoke about both their own and their partner's contributions or feelings towards the relationship. Oftentimes individuals felt as if there was an imbalance – typically from their partner. For example, Leticia spoke about her efforts and the lack of effort from her partner.

> "After doing all the work, maneuvering all this, lying to my Dad, getting on the bus, riding the bus for 30 minutes just to come to him and him not being at the dorm room. It always caused a lot of stress and kind of felt like I was putting in all the work when he wasn't even giving any type of effort."

In relationship uncertainty, stories contained both self and partner contributions directed at the evaluation of reciprocity.

Definition. The third subtheme and least frequently identified, *definition*, focused on the current status of the relationship. Individuals tended to address future concerns rather than focus on the current state of the relationship. Although for one couple their stressful story was about their first date; therefore, their relationship uncertainty was about the present state of the relationship. Jinsuk spoke about their first date and sitting under the moon by a small lake when, "One guy came to us and asked questions. The guy asked 'Are you guys dating?' At the time actually we were just friends and he said, 'Not really.'" Relationship uncertainty centered on whether or not their relationship was romantic or platonic and what their current actions meant in regards to the present rather than the future.

Future. The fourth subtheme, *future,* focused on the long-term outcomes of the

relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). This subtheme surfaced in only a few instances where couples centered on the future state of the relationship. Both partners spoke about the future of their relationship. Their decision is exemplified by the concern stated, "(We had the) decision whether to stay together or not," while one partner studied abroad. Individuals typically spoke about the uncertainty about a decision from themselves or their partner rather than attributing it to relationship uncertainty.

     Retrospection. The fifth and new subtheme, *retrospection*, focused on past events influencing present and future orientations. Although a less prominent subtheme (i.e., it was not echoed by many respondents), everything salient to participants in their characterization of uncertainty is represented (even those events with few exemplars).

     Participants were prompted to talk about a stressful event and in some instances they spoke about past grievances or misgivings, while others talked about present situations. This subtheme discussed pending previous uncertainties that continued to persist as uncertainties (that had not been discussed or resolved). In other words, past uncertainties (retrospectively) influenced the participants' characterization of the present and future.

     This new subtheme may have arisen due to the nature of retrospective storytelling and sense-making. Despite the fact that participants were not specifically asked to talk about past or present transitional events, they independently chose to discuss both past and/or present-oriented stressors. This subtheme represented continued uncertainty about maintaining their relationship that occurred in the past and continues to linger. For instance, Mary Ann's story:

I don't know if I can, like, keep being in a relationship with you [her

partner] because there are days where it's really hard for me to get over it

[relational transgression]. But, I do feel I should be over it and I don't

think it's fair to keep punishing you.

Although this may also exhibit self-uncertainty subtheme desire, the overarching

statement represented Mary Ann's inability to think about a current status of the

relationship when her previous uncertainties are still unsolved. This quotation

emphasized the history rather than present feelings or commitment questions. This

subtheme highlighted individuals talking about past events or previous feelings that

generated uncertainty about their current and future relationship. Mary Ann articulated

her relationship uncertainty from relational history and how it impacted her feelings and

commitment.

Additionally, Angelica expressed concerns reflecting on their past representing

the retrospection subtheme. Previously, she and her boyfriend, Wes, had experienced

transitional stressors caused by their parents' move and subsequent breakup. Upon

coming to college, they met and began dating and then his parents moved across the

country just they began their relationship. As result, Wes broke up with Angelica

because as he expressed his life was in flux – unknowing whether he would return to

school that coming semester. After winter break, the external stress caused by the move

dissipated and Wes sought a renewal with Angelica. A year or so later, Angelica's

parents decided to move across country in the opposite direction – further distancing their

ability to connect and see each other during academic breaks. Angelica expressed worry

125

about how her parents' relocation might cause a similar action prompting dissolution again. Angelica said, "We've had rocky times. I'm not sure it's from my parents' move or other factors." The instability present in their relationship triggered past uncertainties (that had not been discussed or resolved) to resurface and that might precipitate an identical result as before (e.g., relationship termination).

No pre-established themes have addressed the influence of past orientations that are found in these stories. Thus, this subtheme *retrospection* highlights that uncertainty is not isolated to present and future conditions but continues throughout the relationship duration sometimes beckoning back to unpleasant feelings or events. This new subtheme is further explored in the joint stories.

In this section I explore the qualitative results that emerged in the individual stories. The examination reviews the second relational turbulence mechanism, partner influence, and expressions of influence as partner interference and facilitation.

Partner Interdependence in Individual Stories

The RQ$_{3A-3B}$ examination began with Solomon and Knobloch's (2001) broad concepts of partner interdependence as interference and facilitation or the process of negotiating interdependence through individuals' relational stories. Five themes (e.g., *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards,* and *time management*) and 11 corresponding subthemes emerged for partner interference in individual stories. Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and nine corresponding subthemes emerged for partner facilitation in individual stories. This next section discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged in

126

individual stories surrounding interference and facilitation from their partners (see Table 20).

Partner Interference (RQ3A)

RQ3A examined the themes of interference from partners that emerge in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. *Partner interference* refers to the degree to which an individual perceives a partner undermining, deviating, or swaying the other's personal actions and outcomes (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001) from that which would have normally occurred if the individual were a singular unit. Infusing the two people's actions, individuals must rewrite behavioral patterns and scripts to incorporate the other person into their lives. Five themes (e.g., *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards,* and *time management*) and 11 corresponding subthemes emerged within the individual stories (see Table 22). I provide exemplars for each theme and subtheme in alphabetical order, utilizing participants' language, to understand how these manifest in stories about stressful experiences.

Affect. The first theme, *affect,* appeared as emotions or feelings prompting undesirable arousal from their partners. The *affect* experienced by the relational partner influenced the overall tenor of the relationship distraction. This overarching theme encompassed two subthemes, *prompting negative emotions* and *affection toward/from others.*

The first subtheme, *prompting negative emotions*, represented the promotion of emotional outbursts or dejection from their partners. For instance, in describing emotional outbursts, Gabrielle spoke about their stressful vacation that was further

127

stressed by financial burdens throughout the weekend. At a breaking point, Gabrielle and Josh had a fight over a drink lid due to their strenuous circumstances and Josh ended up throwing the drink against the wall on the way to the car. As Gabrielle said, "It was the first time I see him really angry." The emotional outburst prompted her to remain quiet and changed their interaction afterwards. Additionally, dejection ensued when nebulous or gloomy moods influenced relational demeanors whether it was during an anniversary dinner or daily conversations the prompting of altered moods prompted negative reactions. For instance Charles articulated, "We went out for our six month anniversary. And it was nice but I could kind of tell there was something off." Furthermore, as Chance expressed when discussing Saige's stress from familial health problems and the influence on their relationship, "Sometime she feels the effects of it and it comes towards me never in a negative manner but I don't like it when she doesn't feel happy and she's not calm." The interference is exhibited by and through the exchange of emotions prompting negativity.

The second subtheme, *affection toward/from others*, represented the interference evoked by attention or endearment from a potential previous or future rival romantic partner. For instance, Mary Ann spoke about her boyfriend, Max, showing affection toward a previous partner after they had a huge conflict about his interaction with his ex. Mary Ann said, "Checked his Facebook (later time) and saw he and ex had friended each other." His affection toward his previous girlfriend triggered further negative affect toward both him and his previous girlfriend. This was a recurrent subtheme where affection towards others caused friction between partners. Rachel and Connor both

expressed in their individual stories discussions of interference from another's affection. Rachel said, "I went out and he couldn't go because he didn't pass a certain test so he didn't have [military] privileges to go out on leave but I did. I had alcohol and made some poor decisions." Connor also spoke about her decisions affecting their relationship. He said, "She got drunk one night and kissed a guy." The affection towards another and in this case physical affection disrupted their relationship. Additionally, as for affection from others, Xavier spoke about instigating a negative affect from his current romantic partner, Leticia. "She [his previous partner] sent him a card." He in turn intentionally displayed the card – "I kept it on display…to start a situation." Although this instance is more emotional than physical, Xavier incited a reaction from his partner; therefore prompting an almost guaranteed negative affect from Leticia. The theme, *affect*, posits the arousal of emotions primarily negative from affection and demonstrated interference to the partner and relationship.

      Physical proximity. The second theme, *physical proximity,* denoted closeness, and in these instances the expressed disruption caused by geographical distance from their partner or lack of face-to-face interaction. As relational partners became more interdependent their absence was equally as interfering to their daily lives. This theme encompassed two subthemes, *absence* and *mediated communication.*

      The first subtheme, *absence,* addressed the physical absenteeism of their partner. Being unable to directly interact with their partner face-to-face disrupted their schedules due to the integration and interdependence already formulated and had to be renegotiated. This was a prominent subtheme because many relational partners had to either experience

temporary or permanent long-distance relationships while attending college, studying abroad, working, or vacations. For instance in Amy and Glen's situation, Glen went off to college a year before Amy. Amy was a senior in high school. Amy spoke about their separation, "The distance wasn't so big but it felt bigger because it did limit how much time we got to spend together." Glen also spoke about the distance and how it influenced their relationship. Glen said, "Two years ago I came to [college] and changed some, as college does, and have her be home and not be here…" The absence of each other in their daily lives as they had previously been accustomed to interfered with their ability to interact and relate to one another. Another participant, Madison also told spoke about her absence from John. She said, "The long distance [studying abroad] triggered the stressfulness…he worried about me going out at night and not being able to communicate with him." Usually John and Madison would go out together but because they were separated the typical routines caused by separation changed their behaviors. The absence of the relational partner caused more independence and less interdependence than they were accustomed to in their relationship.

The second subtheme, *mediated communication,* addressed the communicative adjustments relational partners had to undergo to interact with their partners while out of physical proximity with one another. This again was a function of their separation due to academics, employment, or vacations. Partners had to turn to mediated forms of communication that took more time and effort to arrange and manage in order to interact. The constant annoyances from the mediated communication forms did not facilitate higher relational satisfaction. For instance, David spoke about his girlfriend traveling to

130

Italy for the semester. He said, "Not being able to see her face-to-face and doing it over Skype is completely different considering the Internet doesn't really work here…" This again occurred in Robert and Joan's story, where Robert spoke about their separation over summer in the same country. "We tried to Skype but I live out in the country and Internet didn't work so we could only really text. She went on vacation at one point and her phone did not work." The inability to connect face-to-face or through mediated communication hindered their behavioral pattern. For Jasmine, the inability to communicate hit a breaking point for her when she was studying abroad for the summer. As Jasmine expressed, "I would send a message on Facebook. I'd see him read it and didn't respond. That would make me mad." The repetitive attempts to communicate over distance further strained their relationship. As Caleb then talked about,

> It came to a head. We were going to Skype at 1:00 AM in the morning.
> Also, the time difference was hell. At one o'clock in the morning we were
> going to Skype and sort everything out and I fell asleep at 12:45…and
> woke up three hours later… Oh shit! I go to Facebook and Jasmine broke
> up with me and crazy stuff.

The lack of their relational partner in face-to-face interactions established the difficulties faced when distance positions their partners from physical proximity. *Physical* distance is a nuisance that is exaggerated and fatiguing even with technological advances that enable communication from afar.

Relational de-escalation. The third theme, *relational de-escalation*, emerged as a decrease intimacy either initiated by termination of the relationship or disputes between

131

partners. The theme encompassed two subthemes, *breakup* and *conflict.*

The first subtheme, *breakup,* referred to relationship termination; although, all the participants were back with their relational partners, the on-again/off-again disruption of the breakup caused changes in their interaction due to relational distancing through emotional and behavioral changes. As Sarah discussed, her week was in upheaval during their breakup. She said,

> We ended up breaking up for a week …it was me who broke up with him.
>
> It was this stressful time. I had just joined a sorority. I was battling with
>
> my major trying to figure everything out…First, I called him and said I
>
> don't think we can do this anymore then ended up going to [his location]
>
> to see him and we ended up breaking up.

This did not end their conversation. When Sarah went home for the weekend, they had a serious conversation. She went on to say, "He said he would have to move on. That triggered something in my head. We ended up breaking up for good." The tension caused by their decision whether to manage or dissolve their relationship caused disruption throughout that week. Although they did get back together both relational partners traversed the fluctuation from interdependence to independence and back to interdependence as their relationship hung in the balance.

The second subtheme, *conflict,* stressed similar oscillations in intimacy as relational partners disturbed their routines through substantial or continual fighting. As expressed in Eunjoo and Christopher's relational story, Christopher spoke about their stylistic differences in addressing conflict and how they exhausted each other physically

132

and emotionally. Christopher said,

> Basically our stress is the way we communicate. When she gets mad she
>
> usually stays quiet and silent. But me different. I always try to straighten
>
> everything out. I don't want to leave things overnight. I want to straighten
>
> everything out that day, so if she stays quiet it looks like she's mad at me.
>
> Sometimes I talk very loud that she cannot put up with.

Although it may appear that Christopher attempted to facilitate relational truths about

their conflict, in the process of this forceful interaction further conflict ensued because he

did not take into account the stress and stylistic differences occurring between them.

This example emphasizes that the distance created by the demand and withdrawal in

conflict confrontation between these partners. Equally conflictive can be the lack of

confrontation or communication that can lead to conflict and decrease in relational

intimacy. Morgan was disturbed by the fact that John did not talk to her about their

mutual acquaintance's infidelity towards her best friend. The conflict arose when John

hid the fact that he knew about the infidelity, especially when she went to talk to him

about it and he had apparently already known about it. This in turn enforced the notion to

Morgan that he approved of his friend's actions and had concealed them based on this

notion. As Morgan uttered, "I was shaken…that he didn't tell her [Morgan] about it…I

didn't speak…I cried." *Conflict* between couples impedes into their daily individual and

relational routines.

       Unfulfilled relational standards. The fourth theme, *unfulfilled relational*

standards, represented guidelines for romantic relationships that were not yet established

in the relationship or had been violated by one partner. This theme encompassed three subthemes, *expectations, intrusion,* and *rules or norms.*

The first subtheme, *expectations,* reflected assumptions about what relational partners should do if they were committed to relational success whether for episodic or global situations. For instance, expectations might revolve around meeting at the agreed upon time and location. Leticia spoke about her constant frustration with Xavier when he did not follow through on their mutual agreements. Leticia was still in high school and had to lie to her parents about working and then hop onto a bus to meet Xaiver during the week. In the process of all the deception she would often be disappointed when,

I would show up at his [location] and we had agreed that we were going to

hang out that night but…he wasn't there. Him not being at his dorm room

when we had agreed that he would be there caused a lot of stress.

To further complicate the situation, when Xavier was at the agreed upon location at the right time, Leticia said, "He had two of his friends in his dorm room when I got there and they did not appear to be going anywhere anytime soon." Thus, they could not even have any intimacy, which additionally bought dissatisfaction for Leticia. The inability to follow through in their anticipated plans brought frustration and sadness.

Other instances of failure to fulfill expectations were at the global level of the relationship. Interference can occur when one relational partner has expectancies for how the other partner should act toward them or for their relationship. For instance, when Jasmine was traveling back from studying

134

abroad, she expected Caleb to be overjoyed at her return. Instead, Jasmine said, "Even when I was flying back he didn't text or call me until like three o'clock in the morning (after I was back)." Her expectation and his lack of response caused negative impact on their relationships. Additionally, another example by Patricia and Devon represented the expectation desired by one and the lack of fulfillment by the other. They met overseas when Devon went on a church mission trip in high school. They continued to manage their relationship from afar and Devon was excited at the possibility of reuniting face-to-face for college. Patricia was in the process of choosing universities and elected not to apply to the university he was attending. His expectation was that his college would be her primary choice, if she loved him, especially since they were now engaged. As Patricia, articulated, "He wanted me to come to [his college]. My parents wanted me to attend a prestigious university." She did not apply to his [college]; instead, she decided to attend a school [on the other side of the United States]. He firmly believed that his expectation should not even be in question; however, Patricia did not follow through with Devon's desire generating further disruption.

The second subtheme, *intrusion,* represented situations where relational partners violated the other partners' personal possessions or privacy. Often times participants described assumptions about common relational practices, or relational standards, such as telling the truth, respecting property or possessions, and appropriate nonverbal communication. These were observed as violations because no relational standard had been discussed; however, the implicit understanding inherent to romantic relationships

135

from one partner's perspective, had been violated. In many instances, an *intrusion* that allowed for invasion of personal belongings, such as cell phones and Facebook went against common relational practices. For instance, Chelsea and Jaime spoke about stress from a previous relational partner. Chelsea "felt like he had something to hide." Playing off this suspicion she "went through his phone" in search of an alias called Edward. She had heard about all his friends but never Edward. When he came over one night, he fell asleep and she snooped through his cell phone. She said, "I started going through his text messages and learned Edward was his alias for his previous girlfriend." She angrily woke him up and spoke about her encroachment of his privacy but justified her behavior to better their relationship. Her actions represent an intrusion into his personal belongings and space while he slept.

Another instance resembles these circumstances when Mary Ann crept on her partner's, Max's, cell phone and Facebook page. Mary Ann did not like Max's previous girlfriend because she had previously spoke poorly of Mary Ann. She also had the suspicion that Max was still communicating with his previous girlfriend, something that Mary Ann had already stated she did not want him doing; nonetheless, she was not convinced. She too crept on her partner's cellphone while he was sleeping. She then said, "I immediately woke him up from his slumber and admitted that I shouldn't have invaded his privacy like that." Although, Mary Ann admitted, "I did some digging and I probably shouldn't have, but I'm glad I did. I feel I had the right to know the truth." She intruded into his privacy and violated the standards of their relationship for her own curiosity and interests.

The third and last subtheme, *rules or norms,* under *unfulfilled relational*

standards refers to set standards embedded by both relational partners. Partners

discussed relational *rules* or *norms* that existed in their relationships identifying

acceptable behavior and communications. Alisha spoke about her relational norms with

George. They talked about their origin story as a couple and when they met that she had

recently broken up with another guy and most likely was not ready to initiate another

relationship so quickly. Nonetheless, they had expressed interest and expected that each

would be honest with each other (as a relational rule). As she stated, "I was under the

impression we were going to be honest with each other. If we were going to see other

people." Alisha quickly realized that this was an implicit assumption by her, not an

explicit *norm*, for their relationship. A norm she took for granted most likely in previous

relationships. George ended up kissing another woman and did not disclose this instance

to Alisha. Relational norms and rules must be established and then also upheld to prevent

interference. As demonstrated when dealing with household rules, David and Nola talked

about how to appropriately respect Nola's dog ownership. The previous established

norm or rule was particularly prudent since she was training to become a veterinarian and

understood the risks associated with deficient pet ownership. Nola said, "Occasionally

I'll come home and see Mendal [her dog] off lease and with no supervision." The

insufficiency to complete her request displayed to Nola a lack of disrespect for her. This

behavior violated the standards set forth to protect her dog Mendal as well as to allow

David to supervise him. Communication and previous situations assisted to establish

procedures for operating as an interdependent couple and violations of those go against

137

their approved course of actions.

Time management. The fifth and final individual interference theme, *time management*, referred to instances where partners influenced their coordination of activities following changes in their circumstances. This theme encompassed two subthemes, *goals* and *plans.*

The first subtheme, *goals,* represented disruptions that occurred between partners when one partner believed he or she was not being prioritized over school, employment, organizations, or activities. Relationship interdependence requires partners to influence activities; and when the activities were believed to require more time, energy, and enthusiasm than the relationship, this subsequently followed with annoyance and often disappointment.

For Joel, videogaming was his priority. As he stated,

I find my friends and we become a team and we had a huge chance to win the prize. But we need to practice a lot. That happens during spring break. I drive to school and pick up my girlfriend but after I have to drive her back. She's kind of missing me and wants me to spend more time with her, but the tournament is really close and my teammates don't have too much time to practice. This is our only free time and it's close to the final. When I went back I lose contact with my girlfriend for a few days. She is mad, angry, upset about this. After the tournament I called her and she's still pretty upset and is kind of disappointed. She asks, "Why are games so important to me?"

138

The negotiation about balance that satisfied both partners paralyzes Joel because he demonstrates that his videogaming is a higher priority to him than to his girlfriend. Their individual and relational goals are not synched and therefore produce interference to each other. This same exemplar can be applied to academics, work, and organizations. One relational partner felt undervalued as a priority. Relational partners determine the relational goal priority by the quantity and quality time given over other activities.

The second subtheme, *plans,* indicated changes in activities based on the other partner or their relationship schedules, routines, or plans. This was as simple as scheduling when Amy expressed, "We had different hours to do things, different class schedules. He didn't have 8-4 or 8-3. Whatever I had in high school so it didn't line up," or Glen, "There would be something when she would hang out with friends and I would hang out with friends and we would want to talk to the other one. That would cause arguments." The coordination of two schedules was exacerbated by varying circumstances when the other partner had to accommodate in order to connect. This was reoccurring in day-to-day activities as well as special events.

As expressed when Monica was planning to be the maid of honor for her best friend, she could not decide whether to invite her current boyfriend when her previous boyfriend would be the best man. Monica was faced with the decision about whether to include her current boyfriend in her plans. Indecision included whether she was attending, her current boyfriend should attend, or her previous boyfriend would attend. The day before the wedding Monica said her current boyfriend, Michael, decided to express his feelings on her indecisiveness about the wedding and his attendance. He told

her, "You don't go or I go with you." He wanted to be included in her plans to attend the wedding as the bride's maid's date. However, with the complications of dealing with mixed personalities and potential conflict from her previous boyfriend, she could not decide whether to have a date and potential conflict. After further discussion, Monica called Michael and told him that he could not go with her to the wedding. The ebb and flow of interdependence from their partners produced interference on both less and more significant events.

Partner Facilitation (RQ3B)

RQ3B examined the themes of facilitation from partners that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. *Partner facilitation* occurs when partners interrupt in ways that assist or support individuals to accomplish everyday functions or relationship norms (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Growing interdependence within a relationship can also facilitate and extend the goals and desired outcomes individuals possess, creating the potential for outcomes that may not have been achieved to the same degree without the relationship. Infusing the two people's actions, individuals rewrite behavioral scripts to incorporate partners into their lives. Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and corresponding nine subthemes emerged within the individual stories (see Table 21). I provide exemplars for each theme and subtheme in alphabetical order, utilizing participants' language, to understand how these manifest in stories about stressful experiences.

Affect. The first individual facilitation theme, *affect*, appeared as emotions or

feelings prompting desirable or positive influence from their partners. The *affect* experienced by the relational partner influenced the overall tenor of the relationship assisting in the betterment of the partner and/or relationship. This theme encompassed three subthemes, *empathy, expressions of affection,* and *support.*

The first subtheme, *empathy*, resembled feelings of sympathy and behaviors reflecting perspective taking from their relational partner. For instance, Lane expressed empathy as a means to assist her partner, Andrew. As Andrew waited for recommendation letters for law school, he grew impatient with his letter writers and would frequently vent. Lane would utter, "I'm sorry" and then Andrew would respond accordingly with "Thank you for listening. I just needed to vent." Lane then acknowledged that she was only providing emotional support for, "Of course, vent about it but realize…I can't do anything" about the recommendation letter writers. Lane's story evidenced her empathy with Andrew's situation. In another example of the subtheme, *empathy,* Roger spoke about comforting Ryessia when her parents were moving from her familial home and further away from her. Roger words perfectly articulated empathy. "We've been able to be there for each other and be able to see what the other person is seeing." The reciprocal nature of their relational experiences, due to both their parents moving within a year, elevated their ability to relate to each other and provide empathic feelings. Perspective-taking by partners accompanied with emotional comfort assisted partners and their ability to complete daily activities where another listens and then also shares in the experiences. Without the ability to communicate and then receive empathy many participants would have not had the opportunity to share their frustrations; thereby,

the partner enabled facilitation through their listening and comfort.

The second subtheme, *expressions of affection*, resembled facilitation as acts of endearment expressed as tangible gifts, money, experiences, or verbalizations of appreciation and fondness. Justin and LaRae both individually spoke about facilitation in their relationship as *expressions of affection* in the form of tangible gifts and experiences. Their stressful experience revolved around a gift to LaRae from Justin to see a Maroon Five concert in a nearby city. While traveling to the concert they assisted each other to improve their goal of attending the concert and enjoying the experience. LaRae articulated that, "He bought tickets for the Maroon Five, my favorite band, so he was going to take me." They exchanged *expressions of affection* throughout their trip as Justin went onto articulate in his story. "The plan was she was going to drive because she has a lot bigger car than I do. She couldn't get her card to work at the gas station so I paid for the gas." The reciprocation of *expressions of affections* did not occur to LaRae's liking at the time because she wanted to have immediate reciprocation but her debit card would not work. Nonetheless, both relational partners enacted behaviors to further their goals in order to accomplish the task of attending the concert. Additionally, to equalize their relationship *expressions of affection* LaRae concluded her story but saying that as a reimbursement for the gas, "He made me pay for a lunch that we had one time." This subtheme emphasized positive associations with the stressor (assisting her with finances on her card); nevertheless, without the assistance from her boyfriend, LaRae would not have attended the concert either at the onset (the purchase of tickets), paid for financial expenses, or made it home (since he drove). His expressions of affection afforded the

142

ability to overcome the minor stressors that arose throughout their trip to Maroon Five. Other stories also included tangible gifts as a common facilitation act such as flowers to express affect or claddagh rings to adorn themselves showing public loyalty, love and affection; these behaviors were especially common for male partners.

The verbalization of appreciation and fondness also encompassed *expressions of affection*. Sarah spoke about her relationship with Alexander and stress that ensued from a potential romantic partner to whom she did not initiate or reciprocate any feelings. This other rival pursued Sarah and told her that he loved her. Nonetheless, this did not prevent or hinder her behavior with her current partner and love. She said, "Alex and my relationship was escalating. We had said 'I love you' for the first time. Alexander also spoke about that same occurrence in his story; "Within a week of this happening [incidence with a potential rival and now former friend of Alex] she told me she loved me so we were in good spot." Their verbal fondness further affirmed the security and stability of their relationship even amongst external distractions.

The third subtheme, *support,* resembled facilitation as fulfilling a role whether offering advice or expertise, defending against others, giving physical assistance, or encouraging their partners. Although *empathy* can be similar to support, that subtheme reflected emotional exchanges as the source and outcome, and under *support* this reflects a variety of sources that can result in an emotional response but does not originate from one.

Support provided positive affect for their partner and subsequently their relationships. For instance with offering advice, Amy articulated that she felt supported

143

by Glen when choosing colleges. "He was very supportive that I should go with what fit me best academically" rather than solely choose his college because he was there. The ability to extend advice that sought her best interests displayed support through facilitation. In another story, *support* was reflected in defending another partners' honor. Mary Anne said that her boyfriend, Max, "Told his [previous partner] that she didn't have the right to say things about me." Mary Anne felt supported by her partner and his standing up to someone he previously cared about.

Often times, external distractions can easily influence internal relational workings. Kyle spoke about his partner's parental divorce impacting her daily. Her father committed infidelity and continued to live at home before the divorce was final. This greatly affected Eliza and her family. Eliza became the support figure for her mother and in turn Kyle become the support figure for Eliza. As he said, "Trying to cheer her up during that period of time was extremely difficult;" nonetheless, he attempted to aid Eliza throughout her familial distress. Additionally, Chelsea supported Jaime at the beginning of their relationship when, "He had an accident so I was there to care for him and he realized that he should make me his girlfriend." She provided positive *affect* in the form of support to care for him and set aside her own needs during his recovery.

Agreeableness. The second theme, *agreeableness*, referred to instances where partners demonstrated willingness to suspend their individual interests for the good of the other. This theme encompassed four subthemes: *accommodation, collaboration, decision-making,* and *reconciliation.*

144

The first subtheme, *accommodation*, is where persons forego their own desires and yield to another's concerns or points of view. Facilitation of *accommodation* was evidenced in personified privacy and personal space. As Wendy articulated about this interaction after numerous big fights with her boyfriend, Phillip, "He said he needed a day to himself." The interdependence established in relationships suffocated or smothered individuals; thereby, several individuals spoke of space allocated to their partners to enable them to clear their heads and resolve pending questions or doubts. For instance, Ishmael talked about giving Sarah space after she had initiated their breakup when she felt overwhelmed. Rather than inundate her with questions and his own feelings, he stepped away and allowed her the opportunity for reflection. As Ishmael stated,

> I had the mindset that I was going to let her be so she could figure out
>
> what she wanted to do. I wasn't going to irritate her or anything or going
>
> to be all over her or suffocate her. I didn't initiate any conversations with
>
> her or anything. I told her if she needed anything I'd be there. I didn't
>
> contact her.

The ability to be agreeable sometimes meant expressing low concern for self and high concern for the partner – enabling their partner's desires to be met over their own.

The second subtheme, *collaboration,* referred to participants cooperatively working towards a mutual agreement beneficial to both partners and their relationship. Typically couples talked about coming together to discuss and work toward a common

145

goal. For instance, Wendy and Phillip had been experiencing constant conflict as they underwent their struggles of maintaining a long-distance relationship while beginning their first year of college. As a way to end their interference and establish facilitation they decided to collaborate to end the fighting, especially when they did have the opportunity see and enjoy each other's company. Wendy said, "We made a pact to not bring up anything we were arguing about." Similarly, Phillip articulated, "We reached this mutual agreement." Wendy expressed her feelings about their new pact, "It really helped." The ability to set aside their issues and appreciate their time together positively influenced their interaction together.

Additionally, Erik and Nadia both spoke about *collaboration* in their individual stories. Nadia worked at a nearby retail store and Erik would drive her to and from work because he did not want her to have to walk from her car late at night on campus; however, her employer would often have the last minute changes to her time schedule. This in turn negatively influenced Erik's schedule. As a way to facilitate a better arrangement Erik came up with a plan while telling his story. He said, "I was thinking about moving out my car and then she can park there and I can park on the street…Just a little bit of a fixer thing we have to do." During his story, Erik was able to resolve the impending issues negatively influencing both of them. The ability to resolve conflictive issues evidenced collaboration benefitting both partners.

The third subtheme, *decision-making,* was reflected when partners choose to include or consider their partner in the process while maintaining authority to make the final decision. This differs from the subtheme, *collaboration,* because that involves both

146

partners' interests working together towards a mutually cooperative outcome. Melanie and Charles' story showed how he was considering her involvement in his future. For years, Charles had dreamed and sought after a military career in a highly specialized and dangerous field. He had recently met Melanie and they enjoyed their relationship; however, Melanie was uncertain about whether she was ready for a military lifestyle and the impending danger associated with Charles' career choice. Charles, still hesitant about this relationship and confident about this career, said he would delay decision-making pending their relationship future. He said, "I told her I would look at other options for her." The ability to be open to other options allowed Melanie to be involved in the *decision-making* process though ultimately left the decision up to Charles. This couple's experience through the decision-making process may have prevented partner interference and potential relationship dissolution.

Similarly, Ingrid included Robert in her *decision-making* process about their relationship. Ingrid was unhappy over their summer separation; she described her dissatisfaction with their mundane and infrequent communications; nonetheless, she was not ready to terminate the relationship. After talking it over with Robert, she said, "I decided to wait until we got back to school to see if it was better when we were together." She delayed her *decision-making* and waited to make her choice and ultimately did decide that their relationship was strained due to distance and satisfactory when they returned to frequent face-to-face interaction. While *decision-making* involved both partners, one partner ultimately made the determination; involvement in the *decision-making* process altered the influence on their relational present and future.

147

The fourth subtheme, *reconciliation*, reflected partners' efforts to make amends for their previous actions or choices through apologies and offering forgiveness. These expressions of regret and forgiveness were a means to move beyond the past and/or sought renewal of the relationship. In general, apologizing and seeking forgiveness was a common facilitation tactic within many relationships, especially after a violation to relational standards. John spoke about their fight when he concealed pertinent information from his girlfriend about her best friend, "I apologized…we established some things in that conversation." She offered forgiveness as a specific gesture to move their relationship forward. However, as a next step in their overarching relationship step they also established new rules and norms for their relationship moving forward.

Additionally, Sarah spoke about her decision to breakup with Ishmael; she was in the process of beginning college, figuring out her major, joining a sorority, and adjusting to her new life. Sarah wondered whether she should dissolve her relationship with Ishmael. She broke up with him. As a result, she said, "I went home bawling to my Mom. She asked if this is what I want. Obviously, it wasn't. I called him and said I was sorry. I was stupid. I didn't mean to do that. We got back together." Sarah offered up an apology and attempted to reconcile their differences in hopes of renewing their relationship; Ishmael was also agreeable and took Sarah back. These couples' participation in *reconciliation* enabled them to salvage a relationship that may have otherwise terminated.

Conversations. The third individual facilitation theme, *conversation*, referred to instances where partners elected to talk things over with their partner or where they

decided to keep concerns to themselves. This theme encompassed two subthemes,

concealing and *heart-to-hearts.*

The first subtheme, *concealing,* addressed partners' efforts to suppress

information as a means to assist or prevent interference. For instance, Eliza spoke about

her partner's parental divorce impacting her daily. Her father committed infidelity and

continued to live at home before the divorce was final. The familial stress greatly

affected Eliza and her family and she attempted to conceal these stressors from her

partner, Kyle. She said, "I didn't want to tell him a lot about it." She did not want their

relationship substantially influenced by external events outside their dyad.

Similarly, Jaime decided to conceal information from his girlfriend, Chelsea. He

altered the name of his previous girlfriend on his phone from Ashley to Edward. He

justified his concealment as a means to assist their relationship and prevent

unpleasantness with Chelsea. Jaime said, "After awhile [breaking up with his previous

girlfriend, Ashley] she started to text me. I didn't want Chelsea to get upset so I changed

the name on my phone." The concealment was intended to assist although it should be

noted that both partners did not view this as a positive facilitation.

The second subtheme, *heart-to-heart,* represented both partners jointly

communicating over a substantive subject or exchange of their feelings in regards to their

relationship. These were dubbed by participants as "talking it out," "we'd talk," "we

were talking about it," "we talked it out," "willing to talk," "we met and were king of

talking through it," and "we talked to each other and we both cried." The intimate

conversations enabled partners to address pending problems and feelings. Lane and

Andrew's story shows the result of a *heart-to-heart.* Andrew had been applying to law schools and stressed about his dilatory recommendation writers. Lane would listen patiently everyday while Andrew began to take out his frustration on her. Lane then decided to speak up and address the situation with Andrew. Lane articulated, "Of course, vent about it but realize…I can't do anything about it. I want you to be able to talk about anything but be nice to me…I should always say something because he'll realize I'm upset about things." Engaging in a *heart-to-heart* communication process enabled Lane and Andrew to confront their relational issues directly and openly. The ability to be upfront and share her concern with Andrew through a *heart-to-heart* conversation altered their interpersonal communication thereafter.

Time management. The fourth and last individual facilitation theme, *time management*, referred to instances where partners influenced coordination of their activities. Relationship interdependence often requires partners to alter relationship schedules, routines, or plans to assist their partner or relationship. Partners described making time in their schedules and planning visitations. For instance, the priority was the relationship and Erica and John managed their time so that they could interact with one another. Erica had only one week before departing to study abroad and they had been separated all summer. When Erica returned to school, she was unable to see John due to sorority recruitment rules; thus, there time together was even more strained. Nonetheless, as Erica said, "The last week I was in [college town] we went out to McDonalds or DQ or any place that was open late after midnight because that was the only time we had." Their ability to see each other was hindered but they assisted each other and

150

accommodated the inflexibility of regulations imposed upon them. Likewise, many

participants in their stories described their time together as reinforcing their commitment

towards the relationship. As Han spoke he summarized many others' feelings while

spending time with their partner through facilitative acts, "When we saw each other, it

was golden, we were perfect." The ability to include and alter changes was not perceived

as an impediment but rather an asset.

This concludes the examination of relational turbulence mechanisms,

relational uncertainty and partner interdependence in individual stories. In this

next section, I explore the qualitative results that emerged in the joint stories

examining relational uncertainty and partner interdependence.

Relational Uncertainty in Joint Stories

Numerous qualitative studies (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; LeFebvre, 2011;

LeFebvre & Damron, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber &

Solomon, 2008) have assessed relational turbulence through communicative exchanges

using analysis for singular persons on qualitative relational perspectives. Although much

of the research on the RTM assesses individuals' perceptions, evaluating how partners

together communicate their perceptions of relational turbulence is important as well (e.g.,

Knobloch, Miller, Bond, et al., 2007; Solomon & Theiss, 2011).

These results provided a triangulation of previous scholarship on individual

relational uncertainty expressions and applied them to joint relational uncertainty

expressions (see Table 19). Relational uncertainty expressions in joint narratives

reinforced the three content issues (desire, evaluation, and goals) that arise in self and

151

partner uncertainty and four content issues that arise in relationship uncertainty (behavioral norms, mutuality, definition, and future). Two additional subthemes, *perceived network involvement and retrospection,* arose in individual stories that also emerged in joint stories. It should be noted that there are fewer examples of uncertainty overall in the joint stories—since there are only half of the number of the individual stories ($N = 94$) versus joint stories ($N = 47$). Thus, all subthemes are included even those with less exemplars showcased. The next section discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged in joint stories.

Self Uncertainty (RQ$_{4A}$)

RQ$_{4A}$ examined the themes of self uncertainty that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Previously self uncertainty included questions people had about desire, evaluation, and goals. *Desire, evaluation*, and *goals* all emerged within joint stories as well as *perceived network involvement* (e.g., Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006). Utilizing participants' language, I provide exemplars below to illustrate how these themes manifest in joint stories about stressful experiences.

Desire. This first subtheme, *desire*, centers on one partner's feelings and commitment for the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) in the joint stories. Self uncertainty as desire appeared less prominently in joint stories. For instance, in Melanie and Charles' story, Charles individually separated himself and said his "uncertainty didn't really warrant any commitment on my part." Although Melanie was confident about their future and could picture it clearly; his lack of certainty concerned their relationship, for her and him. More specifically toward self uncertainty, Charles

152

responded that he knew she was confident but his uncertainty and feelings about the future did not permit him to solidify their future. Likewise, in Morgan and John's story, John separately expressed doubt. John knew, "There's still a problem but I still don't know what to do." He felt as if there were still lingering questions in his mind that caused hesitation to commit further. These two expressions from joint stories indicated self uncertainty regarding how to navigate the relationship.

Evaluation. The second subtheme, *evaluation,* examines one storyteller's value or definition of their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) in joint stories. Again in order to exemplify self uncertainty one partner in the joint story expressed uneasiness. In Chelsea and Jaime's story, Chelsea expressed concern about Jaime's concealment of his friend.

> "It started to get to me. Well, he's never mentioned this friend. It's kind of weird 'cause he usually mentions all his friends to me. So that's when I started looking into it. That's when I starting having my guard up and having trust issues."

Because of Jaime's behaviors, Chelsea began to question whether she should be involved with Jaime and how she viewed the relationship. This was salient because she had thought he had finalized and moved on from his previous relationship; however, Chelsea went on to find out that he concealed his communication resulting in further questions about her involvement with Jaime. Chelsea expressed her feelings, "That's when I became uneasy." Evaluating her feelings about his actions caused questions about whether she should be involved with her partner at all. This subtheme reflected self-doubt as a result of their partners' communication or behaviors.

153

Goals. The third and least prominent self uncertainty subtheme, *goals,* examines storytellers' questions surrounding the future of their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Goals were not a common concern probably because they are very future oriented and if a relationship is unable to manage their present uncertainty then they are unlikely to initiate communication about the future. Because this subtheme was a less prominent subtheme, it was echoed less by participants. Nevertheless, everything salient to participants in their characterization of uncertainty is represented (even those with few exemplars). Having said that, there are two likely reasons for the lower occurrence of this theme. First, the retrospective nature of storytelling may have influenced as well as second, the transitional event (e.g., stressor) expressed as a past or present event almost automatically reduces the occurrence of future orientation in the stories (or goals for the relational progression).

Nonetheless, Amy and Glen's story did discuss how Amy did not include Glen in her long-term plans. Amy said, "When I had to pick colleges it was stressful, at least for me, cause I didn't know how much to consider you in that decision-making process." Although this subtheme is less visible within this sample, previous RTM has demonstrated *goals* as a notable issue sparking ambiguity for individuals (see Knobloch, 2007).

Perceived network involvement. The last subtheme, *perceived network involvement,* emerged in relation to self-certainty similar to individual self uncertainty. Previously, Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) examined perceived network involvement as a mechanism influencing relational turbulence. Specifically, perceived

154

network involvement appraisals either helped or hindered their partner and/or relationship. Their assumption emerged as couples spoke about how their networks influenced their own relationship introducing self uncertainty in joint stories. The influence exhibited especially from parents created doubt about which actions to take. For instance in Samantha and Han's story, Samantha did not have full control over her choices because she was dependent on her parents' finances for college. Samantha said, "I was driven because of fear of, you know, what my parents would say because they pay for my school and from the very beginning I knew they would not agree with [attending that college]." Therefore, Samantha experienced uncertainty about what she should do to maintain her relationship when her parents and her boyfriend pulled her in different directions as to which college to attend. The perceived involvement from the social network penetrated individuals instilling personal doubts about their feelings and actions toward their romantic relationships.

Partner Uncertainty (RQ4B)

RQ4B examined the themes of partner uncertainty that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Previously partner uncertainty included questions people had about desire, evaluation, and goals and have analogous conceptualizations to self uncertainty. *Desire and evaluation* emerged within joint narratives; however, goals did not surface in joint stories. I provide exemplars, utilizing participants' language, to understand how these manifest in joint stories about stressful experiences.

Desire. This first subtheme, *desire*, centers on one of the storyteller's thoughts

155

about their partners' feelings and commitment for the relationship (Knobloch &

Solomon, 1999). These expressions were oriented as one partner expressed doubts about

other partner in first- and second-person. In Morgan and John's joint story, Morgan

expressed her partner uncertainty.

> I was really unsure about whether you wanted to hangout at all. And I
>
> was frustrated with him because for whatever reason. I don't know. I
>
> really wanted him to come with me to my friend's tailgate but I was like
>
> I'm going to go and I was hoping you'd want to go but it wasn't like
>
> that…I don't know. I wanted it to be, like, an obvious thing, like maybe
>
> we should sit together. I don't know…Doesn't he even want to meet up
>
> with me?

Morgan spoke from first-person about her partner uncertainty. She perceived

confusing actions that did not provide comfort for her about his feelings and

commitment to the relationship.

Alternatively, Leticia and Xavier's story had Xavier express how Leticia

experienced partner uncertainty from his actions and statement. He said, "After

the first couple of weeks, you [Leticia] noticed I wasn't as into the relationship

as you thought I could have been." The portrayal of partner uncertainty varied

evidencing expressions from the partner experiencing uncertainty as well as the

partner causing the uncertainty.

Evaluation. The second and most prominent partner uncertainty subtheme,

evaluation, examines one storyteller's value or definition of their relationship (Knobloch

& Solomon, 1999) in joint stories. In these stories, one storyteller spoke about the involvement or lack of interest from their partner. As Jasmine articulated to Caleb, "It's hard to be understanding when someone doesn't tell you what's going on." Similarly, Chelsea expressed to Jaime in their story, "It made me feel like he had something to hide." The importance of their relationships was called into question when their partners did not show interest in their communications.

Relationship Uncertainty (RQ4C)

RQ4C examined the themes of relationship uncertainty that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. According to Knobloch and Solomon (1999) relationship uncertainty includes four constructs: behavioral norms, mutuality, definition and future. The subthemes, *behavioral norms, mutuality,* and *future* (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) emerged as well as new subthemes, *retrospection* and *perceived network involvement*, within joint narratives. *Definition* did not emerge in joint stories. In comparison to self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty was a more often expressed theme within their joint stories.

Behavioral norms. The first relationship uncertainty subtheme, *behavioral norms*, emphasized acceptable and unacceptable actions, rules, or boundaries within a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) in joint stories. In these instances, behavioral norms focused on creating new acceptable actions in the relationship. Amy and Glen talked how their face-to-face communication was their norm and transitioning to a long-distance relationship altered their behaviors causing uncertainty. In their joint story, Amy said, "We couldn't talk about every aspect of our day kind of like we could when we saw

157

each other every day." This altered how they communicated and generated uncertainty until they could reestablish a new behavioral norm. The discrepancy between partners early in their relationships created uncertainty about each partner's norms and until that was established often one partner felt a lack of mutuality. It appears that behavioral norms and mutuality were interconnected.

Mutuality. The second and least emerging relational uncertainty subtheme, *mutuality*, assessed the reciprocity of feelings within the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) in joint stories. This only occurred in three instances expressing how relational partners did not compensate equally in terms of demonstrating their feelings. Two joint stories has several statements, "I was more into it than you were." and "I cut everybody off when I first met him and it seemed like he wasn't doing the same for me." One partner expected more from their partner based on their own actions.

Additionally, Leticia and Xavier spoke about differences in their individual perceptions of mutuality into their relationship. In particular Leticia spoke about gift giving during holidays,

> I don't know…When I first got into a relationship with him [Xavier], I was like stupid. I spent a lot of money on him. I would go shopping and buy him $60 jackets and $30 t-shirts I knew he would like. I bought him a very expensive Christmas present. Like, nothing was ever in return. Not like that was wrong cause I understand some people are different…I felt like he didn't care about me as much. To go out of my way to buy you [Xavier] a Christmas present and not get anything in return to me felt a little weird.

158

Leticia felt as if gifts symbolized her affection and interest in Xavier, whereas he did not reciprocate these feelings through gift-giving gestures.

Future. The third and most often mentioned subtheme, *future,* focused on the long-term outcomes of the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) in joint stories. These young adult couples faced uncertainty as to whether their relationship would stand the test of time. Angelic and Wes spoke directly about the future. "(The) uncertainty of where we're going right now [the present]." Their uncertainty about the future was still pending; the stressor was ongoing in most of the participants' relationships. Another couple Jillian and Conrad said, "It was tough not to know what the future held for us." Tentative about the stressful event, this caused the present to be all that was certain. Melanie and Charles talked about the idea of disappointment considering that their relationship may not always exist. Charles spoke about his feelings about the future.

> We talked about how you kind of just don't want to set yourself up for disappointment. That whole deal. To commit to something and have it, to have it taken away. To get too excited about something and not have it work out.

If the future is uncertain for Melanie and Charles, they did not want to plan for long-term relational outcomes and experience negative individual repercussions. They wanted to solidify their commitment for each other and used that to manage their uncertainty. Not all couples faced uncertainty head on as when Han spoke, "How am I going to expect that we're going to get married in 15

159

years or ten years or four years or something?" The relationship uncertainty

suggested anything other than the present was difficult to project.

        Retrospection. The fourth subtheme, *retrospection*, focused on past events

influencing present and future orientations. Although much less prominent, this

subtheme may have arisen due to the nature of retrospective stories and sense-making. It

should be noted that there are fewer examples of uncertainty in the joint stories;

nonetheless, all subthemes are included even those with less exemplars showcased.

Although a less prominent subtheme (i.e., it was not echoed by many respondents),

everything salient to participants in their characterization of uncertainty is represented.

This retrospection subtheme focused on attributing the past to present and future

uncertainties. Even though it did not occur frequently, two couples spoke about past

events causing perpetual problems with "trust issues that linger around" and breakup

being caused by uncertainties from parents (or possibility other things). Telling stories

about past events bought to the surface remaining uncertainties. Partners attempted to

attribute present uncertainties to past events as a rationale for why these events happened.

        Perceived network involvement. The last and fifth subtheme, *perceived network*

involvement, emerged in exhibiting relational uncertainty influenced by network

appraisals hindering relationships. One partner felt negative or non-existent network

appraisals thus creating uncertainty about their relationship. In Laura and Adam's story,

Adam wanted Laura to introduce him to her parents as a gesture demonstrating their

commitment. The lack of introduction to her parents, who were central in her network

caused him to be worried. As such Adam articulated, "I really get nervous and uncertain

about our relationship because you never let your parents know about my existence."
Adam knew to become an active member and involved in the network he would have to meet other family members and the absence of this interaction caused questions about their relationship stability and his importance to her. Bree and Chen's joint story exemplifies the influence networks have on relationship security. Chen was pursuing a career as a police officer and according to Bree, as echoed by her family; this was a disreputable choice and devalued. Chen spoke to this,

> So in their eyes they won't see a police officer as prestigious as they are
>
> used to in terms of their family background and what everyone does in
>
> the family. It's a very stressful situation for me. Am I ever going to be
>
> good enough for her family?

The perceived network involvement affected relational partners causing them to question and possibility erode into relationship uncertainties.

Partner Interdependence in Joint Stories

Partner interdependence involves expressions of interference and facilitation in joint narratives. Interdependence appears in two forms: (1) interference referring to disrupting or hindering and (2) facilitation as assisting or helping their relational partner. Six themes (e.g., *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards, time management,* and *withholding*) and thirteen subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner interference (RQ_{5A}). Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and seven subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner facilitation (RQ_{5B}).

161

The next section discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged in joint stories for interference and facilitation (see Table 20).

Partner Interference (RQ5A)

RQ5A examined the interference from partners themes that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Six themes (e.g., *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards, time management,* and *withholding*) and thirteen subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner interference.

Affect. The first theme, *affect,* appeared as emotions or feelings prompting undesirable arousal from their partners. The *affect* experienced by the relational partner influenced the overall tenor of the relationship similar to that in individual stories. This overarching theme encompassed the same two subthemes, *prompting negative emotions* and *affection toward/from others.*

The first subtheme, *prompting negative emotions*, represented the promotion of anxiety or stressful feelings from their partners and the subsequent reaction of negative emotions on their part. For instance, Morgan and John experienced interference with their weekend plans. They planned to attend a football game near her parents' home and her father suggested that they bring friends. This turned into conflict quickly as Morgan felt John spent time with his friends rather than with her. Morgan said, "He [John] noticed the tension building at the tailgate." This tension escalated and Morgan sulked when interacting with John. She felt she did not get invited to sit with him. Her negative mood prompted John to feel negatively about his actions and the remainder of the

162

weekend. Additionally, anxiety by Roberto prompted emotion for Ashley. This couple

spoke about meeting her parents for the first time. During the initial stages of preparing

to meet them, Roberto expressed his nervousness, which then Ashley said, "I wasn't

stressed at first. He made me stressed." Lastly, Lane and Andrew articulated the

prompting of negative emotion to each other from Andrew's frustration with law school

recommendation letters. He constantly ranted about the delay from his reference letter

writers and soon directed his frustrations onto Lane. His behaviors prompted negative

emotions from her as well as within their relationship interaction. The interference was

exhibited by and through the exchange of emotions prompting negativity from a variety

of feelings (angry, sadness, or anxiety in the exemplars shown).

The second subtheme, *affection toward/from others*, represented the interference

evoked by attention or endearment from a potential previous or future rival romantic

partner. *Affection toward/from others* exemplified jealousy as partners expressed or

showed affection to others outside their dyad. Rachel and Connor, as in their individual

stories, spoke about her affection towards another potential romantic relationship partner

that influenced negative affect from Connor. While both were in their military boot

camp, Rachel said, "She was able to leave base and hung out with a couple of guys."

This notion of affection towards another hurt Connor and their relationship, especially

because he was more committed than Rachel. This subtheme, *affection toward/from

others,* also arose for Leticia and Xavier when "He was still talking to his ex." When he

did, this interference caused Leticia to not trust that his intentions were sincere, and she

questioned the stability of their relationship. The negative *affect* prompted undesirable

163

arousal from their partners when they offered or received affection from others.

Physical proximity. The second theme, *physical proximity*, expressed disruption caused by geographical distance from their partner or lack of face-to-face interaction. This overarching theme encompassed the two similar subthemes to those in individual stories, *absence* and *mediated communication,* to individual stories and one new subtheme, *neglect.*

The first subtheme, *absence,* addressed the physical absenteeism of their partner. Being unable to directly interact with their partner face-to-face disrupted their schedules due to the integration and interdependence already formulated. As Wendy and Phillip articulated in their joint story, "We were separated from each other. We had been in this place where we had never been before, well you had been there before [going to college a year before him]. Our relationship had never been there." The inability to navigate the separate and subsequent independence apart forced new patterns and pushed the relationship in unfamiliar ways. This paralleled Amy and Glen's experience talking about Glen attending college the year before Amy (as she completed high school). They spoke about their experience. "Hard to communicate being so far away. It was a big shift…we couldn't talk about every aspect of our day like we could when we could see ach other everyday…miss out on the other person's life a little bit." Separateness caused interference in first having to set time apart to communicate via distance as well as disrupting their previously established routines to which they were accustomed in their relationship.

The second subtheme, *mediated communication,* addressed the communicative

adjustments relational partners had to undergo to interact with their partners while out of physical proximity with one another. Eve and Han expressed how mediated communication interfered in their daily routines, especially when the technological innovations were not functioning. They talked about their separation at different universities and their attempt to communicate. "It was to the point where we were trying to communicate by text message. It ended up with fighting constantly." They could not Skype. "She had to go out in the hallway to get somewhat good reception," and "Computers sucked here [at college] – all pixelated…mine cut out and then hers." The mediated communication should assist to make it easier to communicate, but instead it caused disruption in their ability to communicate.

The third and new subtheme, *neglect*, addressed disregard for their relational partners. The absence of physical proximity left several partners feeling abandoned in their relationships. For instance, with Even and Han, besides difficulties in the communication medium, Han "always had people [in] the room…[Eve] would get upset with me for not paying attention." The mediated communication disrupted their ability to communicate without the familiarity of face-to-face closeness. Additionally, Georgia expressed a similar *neglect* from Edward after visiting him for his birthday. Georgia had felt he was spending more time with his friends for the summer while home. She was working multiple jobs and attempted to maintain their relationship bond. She felt as if he was not reciprocating commitment toward the relationship and initiating any communication. Nonetheless, she went to see him for his birthday during her weekend off. Upon returning she said, "After I got back home after the trip to [his hometown] – it

went back to the way we were. He wasn't talking to me." The physical distance caused greater separation for several couples as out of sight also meant out of mind and caused interference in attempting to maintain a distance relationship while feeling neglected.

Relational de-escalation. The third theme, *relational de-escalation*, emerged as a decrease in intimacy either initiated by termination of the relationship or disputes between partners. Interference within joint partners saw this theme emerge with two similar subthemes to those expressed in individual partner interference, *breakup* and *conflict*.

The first subtheme, *breakup,* referred to relationship termination. Although, all the participants had reunited with their relational partners, the on-again/off-again disruption of the breakup caused distancing through emotional and behavioral changes. Laura and Adam talked about the interference when Laura broke-up with Adam. He said, "It was when you kicked me out, pushing me away from you." The physical removal and termination clearly impeded with his daily activities. This happened throughout many joint stories as they expressed their off-time between breaking up and renewing their relationship. Han articulated, "I brought up breaking up," and Eve went on to say, "Every other day he brought it up." The instability leading up to and the dissolution of the relationship caused disorder for both relational partners. They renewed their relationship after traversing the ultimate turbulence, *breakup*.

The second subtheme, *conflict,* stressed similar oscillations in intimacy as relational partners disturbed their routines through substantial or continual fighting. *Conflict* between couples impedes into their daily individual and relational routines, often

166

revolving around and leading up to the relationship breakup. As in Laura and Adam's story, "We had a big, huge, unbelievable fight." which led to the breakup previously discussed. In Wendy and Phillip's story their interference developed continuously as "a series of incidences" initially stemming from long distance separated by 45 minutes attending different schools. Nonetheless, this quickly escalated into multiple conflicts about emotional and physical intimacy as well as devotion to the relationship. The repetitive fighting plagued their every conversation interfering with personal and relational activities.

Unfulfilled relational standards. The fourth theme, *unfulfilled relational standards*, represented guidelines for romantic relationships that were not yet established in the relationship or had been violated by one partner. This theme encompassed two subthemes, *expectations* and *intrusion.*

The first subtheme, *expectations,* reflected assumptions about what relational partners should do if they were committed to relational success whether for episodic or global situations. With Georgia and Elvis, she expected Elvis to be available but he always seemed busy, even when she texted him and communicated that it was very important that she needed his support. Georgia said, "When I got into a huge fight with my best friend, Megan, Friday night, I told him I needed to talk to him about it…I don't think we [Georgia and Elvis] talked until Monday afternoon…He didn't call." The lack of courtesy shown for her concerns when requested demonstrated their assumptions about relational standards greatly differed. Similarly, Jasmine and Caleb expressed divergent expectations provoking interference when Caleb did not attempt to communicate with

167

Jasmine. She said, "Why didn't you send me a message for three days?" Upon her arrival back in the United States from studying aboard, Caleb did not attempt to communicate or express concern for her whereabouts. Jasmine went on to articulate that her familial expectations are that when you are person traveling people call to check on you, not the other way around. Caleb indicated that he did not know when she was returning and he "didn't ask when you [Jasmine] were coming in." Her expectations differed and distressed her, first when they did not talk and second when they did talk it was fighting about his lack of communication, concern, or excitement for her arrival.

The second subtheme, *intrusion,* represented situations where relational partners violated the other partners' personal possessions or privacy. These were observed as violations because there was no relational standard that allowed for invasion of personal belongings and privacy on cellular phones. The several instances paralleled the individual stories instances.

Chelsea and Jaime spoke about stress from a previous relational partner. Chelsea believed Jaime was concealing information, playing off this suspicion she went through his phone in search of the alias, Edward. She said during their joint story that "He came home and went to sleep and it was the perfect opportunity to check who is Edward [the alias for his unknown friend]." She then angrily woke him up and spoke about her encroachment of his privacy. Her actions represented an intrusion into his personal belongings and space while he slept.

Another instance resembles these circumstances as discussed in the individual partner interference stories when Mary Ann crept on her partner, Max's cell phone and

Facebook page. Max said, "I knew you didn't like her and didn't want me to be around her." She also had the suspicion that Max was still communicating with his previous girlfriend, something that Mary Ann had already stated she did not want him doing. She too crept on her partner's cellphone while he was sleeping. She "immediately woke him up" and Max said, "I didn't sleep the rest of the night." Mary Ann admitted that she intruded into his privacy and violated the standards of their relationship. Within their relationship, both partners could not communicate with anyone without worrying about violation of their privacy on their personal phones.

     Time management. The fifth theme, *time management*, referred to instances where partners influenced their coordination of activities caused disruption to preset plans and/or goals. Thus, this theme encompassed two subthemes, *goals* and *plans.*

     The first subtheme, *goals,* represented disruptions that occurred between partners when one partner believed he or she was not being prioritized over school, employment, organizations, or activities. Relationship interdependence required that partners influence activities, often leaving certain relational partners feeling less valued in comparison to other goals. These were similar to those articulated in individual partner interference expressions. However, sometimes the relationship goal superseded other goals, such as academics, and that came with repercussions. When Eve and Han were in high school Han "arranged classes to spend more time with her [Eve]. She said that included failing Spanish 4 which resulted in him getting kicked out of wrestling season for two weeks." Prioritizing one goal over another often interferes with completion of the lesser goal.

     The second subtheme, *plans,* indicated changes in activities based on the partner

169

or their relationship schedules, routines, or plans. In Erik and Nadia's story they discuss her employment causing scheduling issues for him because he drives her to work. As Nadia uttered, "When I'm doing regular selling they [work] let me off early and when I'm doing floor sets they let me off significantly later than I'm supposed to get off. And it causes problems with my relationship because he is my ride." Often times someone or both had to rearrange their schedule. In another instance Ingrid and Robert expressed, "There was a lot of times when she's doing something [at work] and I can't talk and then I'm doing something and she's not but I can't talk [at work]." The inability to communicate based on previous plans or obligations in each other's schedule took *time management* by both partners often causing partner interference.

Withholding. The seventh and new partner interference theme, *withholding*, addressed obstruction by retaining pertinent information or actively deceiving their partner. Thus, this theme encompassed two subthemes, *concealment* and *deception.*

The first subtheme, *concealment,* addressed instances where partners indirectly or directly withheld information. This was displayed indirectly as interference when Morgan discovered John had known information about her best friend and her partners' infidelity. John said, "I had heard shady stuff [about her friend's boyfriend] and I had not mentioned it." Because John chose not to disclose pertinent information to his partner Morgan later stated in their joint story, "His silence was his demise." When John did not disclose Morgan believed he either affirmed the actions or did not believe these were reprehensible actions. Alisha and George more directly expressed *concealment* when Alisha heard from one of her friends that George had kissed another woman. Alisha then

170

called George and said, "We need to talk," and proceeded over to his house and "asked questions…he didn't want to answer." After an intense interrogation, "She got it out of him." He had kissed another woman as they were beginning to initiate their relationship throwing their own relationship into question, based on his concealment and dual interests.

The second subtheme, *deception*, addressed instances where partners actively interfered by deceiving their partners. For instance, LaRae and Justin were near to experiencing relational termination and Justin asked if LaRae would go for a drive with him so they could talk. Justin went on to explain that he disabled the navigation system delaying their return and affording him more time to talk with LaRae and convince her of their relationship. As Justin said, "I did some tricky, cheating stuff on my vehicle when I manually shut down the GPS system." The *deception* worked in his favor and helped persuade LaRae back into his good graces. Other times, the deception was not to further the relationship but rather to maintain relational connections with previous or other potential romantic relationship partners. In the situation with Chelsea and Jaime, he altered his previous girlfriend's name to Edward as to not interfere and create conflict on a daily basis. As Jaime stated, "I decided to change her [ex] on the phone" to prevent Chelsea from finding out about their communication. Chelsea indicated that even during dinner, Jaime would receive a text message from Edward. Jaime would respond and communicate with "Edward" and Chelsea began to question who that was and why she had never heard of him because he would frequently respond to his messages. When she uncovered his deception and found that that Edward was his previous girlfriend an

171

argument ensued and disrupted their relationship. Hence, deception interfered with the relationship as it was occurring as well as when it was revealed.

Partner Facilitation (RQ5B)

RQ5B examined the facilitation from partners themes that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and seven subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner facilitation (RQ5B).

Affect. The first joint facilitation theme, *affect*, appeared as emotions or feelings prompting desirable or positive influence from their partners. The *affect* experienced by the relational partner influenced the overall tenor of the relationship assisting in the betterment of the partner and/or relationship. This theme encompassed three subthemes, *empathy, expressions of affection,* and *support.*

The first subtheme, *empathy*, resembled feelings of sympathy and behaviors reflecting perspective taking from their relational partner. Several instances of empathizing as facilitation occurred, for example, with Mary Anne and Max. They spoke about their stressful experience negotiating Max's relationship and communication with his previous girlfriend. Mary Anne did not approve of their interactions and felt it was detrimental to their relationship. After Mary Anne exposed Max's continued concealed conversations, he attempted to sooth her. He articulated that, "I tried to calm you down." The ability to comfort Mary Anne even after he caused the harm helped to facilitate communication about the situation. Furthermore, Ashley and Roberto also were able to cooperatively reflect on each other's feelings and console one another when introducing

172

him to her parents for the first time. Ashley said, "He was fine; then I was fine." At first Roberto expressed nervousness and hesitancy when planning to meet her parents, he wanted to ensure a positive first impression. As Ashley talked them through it, he became calmer and in turn so did she. They encouraged and comforted one another to the furtherance of their relationship.

The second subtheme, *expressions of affection*, resembled facilitation with acts of endearment expressed as tangible gifts or experiences. Similar to individual stories, joint stories included *expressions of affection* summarized as flower giving and experiences. LaRae and Justin spoke about Justin buying tickets for LaRae. She said, "He bought tickets to see Maroon Five, one of my favorite bands." LaRae had never seen them and Justin put forth the effort to show affection by first knowing that it was one of her favorite bands and then buying and planning the experience to see them. Additionally, several other couples spoke of their boyfriends buying them flowers. "He bought me roses which was really sweet" and "I bought flowers over to you and you started to crying." The *expressions of affection* escalated the relationship through the influence of each other's activities and actions.

The third subtheme, *support,* resembled facilitation as fulfilling a role whether offering assistance, defending against others, or encouraging their partners. *Support* provided positive affect for their partner and subsequently their relationships. LaRae and Justin also articulated several exemplars demonstrating the facilitative power of *support*. On the way to their Maroon Five concert, her debit card did not work. Justin easily acted to rectify the situation as LaRae articulated, "He went inside to see if he could pay it

173

inside." Unfortunately, it did not work and Justin paid for the gas as well as the experience. He continued to demonstrate supportive behaviors throughout and even emphasized that at the end of the story when LaRae said they drove home. Justin said, "You slept all the way home. You didn't drive. I technically drove." Justin continued to provide *support* by offering assistance and encouragement during their trip. Likewise, Josh offered support when he came home a month early from study abroad to help Gabrielle move. As he articulated, "I came back a month early to help you move back." Josh's sacrifice offered assistance to the other.

      Agreeableness. The second theme, *agreeableness*, referred to instances where partners showed willingness to suspend their individual interests for the good of the other. This theme encompassed four subthemes, *accommodation, collaboration, decision-making,* and *reconciliation.*

      The first subtheme, *accommodation*, is where persons forego their own desires and yield to another's concerns or points of view. *Accommodation* meant expressing low concern for self and high concern for the partner. Xavier and Leticia represented this subtheme in their interaction about her behavior. Leticia said to Xavier, "There never seems to be anything I did wrong. You'd never say if anything bothered you or if I offended you." Xavier held this tongue rather than escalate the conversation. Similarly, Adam and Kate reflected *accommodation* when trying to handle a conflict created by Adam's friend. They both restrained themselves in order to accommodate each other. As articulated by Adam, "You were waiting for me to say something and I was waiting for you to say something." Both suppressed their tempers toward one another putting their

partners' needs above their own.

The second subtheme, *collaboration,* referred to participants cooperatively working towards a mutual agreement beneficial to both partners and their relationship. The ability to resolve conflictive issues evidenced collaboration benefitting both partners. For instance with Melanie and Charles, they had agreed early in their relationship to collaborate on problems and to pressure an issue until discussed and resolved by both of them. As they articulated, "We want to talk about everything…when we find something is wrong with each other we nag at it until we find out what's wrong…don't let it go unnoticed…try to solve it and not build it up." They had established that they were going to cooperate to resolve pending issues together. In a like manner, Nadia and Erik collaboratively resolved their stressor during their storytelling experience. For several participants chose to share present uncertainties rather than retrospective uncertainties. In this story, Nadia always had her hours at work shifted at the last minute interfering with Erik's schedule. To resolve the problem, Erik said, "If it's super late I'll move my car out and park on the street and you can park in my space." Their discussion during storytelling cooperatively addressed their interference and facilitated agreeableness with both partners.

The third subtheme, *decision-making,* was reflected when partners chose to include or consider their partner in the process while maintaining authority to make the final decision. While *decision-making* involved both partners, one partner ultimately made the determination. Several instances occurred where partners were making life-altering decisions and involved their partners but then choose their trajectory. For

175

instance, in Han and Samantha's story they talk about her trying to choose whether to transfer to Han's school. He was in favor of that decision; nevertheless, there were multiple factors that led to her decision to transfer home and be closer to him. As Samantha stated, "Me not making any friends and not getting connected with anyone and grandma sick at that time – made the decision to transfer to [his college] even though her parents did not want her to." Han listened and participated in the *decision-making* process, but Samantha had to make the decision and live with the direct consequences.

The fourth subtheme, *reconciliation*, reflected partners' efforts to make amends for their previous actions or choices through apologies and offering forgiveness. Expressions of regret and request for forgiveness were a means to move beyond the past and/or renew the relationship. For instance, Joel and Abby spoke about Abby's perspective on excessive videogaming as a leisure activity. Abby felt as if she was a secondary priority, especially leading up to a potential monetary payout at a tournament. As Joel spoke, "After the tournament I called her and we had a fight. Later I apologized and she forgave me." Both participants participated in facilitation as Joel reached out to express regret and Abby forgave him of his neglect.

Similarly, Morgan and John experienced an apology as a form of *reconciliation*, after John realized that "a lot of stress built up on Morgan." He attempted to engage her at the time by sitting together, especially since Morgan had invited him and his friends to her house and then a football game. Morgan felt as if he had paid no attention to her. In order to rectify the situation, John "went back to the game, together, and sat together. [It] seemed to go fine; though a little awkward." In seeking forgiveness, sometimes a partner

had to experience a little interference to then build back trust and forgiveness. In general, apologizing and seeking forgiveness was a common facilitation tactic within many relationships, especially after a violation to relational standards. In Morgan and John's situation, they faced discomfort in the relationship until he sought, and she accepted, his apology.

Conversations. The third individual facilitation theme, *conversation*, referred to instances where partners elected to talk things over with their partner or where they decided to keep concerns to themselves. Joint *heart to heart* conversations represented both partners jointly communicating over a substantive subject or an exchange of their feelings in regards to their relationship and resembles *heart-to-heart* conversations in individual stories. Here participants spoke about talking with one another about salient relationship issues and/or feelings. Many joint stories included: "We had a lot to talk about at the beginning of the year," "And then we talked about it afterward," "After we got back to school we talked about things. We cleared up things up," and "When we got back to school, we had talked," "…gave us more time to talk," and "We've talked about this several times." The ability to have a *heart-to-heart* or more generally an intimate conversation improved their relationships.

Time management. The fourth and last individual facilitation theme, *time management*, referred to instances where partners influenced coordination of their activities. Relationship interdependence often requires partners to alter relationship schedules, routines, or plans to assist their partner or relationship. Partners described making time in their schedules and planning visitations. Ryessia and Roger told about

arranging a trip to visit her parents who had moved, "We did go out to visit them together." Prioritizing one goal over another often interferes with completion of the lesser goal but in this instance also enabled more time together. The ability to include and implement changes was not perceived as an impediment but rather an asset.

This concludes the examination of relational turbulence mechanism, partner influence as interference and facilitation in joint stories. In this next section, I explore the qualitative results that emerged in the comparison of relational uncertainty in individual and joint stories.

Comparison of Relational Uncertainty in Individual and Joint Stories

When relationships experience relational turbulence, communication about the nature or status of the relationship is particularly difficult (Theiss & Nagy, 2013) even in their stories. RQ_{6A-6C} examined the similarities and differences in individual and joint stories. As previous research has found when it comes to relational uncertainty individuals avoid relationship conversations (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), withhold information (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), or employ indirect communication (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) because they do not want to broach potentially unpleasant or risky outcomes. However, I was able to investigate the similarities and differences in the major tripartite of relational uncertainty and subthemes and whether they are communicated. The comparison between individual and joint stories introduces complexities about the possibility of differing themes that emerge about stressors in romantic relationships. The following section highlights the research questions reflecting these comparisons (refer to the corresponding Table 19). Frequencies are not comparable

178

because there were more individual stories, two per couple, in comparison to one joint per couple.

Self Uncertainty (RQ6A)

RQ6A examined the similarities and differences for self uncertainty themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. The similarities for individual and joint stories far outweighed the differences; for regardless of individuals speaking from their own perspective or together with their relational partner all four subthemes (e.g., *desire, evaluation, goals,* and *perceived network involvement*) emerged. Individual and joint stories about stressors within their romantic relationships demonstrated no differences, and all subthemes were represented. Additionally, one might expect that the individual who demonstrated self uncertainty did so in both the individual and joint stories; however, in most instances, self uncertainty emerged in expressions from a diversity of individuals, not the same for both individual and joint stories. In other words, only some who expressed self uncertainty in the individual story did so in the joint story, and vice versa.

Partner Uncertainty (RQ6B)

RQ6B examined the similarities and differences of partner uncertainty themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. The subthemes, *desire* and *evaluation*, emerged in both individual and joint stories indicating similarities. The subtheme, *goals*, although a less prominent subtheme in partner uncertainty, was only articulated in individual stories and not in joint stories. As Caleb expressed, "Where, you know, she would be like, what's going to happen this

179

summer when I go off to work and you stop talking to me and stuff like that?" The inability to decipher another partners' current feelings, commitment, and involvement outweighed expression of uncertainty about future orientations.

Relationship Uncertainty (RQ$_{6C}$)

RQ$_{6C}$ examined the similarities and differences in relationship uncertainty themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. The subthemes, *behavioral norms, mutuality, future, perceived network involvement,* and *retrospection* emerged in both individual and joint stories, whereas *definition* emerged in only individual stories and *retrospection* emerged in only joint stories.

In individual and joint stories, relational partners expressed uncertainty about appropriate rules and acceptable relational boundaries (e.g., *behavioral norms*), questions about reciprocity of feelings (e.g., *mutuality*), long-range relational outcomes (e.g., *future*), and social network involvement instilling doubts about their feelings and actions toward their relationships (e.g., *perceived network involvement*). In comparison, *definition* emerged only in stories by individuals. Although a less prominent subtheme, *definition* was primarily expressed when discussing the relationship and transitions from a temporary relocation (e.g., studying abroad to returning home). The present or current definition about the relationship was limited to individual discussion and not discussed amongst both partners. When speaking about past events in relation to present and future orientations, the subtheme, *retrospection,* was only expressed in joint stories. Drawing on previous frustrations, trust, prior breakups in the relationship, repetitive troubles with

180

directions and overspending, were common springboards to addressing current and future

uncertainties – for the past did not stay in the past.

This concludes the examination of relational turbulence mechanism,

relational uncertainty in joint stories. In this next section, I explore the

qualitative results that emerged in the joint stories examining partner influence.

Comparison of Partner Interdependence in Individual and Joint Stories

The comparison between individual and joint stories introduces complexities

about the possibility of differing partner interference (RQ_{7A}) and facilitation (RQ_{7B})

themes that emerge about stressors in romantic relationships. The following section

highlights the research questions reflecting these comparisons (refer to the corresponding

Table 23 and 24).

Partner Interference (RQ_{7A})

RQ_{7A} examined the similarities and differences in partner interference themes that

emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships.

More similarities arose than differences between individual and joint stories (See Table

23). First, the similarities were *affect, relational de-escalation, and time management*

themes and subthemes that emerged in both individual and joint stories.

Second, there was one major theme and two subthemes that emerged uniquely to

individual or joint stories. *Withholding* was the only major theme difference emerging

between individual and joint stories. This theme addressed the obstruction by one partner

that occurred by retaining pertinent information or actively deceiving their partner. This

theme encompassed two subthemes, *concealment* and *deception. Physical proximity* and

unfulfilled relational standards had two differences within subthemes. The subtheme *neglect* emerged in only joint stories under the *physical proximity* theme and *rules or norms* surfaced only in individual stories under *unfulfilled relational standards*. The subtheme, *neglect,* addressed disregard for their relational partners and the absence of physical proximity left several partners feeling abandoned in their relationships. In individual stories, *physical proximity* reflected difficulty in day-to-day activities because of the unavailability due to separation or distance and difficulties communicating via mediated communication. In their individual stories no instances of neglect formed from physical proximity and this was uniquely expressed in their joint stories. Additionally, the subtheme, *rules or norms,* emerged only individual stories under *unfulfilled relational standards* rather than in joint stories. Individuals often referred to their own standards identifying acceptable behavior and communication in their relationships; these were not discussed explicitly in their joint stories.

Partner Facilitation (RQ$_{7B}$)

RQ$_{7B}$ examined the similarities and differences in partner facilitation themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships (See Table 21). More similarities than differences arose between individual and joint stories. All major themes, *affect, agreeableness, conversations, and time management,* emerged in both individual and joint stories. Additionally, most of the subthemes emerged in both individual and joint stories; however, the subthemes, for *conversations – concealing* and *heart-to-heart* did not emerge for joint stories. Instead, *conversations* represented a more holistic opportunity to converse about relational issues and disclose

182

feelings.

This concludes the examination of pre-established relational turbulence mechanisms, relational uncertainty and partner interdependence comparisons of individual and joint stories. In this next section, I explore the qualitative results that emerged as individual and relational identity as the new theoretical addition, relational turbulence.

Identity in Individual Stories

A third mechanism, *identity,* is postulated to extend the relational turbulence model. Four research studies (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; Nagy, 2011; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber & Solomon, 2008) have noted identity as an issue, and began to conceptualize it. My dissertation argues that it is vital to consider identity, which is open to development and fluctuation throughout the life of relationships; thus, I initiate the exploration of identity as an integral third mechanism in the relational turbulence model.

My dissertation examined the identities incorporated within narratives as they correspond to turbulent experiences – both individual and relational. Clarifying the role of identity during transitions may assist our understanding of identity initiated by turbulent processes on personal and relational identities (Solomon et al., 2010). Because identity has only been speculated upon and briefly explored in previous RTM scholarship, it is necessary to further explore it as a third mechanism. The duality of identity of both individual and relational should be detected in narratives especially during the transition from relational initiation to intimacy (Riessman, 2008).

This section examined individual and relational identities in the individual and joint stories (RQ$_{8A-8B}$) as well as the similarities and differences in individual and joint identities (RQ$_{8C}$). The following section highlights the research questions reflecting these comparisons (refer to the corresponding Table 22).

Individual and Relational Identity in Individual Stories (RQ$_{8A}$)

RQ$_{8A}$ examined the themes of individual and relational identity that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Two themes, *static identity* and *dynamic identity*, and five subsequent subthemes emerged and I explore these new theoretical contributions to relational turbulence utilizing participants' language. I note that *static identity* acts more as an anchor when going through transitional events or as something that helped to maintain their own well-being and/or relationship as they weathered the turbulence. Nevertheless, these two subthemes represent identity and are not related to relational turbulence but more specifically to identity, as a mechanism. The other major theme, *dynamic identity*, does set in motion questions about how identity as cognition and communication shapes people's experiences in ongoing close relationships. I provide exemplars below to illustrate how all instances of individual and relational identities manifested as themes in individual stories about stressful experiences.

Static identity. The first theme*, static identity*, represented identity expressions that are stable, that is, have consistent characteristics or features of the individual or relationship. Although *static identity* inherently lacks action or change, it goes without saying that everything is in motion. Hence, *static identity* assumes unwavering individual

184

or relational identity in the present and changes would not be sought or desirable to those expressing them. This theme encompassed two subthemes: *individual identity* and *relational identity*.

The first subtheme, *individual identity,* referred to constant or stable features about oneself in relation to their relationships; furthermore, these were unique attributes prescribed to established or permanent descriptions. The *individual identity* recounted negative and positive characteristics. For instance, Elvis stated that, "I was a bad boyfriend," and Sarah said, "I never showed up in the greatest of moods." These self-descriptions were anchored in a characteristic or feature that was stable. For others, this resonated positively, as with Angelica who spoke about her relationship with Brandon. She indicated, "Brandon is my first boyfriend. I've never had a relationship prior to him." She had not previously identified her own identity with another. Xavier realized that who he was in his previous relationship to his current relationship had changed. He articulated, "I'm trying to grow as a man and change as a person." The latter two exemplars indicate growth but change was embraced as a static feature regarding their present identity.

The second subtheme, *relational identity,* referred to constant or stable features about the relationship, and similar to *individual identity,* this was portrayed as established or more permanent. Thus, the expression did not indicate oscillation in their statements – individuals were confident in their interdependence. These statements were further articulated with the notion of stability. As indicated by Madison in her stressful story, "We were already stable in our relationship…I was confident we'd be fine." Similarly,

Connor utilized analogous language. "I was ready to have a stable relationship."

Additionally, Jaime spoke about his *relational identity* in his decision to be with his

girlfriend. "I finally decided to settle down with Chelsea." Furthermore, Joel expressed

in his story, "She really cares for me. We have a pretty stable relationship. I think she's

the one I'm looking for. We want to stay together as long as we can." These individuals

clearly voiced confidence in their relational identity as a couple. Their *relational identity*

reflected permanence in a stable and not uncertain manner.

   Dynamic identity. The second theme*, dynamic identity*, represents identity

expressions that are in change or motion in regards to the characteristics or features

associated with individual or relationship. *Dynamic identity* assumes a wavering

individual or relational identity by those expressing them. The *dynamic identity*

subthemes: *identity fluctuation, relational identity development*, and *relational identity*

development, exemplified the difference of intensity in the stressor/transitional event.

This theme recognizes that turbulence encompasses amplified experiences within the

relationship, such as polarized cognitions, stronger emotions, and more extreme

communication behaviors (Solomon et al., 2011). The relational turbulence model

describes relational uncertainty and partner interdependence and I posit *dynamic identity*

that induces a state of reactivity.

   The first subtheme, *identity fluctuation,* has been previously designated by

LeFebvre (2011). She redefined identity development as *identity fluctuation* as an

adaptation. She identified that identity fluctuation occurs throughout a relationship.

Within this context, I further conceptualize it beyond this previous definition. *Identity*

186

fluctuation falls under the *dynamic identity* because this is a micro or minor movement within identity.

To further articulate this, consider the metaphor of an earthquake, rather than the flight or aircraft metaphor commonly utilized in relational turbulence, in order to measure the magnitude or strength of identity movement. The center point for an earthquake is an epicenter; therefore, to determine the magnitude of an earthquake, there are numerous means to evaluate earthquake strength. For instance, scientists could evaluate the relative strength of an earthquake from: the cost of repairs resulting from damage, the length of rupture of the earthquake fault, the amount of ground shaking, or the distance it traveled. The seismograph does not tell the seismologist exactly where the epicenter was (e.g., where a relational partner was before the stressor), just that the earthquake happened so many miles or kilometers away from that seismograph. The vibrations, called seismic waves, travel outward in all directions and are called an earthquake. Similarly, during turbulence—or a quake in a relationship—if it is a micro or minor disruption, it is sensed but does not shift the identity; this represents an *identity fluctuation.*

Melanie had come into a relationship with Charles. She said, "I love him to death, but," his choice to enlist and pursue a life in the military is not want she anticipated for her life. She went onto articulate,

> The kind of life I like is not what he had always envisioned for himself
> and the kind of life he wants is not what I had always envisioned for
> myself. It's kind of conflicting where we both saw our lives, but now

we're together. It's kind of a compromise and how we're going to figure

it out.

Identity fluctuation does not alter the foundation, rather it sets in motion actions and

behaviors to reinforce and stabilize the identity.

Furthermore, Xavier articulated that even after finding out that his previous

partner may be pregnant with his child, "It didn't phase the way she acted toward me."

He said that Leticia maintained her unnerved relational identity with him. He further

went on to articulate how this then influenced him. "Even though our situation was

obviously rocky, it let me know I needed to be more serious, a little more invested in it."

With uncertainty individuals are unsure whether they wanted the relationship, however,

with identity fluctuation they sought adaptations to maintain the relationship after the

fluctuation. Thus, *identity fluctuation* represented a movement within rather a movement

between identities – nevertheless still a movement.

In order to better articulate *dynamic identity* and its corresponding subthemes, I

recall the metaphor of an earthquake. The impact from the quake measures the

magnitude or strength of identity movement. The center point for an earthquake is the

epicenter; therefore, to determine the magnitude of an earthquake, scientists can measure

the distance from the epicenter. During turbulence—or a quake in a relationship—if it is

a micro or minor disruption it is felt but does not alter, damage, or change the identity;

this represents an *identity fluctuation.* On the other hand when the quake is significant

and causes great seismic tremors—an intense quake in the relationship—dynamic identity

represents movement to another identity. *Identity fluctuation* in comparison is where the

188

tremor was sensed but did not move individuals toward or away from the identity. Conversely, *dynamic identity subthemes, relational identity development* and *relational identity disintegration,* accentuate movement that is noticeable and evidence an individuals' shift between identities as a result of the quake. This theme encompassed two macro movement subthemes: *relational identity development* and *relational identity disintegration.*

The second subtheme, *relational identity development,* has been previously designated by Solomon and colleagues (e.g., Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber & Solomon, 2008). In these stories, individuals spoke about the growth of a relational identity. There was exclusively an individual identity and this subtheme represented the expansion of the self with another formulating a couple.

Relational identity development revealed a spectrum of a relational escalation leading toward intimacy and further inclusion of their relationship identity. For example, during initial stages of his relationship, Jacob discussed his stress on their first date. He said,

> We decided to go out and walk around…for a while. But the temperature
> is very low so she feels cold so I get her hand. I think at the time we are in
> a relationship. We go out some more times. I feel I like her much more
> than before. After [the evening and holding hands] we are in a
> relationship.

After the initial moments and their embrace, Jacob reveals that he likes Jinsuk and he begins to articulate a relational identity as a result of their interactions and his feelings.

189

Additionally, Eliza spoke about her connection with Kyle after her parent's divorce. She expressed difficulties about communicating about her parent's divorce and saw their separation as a possibility for her own relationship. With her parent's pending divorce, Eliza, as a young adult, found it difficult to express her concerns to her partner and the divorce caused her to question the ability to maintain her own romantic relationship. Thus, speaking about the ability to work through this traumatic event that had affected Eliza daily, she felt, "It brought us closer together." Her connection to Kyle throughout her parental separation solidified them as a unit rather than as separate individuals. She did not feel as if she experienced her parents' divorce alone rather together, which reinforced their connected *relational identity development.*

While for others, it was less of a development, than a redevelopment after a breakup in their on-off relationships. Glen and Sarah exemplify the shift away and then again the movement toward each other. They attended colleges in different communities. Sarah was going through a number of changes including joining a sorority and figuring out her major. She decided to break up with Glen. However, Sarah decided she had made a mistake and asked Glen to take her back. Following their reconciliation, Glen said, "Afterwards we definitely saw a bit more life in our relationship." Their relationship experienced a redevelopment of relational identity. Although, turbulence is often perceived to have negative repressions, it can be visible in both positively (e.g., *relational identity development*) and negatively (e.g., *relational identity disintegration*) valenced relationship events (Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010).

190

The third subtheme, *relational identity disintegration,* represented a spectrum of

relational de-escalation leading away from intimacy. Individuals either expressed the

reduction of their identity with another or termination of the relational identity. For

instance, Joan spoke about her confidence about terminating their relationship at one

point, "There was like, a time I was almost sure I was going to break up with him."

Similarly, Blake and Melissa also thought about severing their relational identity. He

said, "We didn't have a decision yet if we were going to stay together or not till the end

of school in the spring." Although, these couples remained together they experienced

relational deterioration.

For Wendy, the *relational identity disintegration* hit her hard in thinking about

decoupling from Phillip after years with each other. "When you look around your

bedroom and see photos of somebody you spent four years with, oh my gosh, that's the

person I would chose to marry and spend forever with. Now we're at this point." Her

surroundings symbolized an extension of her identity and she began to reflect on the fact

her identity mainly consisted of her relationship to Phillip. Thus, having to detach years

of memories as evidenced in physical possessions was painful. Thinking about *relational

identity disintegration* had real consequences and caused her to reflect about their current

situation and how to correct it posthaste.

Clarifying the role of identity during transitions may assist our understanding of

identity initiated by turbulent processes on individual and relational identities and

provides evidence that a relational turbulence may need to continue to explore identity as

a third mechanism. This question explored *static identity* and *dynamic identity* themes of

191

individual and relational identity that emerged in individual stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. In this question, I explore the qualitative results that emerged as individual and relational identity in joint stories.

Identity in Joint Stories

My dissertation examined the identities incorporated within narratives as they correspond to turbulent experiences – both individual and relational. The duality of identity of both individual and relational should be detected in narratives especially during the transition from relational initiation to intimacy (Riessman, 2008). This research examined individual and relational identities in joint stories (refer to the corresponding Table 22).

Individual and Relational Identity in Joint Stories (RQ8B)

RQ8B examined the themes of individual and relational identity that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. Two themes, *static identity* and *dynamic identity*, and five subsequent subthemes emerged and I explore these new theoretical contributions to relational turbulence utilizing participants' language. I noted that *static identity* acts more of an anchor when going through transitional events. This in turn is something that helped couples to weather the turbulence relational partners experienced when undergoing a stressor; however, while these two subthemes encompassed under *static identity* do represent identity they are not related to relational turbulence, and more specifically identity, as a mechanism. The other major theme, *dynamic identity*, does set in motion questions about how identity as cognition and communication shapes people's experiences in ongoing close relationships.

192

I provide exemplars below to illustrate how individual and relational identities manifest as themes in joint stories about stressful experiences.

Static identity. The first theme, *static identity*, represented identity expressions that are stable, that is, have consistent characteristics or features of the individual or relationship. This theme assumes unwavering individual or relational identity in the present and changes would not be sought or desirable to those expressing them. This theme encompassed three subthemes: *individual identity* and *relational identity.* These definitions and descriptions are analogous to the individual stories' themes.

The first subtheme, *individual identity,* referred to constant or stable features about oneself in relation to their relationships; furthermore, these were unique attributes prescribed to those with whom they were in established or permanent relationships. The *individual identity* recounted negative and positive characteristics and frequently as first-person singular linguistic expressions.

Often instances indicated that certain individuals in their relationships were not willing or ready to commit; rather, they wanted to maintain their independence. For example, Chelsea and Jaime spoke about initiating their relationship and the reluctance to become a couple. Jaime had only recently ended his relationship and Chelsea believed there were lingering feelings. She said, "I was hesitant about getting into a relationship. I guess I just wanted my freedom." Other individuals were elated to include their relationship as part of their *individual identity.* For instance, Eve uttered, "This is my first relationship ever." She did not talk about this within 'their' joint story. She did not characterize their relationship in an interconnected fashion with inclusive plurality (e.g.,

we) in her language. The orientation was from her perspective. She discussed her first relationship as an *individual identity* characteristic. Moreover, others talked about their personal features, particularly their honesty – being true to themselves and their relational partners. Charles told Melanie in their joint story, "I don't want to say something and have to go back on my word. I hate to go back on my word. It just doesn't happen." Charles did not want to identify as a couple if he had to dissolve the relationship later on.

The second subtheme, *relational identity,* referred to constant or stable features about the relationship, and similar to *individual identity,* these were portrayed as established or more permanent descriptions. Thus, the expression did not indicate oscillation in their statements – individuals were confident in their interdependence. The *relational identity* reflected permanence in a stable and not uncertain manner. These assorted utterances get to the heart of *relational identity:* "We knew we wanted to stay together," Both of us realized we need each other," "He always had faith and faith in our relationship," and "Breakup has never been an option when it comes to our relationship." The immutable nature of these descriptions articulates that these individuals in their joint stories meant to remain together and were secure in their *relational identity.*

Dynamic identity. The second theme, *dynamic identity*, represents identity expressions that are in constant change or motion in regards to the characteristics or features associated with individual or relationship. *Dynamic identity* assumes a wavering individual or relational identity by those expressing them. This theme emphasizes movement to another identity and accentuates movement that is noticeable and evidences an individual's shift between identities as a result of the quake. This theme encompassed

194

the two subthemes: *identity fluctuation, relational identity development* and *relational identity disintegration,*

The third subtheme, *identity fluctuation,* is as an adaptation. During turbulence-- or a quake in a relationship—if it is a micro or minor disruption—it is sensed but does not alter, damage, or change the identity; this represents an *identity fluctuation.* For instance, Mary Ann and Max spoke about his concealment of communication with his previous partner. As a result, Mary Ann said, "We had to redefine the relationship from there and set boundaries and what I expected from that situation." The disruption did not cause Mary Ann to question whether she wanted the relationship with Max rather she required an adaptation from him as a result of the "tremor." The fluctuation was based on Max's concealment of communication with his previous partner that caused turbulence and/or a fluctuation in what Mary Ann perceived a stable relational foundation. Also, several other couples spoke about difficulties in their relationship causing pressure and questions about their relational foundations. Otherwise, several couples spoke about the impending difficulties anticipated "We went into our relationship knowing we'd be doing this," and the unanticipated "made our relationship a little rocky." To best summarize, *identity fluctuation,* Robert expressed that "I almost lost faith." *Identity fluctuation* does not alter the foundation rather sets in motion actions and behaviors to reinforce and stabilize the identity.

The second subtheme, *relational identity development,* revealed a spectrum of a relational escalation leading toward intimacy and further inclusion of their relationship identity. *Relational identity development* is demonstrated here through the progression of

195

expressions. Leticia openly lavished Xavier in her identity; however, Xavier did not initially feel the same way nevertheless came around to a similar perspective. He said, "I had to reach a point where I felt you were worth it [buying presents for]. Overtime, you really proved yourself. I wish I would had woke up a little sooner…everyday we improved and everything got a little better." He was slow to integrate and then began to develop a relational identity. Further along in *relational identity development* solidification, Riley and Rianna spoke about their verbal expression of affections, "Me and [Riley's] relationship is escalating." She told him she loved him for the first time. This theme symbolized a movement toward intimacy and incorporation of a relational identity.

The third subtheme, *relational identity disintegration,* represented a spectrum of relational de-escalation leading away from intimacy and the further exclusion of their relationship identity. Individuals either expressed the reduction of their relational identity with another either through boredom, "I was bored with our relationship," or "I wasn't having fun anymore," or termination of the relational identity, "we broke up." Basically, *relational identity disintegration* involved the decoupling process and moving away from a relational identity.

This question explored *static identity* and *dynamic identity* themes of individual and relational identity that emerged in joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. In this question, I explore the qualitative results that emerged as individual and relational identity between individual and joint stories.

Comparison of Identity in Individual and Joint Stories

When relationships experience relational turbulence, communication about the nature or status of the relationship is particularly difficult (Theiss & Nagy, 2013) even in their stories. My dissertation begins to incorporate the fluctuation of identities embodied within narratives as they correspond to turbulent experiences – both individual and relational identities. People construct identity (multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within their stories (Orbuch, 1997; Somers, 1994). RQ$_{8C}$ examined the similarities and differences in individual and joint stories (refer to the corresponding Table 21).

Comparison of Individual and Relational Identity (RQ$_{8C}$)

RQ$_{8C}$ examined the similarities and differences in individual identity themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors within romantic relationships. More similarities than differences arose between individual and joint stories. All major themes, *static* and *dynamic identities,* and corresponding subthemes emerged in both individual and joint stories. Additionally, identity may emerge more prominently when assessing specific topics (e.g., infertility, empty nest, menopause) rather than general stressors.

This concludes the examination of identity as an individual and relational construct adding a theoretical extension to relational turbulence and its established mechanisms, relational uncertainty and partner influence. Additionally, RQ$_{8A-8C}$ provides evidence that further exploration must continue to understand the shift of identities as a mechanism in relational turbulence.

197

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I explored the qualitative results that emerged in the individual and joint stories by examining their unique content, levels, and sources that arise in stressful dating stories. The results explore the each relational turbulence model component, relational uncertainty, partner interdependence, and identity, in each partner's individual and their joint stories as well as the similarities and differences between them. The qualitative nuances within the content of these stories were discussed. In Chapter 6, I will report the results from examining the storytelling process within and between the relational partners utilizing the relational turbulence model mechanisms and narrative completeness.

Chapter 6

Results II

Within this section, I expanded narrative completeness extending it to the storytellers' perspective utilizing Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) narrative completeness framework. Participants assessed their own understanding of their narrative completeness upon recalling their stressful experiences through their individual and joint stories. As a result, narrative completeness may evidence cognitive and communicative understanding of individuals and relationships experiencing turbulence as uncertainty or interference may exhibit lack of completeness or coherence in their stories within and between actor and partner effects.

Assessing the Relationship between RTM Mechanisms and Narrative Completeness in Individual Stories

Because narrative completeness has only been empirically tested once in a different relational context, it is important to test whether specific narrative completeness is associated with relational turbulence mechanisms – relational uncertainty (RQ_9), partner interference (RQ_{10}), and partner facilitation (RQ_{11}). This section examined composite narrative completeness in individual storytelling of stressful experiences. I initially assessed the bivariate correlations among the predictor and independent variables (see Table 23).

I used a multilevel modeling (MLM) as the analytical because this methodological approach accommodates the dynamic interdependence that exists between partners (e.g., Kashy & Kenny, 2000; see Kenny et al., 2006). Although each

partner completed individual narratives separately, both belong to the same couple and spoke about the same stressful event inherently establishing interdependent data. Further, I used APIM to assess both actor and partner effects, which highlights the interactional and interdependent nature of interpersonal relationships (Theiss & Knobloch, 2009).

For these particular analyses, I employed MLM utilizing HLM6 (e.g., Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2004) to conduct the analyses. MLM is useful for dyadic or nested data such that partners (Level 1) are nested within couples (Level 2). I treated the dyads as distinguishable since all participants were in heterosexual relationships. The narrative completeness, dependent variable, and the each RTM component, independent variables, was assessed in a separate set of analyses. As suggested by Nezlek (2003), I began with a forward-stepping approach in which I started with an unconditional or null model (Model 1) with narrative completeness as the dependent variable and no independent variables, which assisted in determining a base for subsequent models. Table 24 presents all the results pertinent to these subsequent research questions.

Research Question Nine (RQ9)

There was not statistical support for RQ9 that assessed the relationship between relational uncertainty and the composite narrative completeness in of individual storytelling (see Model 3a). In other words, there was not an association between individuals' relational uncertainty assessment and their self-perceived completeness as expressed in their narratives about stressful events.

Research Question Ten (RQ$_{10}$)

There was not statistical support for RQ$_{10}$ that assessed the relationship between partner interference and the composite narrative completeness in of individual storytelling (see Model 4a). In other words, there was not an association between individuals' partner interference assessment and their self-perceived completeness as expressed in their narratives about stressful events.

Research Question Eleven (RQ$_{11}$)

There was statistical support for RQ$_{11}$ that assessed the relationship between partner facilitation and the composite narrative completeness in of individual storytelling (see Model 5a). In other words, there was a positive association between individuals' partner facilitation assessment and their self-perceived completeness as expressed in their narratives about stressful events.

Actor-Partner Interdependence Modeling of Joint Stories

This section explored the hypotheses addressing actor effects (H$_{1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A}$) of RTM mechanisms associated with narrative completeness. The hypotheses regarding partner effects (H$_{1B, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5B}$) explored the actor's RTM mechanisms associated with the partner's narrative completeness. I employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) which accounts for interdependence in nested designs among couples (i.e., treat each participant as independent) while simultaneously assessing both actor and partner effects.

Through this dyadic data collection, both partners completed surveys; therefore, actor effects will be in reference to individual scores or partner effects will reference individuals' partner scores. Actor effects refer to the relationship between an individual's

201

own reports for both the independent and dependent variables, whereas partner effects refer to the relationship between a partner's report for an independent variable and the individual's dependent variable.

Five separate models assessed the various relational turbulence mechanisms. Joint narrative completeness was the dependent variable in all models. Both actor and partner effects were assessed simultaneously: self uncertainty (H_{1A-1B}), partner uncertainty (H_{2A-2B}), relationship uncertainty (H_{3A-3B}), partner interference (H_{4A-4B}), and partner facilitation (H_{5A-5B}).

As suggested by Nezlek (2003), I began with a forward-stepping approach in which I started with an unconditional or null model (Model 1) with joint narrative completeness as the dependent variable and no independent variables that assisted in determining a base for subsequent models. Tables 25-29 present all the results pertinent to these subsequent hypotheses.

Hypotheses (H_{1-5})

In assessing all the hypotheses (H_{1-3}), neither actor nor partner self, partner, or relationship uncertainty was associated with joint narrative completeness (see Tables 28, 29, and 30). Additionally, in assessing H_{4-5}, neither actor nor partner interference and facilitation was associated with joint narrative completeness (see Tables 31 and 32).

Conclusion

In Chapter 6, I explored the quantitative results that emerged in the individual and joint stories by examining the RTM mechanisms association to narrative completeness that arise in stressful dating stories. This chapter examined the holistic mechanism as

202

measured by pre-existing relational turbulence measures as well as the newly constructed

narrative completeness measurement. The results were reported utilizing bivariate

correlations and MLM of actor and partners effects on actors' narrative completeness. In

Chapter 7, I will discuss qualitative and quantitative results influence on relational

turbulence model mechanisms and narrative completeness in the present and future

studies.

Chapter 7

Discussion

This dissertation examined individual and joint storytelling as the communicative process underlying the relational turbulence model (RTM) to explore stressful transitional events. I argued that RTM needs to be further investigated utilizing naturalistic expressions (e.g., storytelling) to highlight uncertainty, influence, and identity as expressed through communication, while simultaneously investigating the individual and joint storytelling process that fashions narrative completeness. I offered research questions and hypotheses that scrutinized narrative content and structure.

This section first explores relational turbulence by examining the relational stories' content as turning points and relational turbulence content. Next, each relational turbulence mechanism will be discussed: (1) relational uncertainty (e.g., self, partner, and relationship) (2) partner interdependence (e.g., interference and facilitation), and (3) identity (e.g., individual and relationship) in individual and joint stories. Following the discussion of qualitative results, storytelling more specifically and its associations to narrative completeness will be explored. I will then discuss practical implications, limitations, and future research in the areas of relational turbulence and storytelling.

Theoretical Implications

Relational Turbulence Content

Research Question 1 examined the transitional events, or content, in dating relationships that caused relational turbulence. When examining the transitional events by participants, researchers have acknowledged that variation about content occurs within

each dyad because the participation in relationships depends on whether partners are in dating or established relationships. Many of the transitional event themes that emerged in this study overlapped with existing turning point literature. Baxter and Bullis' (1986) study of collegiate students' turning points had 14 major themes emerge; approximately 30 years later many of those same themes are relevant in today's dating relationships. To a greater extent were the similarities that appeared to exist between Dailey and colleagues (2013) turning points in on-off relationships and the present study. This might be due to the fact that both studies were conducted within the same decade (with similar dating transitional events) as well as 23.4% ($n = 22$) of the couples reported experiencing an on-off romantic relationship. The prevalence of on-off relationships influences relational content throughout the relationship because partners had to experience and re-experience relational uncertainty, changing partner influences, and alternation in their personal and relational identities.

Nevertheless, this study did identify several novel themes (e.g., *career/academic-related obstacles, social network, health, finances*, and *pets*) that had not previously emerged in turning point and/or transitional events in dating romantic relationships research. These themes suggest that although the majority of relational turbulence research has focused on college dating relationships there is still relevant work to be done to expand how these stressful experiences influence their current relationship and continue to impact over the lifespan of an individual and the romantic relationship (Solomon & Theiss, 2011). Additionally, researchers should begin to expand beyond dating relationships during collegiate years to see how these themes continue or adapt to

different lifespan changes (e.g., newlyweds, parents, empty nesters, grandparents, retirements).

Furthermore, this study focused on stressors rather than turning points. Turning points are inclusive of both negative and positive events. This application may be useful to further examine the influence of both positive and negative stressful transitional events. For instance, participants were asked to share a stressful story and several spoke of positive events (e.g., *getting-to-know you* and *relational escalation*) in comparison to negative events (e.g., *relational de-escalation, external relational threats,* and *relational transgressions*). To recall the turbulent metaphor, the pilots represent the relational partners (e.g., co-pilots) and the plane symbolizes their relationship. While in flight, planes may experience turbulence, much like relationships – both need to respond to changing conditions inside and outside the aircraft in order to maintain its course, especially at particular altitudes and speeds (e.g., courtship). Disruption (positive or negative) occurs in flights and relationships as both adjust or move through conditions. When thinking about the turbulence through this metaphor, the pocket of wind may slow the plane or a western gust may expedite the flight. Thus, when perceiving relational turbulence, scholarship may want to examine the distinctions between the valences associated with stressors.

Relational Uncertainty Themes

Examination of the relational uncertainty tripartite encompassed questions people have about their own involvement in the relationship (e.g., self uncertainty), their partner's level of involvement (e.g., partner uncertainty), and the nature of the dyadic unit

(e.g., relationship uncertainty). Previous research has primarily utilized a deductive approach, whereas this dissertation took an inductive approach. This approach allowed for an emergent analysis that upon closer rigorous investigation promoted the triangulation of research methods confirming the pre-existing conceptualization of the psychological presence of relational uncertainty through communicative exchanges in stories.

Upon closer inductive thematic analysis, the content issues for self or partner uncertainty surrounding the relationships reflected similar constructs as subthemes (e.g., *desire, evaluation,* and *goals*) (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). These expressions of self and partner uncertainty were apparent in both individual and joint storytelling. Additionally, the emergence of the theme, *perceived network involvement*, supports Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken's (2006) study that illuminated the nuances in perceived hindrance from network members. Therefore, my dissertation reaffirms the pre-existing conceptualizations for relational uncertainty while also offering several new themes for consideration.

People's social networks, family and friends, influence relational partners' perceptions of their own relationships. The perceived contact, communication, and support from members of the participants' own networks positively correlates with their perception of their own relationship (Parks, 2011). For that reason, networks' ambiguity that is observed and directed towards their partners and/or relationships evoked self uncertainty. To further articulate, Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) found a similar relationship for perceived network involvement, such that relationship uncertainty

207

mediates the concave curvilinear association between intimacy and perceived helpfulness from network members. The pre-existing research on self and partner uncertainty were reinforced in these findings, such that uncertainty expressed from their network members about their relationship and relational partner negatively associated their own perceptions. Perceived network involvement instilled pre-existing doubts or created new doubts based on their established social networks that were proven and trusted. Additionally, the content issue of relationship uncertainty in previous literature has focused on the present, comparisons, and future intentions, whereas self and partner uncertainty are both structured around a person's doubt stemming from different sources.

Retrospection in storytelling. In individual and joint storytelling, partners expressed a combination of all four constructs of relationship uncertainty (e.g., *behavioral norms, mutuality, definition,* and *future*). Ambiguity about the definition of the relationship was the least prevalent and only emerged in individual stories. Two new subthemes emerged, *perceived network involvement*, as discussed in the above paragraphs, and *retrospection*. The four pre-existing constructs (e.g., behavioral norms, mutuality, definition, and future) evidenced questions about the present or future; consequently, there was a gap discussing past influences on the present and future. *Retrospection* is relevant to relationship uncertainty because relational history and the corresponding grievances may raise doubt in the security and stability of any present or future relationship. This new subtheme only emerged in joint storytelling in instances where past uncertainties continued to linger and persist into present conditions and future ambiguity. This may be the first occurrence of this subtheme in relational uncertainty

208

constructs due to the retrospective nature of storytelling about past events; although, it is surprising that it has not occurred previously since most relational research is retrospective in nature. Even though participants were not specifically instructed to discuss retrospective events, some elected to discuss present events and others talked about ongoing stressful events. Nonetheless, the examination of prior events influences present and future uncertainties prompting questions about relational stability.

Joint storytelling as indirect or direct communication. The cognitive representation through which partners come to perceive themselves within a relationship causes relational uncertainty to stem from an indirect nonrepresentational source, which is less detectable or concrete than self and partner uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). This dissertation takes the psychological and cognitive aspects of uncertainty and applies them to actual communication from relational narratives about stressful events.

Particularly interesting observations about joint storytelling of stressful relational events emerged. Previous research would assume less direct communication about self, partner, and relational uncertainty. Specifically, Solomon and Theiss (2011) argue that negative cognitions and emotions that coincide with relational uncertainty correspond with more topic avoidance (Knobloch-Carpenter-Theune, 2004) and more indirect communications about irritations about the relationship (Theiss & Knobloch, 2009; Theiss & Solomon, 2006b). This previous literature would suggest that people are less likely to discuss their stressors when they are more uncertain. Nevertheless, in joint storytelling, both relational partners expressed self, partner, and relationship uncertainties directly to and with their partners, even though participants were not asked to discuss

209

their uncertainties rather generally asked to tell their story of a stressor. This appears contradictory to previous research on relational uncertainty communication because participants discussed both stressors and their associated uncertainties.

Future research should examine whether participants view storytelling as an indirect or direct communication about uncertainty. Difficult experiences may shift between individual to joint processes, as such that an interdependent and collaborative nature afforded through storytelling may create a new set of exigencies for sense-making in a less confrontational manner (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). As a result, joint storytelling forces couples to navigate content and process discrepancies and differences in an open communication that is more avoidant and indirect.

Partner Interdependence Themes

Next, there was an examination of the partner interdependence. Previous research has primarily utilized a deductive approach, whereas this dissertation again took an inductive approach to explore interfering and facilitating behaviors occurring during stressors in courtship relationships. This approach allowed for an emergent analysis that upon closer rigorous investigation promoted the triangulation of research methods to expand the pre-existing conceptualization.

Solomon and Knobloch envisioned components of developing interdependence as a process interacting within intimacy (e.g., Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). In order to acknowledge the nuance and complexity of intimacy, they drew from both the emotional investment and social exchange perspectives. Knobloch and Solomon (2004) previously articulated that interference *disturbs* and *interrupts,*

while facilitation acts in ways that *helps* or *assists* relational partners accomplish or impede everyday functions. Solomon and Knobloch (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001) utilized 10 items to index a partner's capacity to interfere and facilitate within individual's outcomes. Participants were directed to recall the disturbances or assistances generated by their partners during their stressful event. Participants reported their agreement with statements that offered potential descriptions of their partners' influence. These five interference and five facilitation items characterize partner's impact on everyday lives with specific statements about activities, goals, plans, routines, and work.

This dissertation continued and expanded the conceptual link on both global processes and the specific local message features through stories. In order to generate a broad sense of interdependence, I examined partner interdependence as interference and facilitation through relational stories to understand emotional and behavioral representation of turbulence.

Partner interference. The examination of interference from partners' themes that emerged in individual and joint stories about their stressors revealed more nuances within the disruptions to their everyday lives. Five themes (e.g., *affect, goals, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards,* and *time management*) and 11 corresponding subthemes emerged for partner interference in individual stories. Six themes (e.g., *affect, physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards, time management,* and *withholding*) and thirteen subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner interference

211

in joint stories. There was an abundance of overlap between individual and joint stories, but there was only negligible overlap with the pre-established partner influence measurements. *Time management* appeared to have the most similarity in that it represented hindrance in completing goals and plans. However, these results indicate that there are more interruptions identified that could also be included within future conceptualizations of partner interferences.

Although it may appear that these findings evidence the cause of the stressor, these findings provide more than the cause of the stressor. The RTM indicates that the second mechanism, partner interdependence functions as interference and facilitation. In partner interference, the partner impedes the normative routine and in partner facilitation, the partner assists the normative routine. It is hard to pinpoint the stressor and the cause. Stressors occur within the relational framework of partners – pinpointing the cause of the stressor (which might be reflect a turning point), whereas a stressor may occur throughout the turbulence (e.g., transitional event). Thus, adding more nuances to partner interference may more accurately assess this conceptualization. For relational development, the transition during a stressor may cause partners negotiate more than mere behaviors and schedules.

Several new interference themes emerged, *physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards,* and *withholding*. First, *physical proximity* – this theme emerged as a result of long distance relationship faced by many couples pursuing higher education after high school. Their circumstances placed extra strain on their partners forcing them to establish new routines and schedules in order to facilitate

both personal and relational goals. Previously, the lack or absence of a partner had not been considered within the partner influence measurement. Additionally, the on-again/off-again relationships emerged as interference or *relational de-escalation* for individuals and couples, especially since experiencing a romantic breakup can be emotionally distressing and is frequently cited among life's most distressing psychological events (Kendler, Hettema, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2006). Breakups and renewals are taxing on individuals. Furthermore, participants spoke about differences in *unfulfilled relational standards* and information *withholding* as interfering with their ability to navigate their lives and relationships. Again, future investigations of partner interference should include these features as influences disrupting relational partners in assessment of relational turbulence.

   Partner facilitation. *Partner facilitation* occurs when partners interrupt in ways that assist or support individuals to accomplish everyday functions or relationship norms (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and corresponding nine subthemes emerged for partner facilitation in individual stories. Four themes (e.g., *affect, agreeableness, conversations,* and *time management*) and seven subsequent subthemes emerged highlighting the influences caused by partner facilitation. There was an abundance of overlap between individual and joint stories. Most likely the minor differences in subthemes under *conversations* were due to the fact that individual stories had twice as many stories (two individual stories for every one joint story).

Additionally, results showed there was a negligible overlap with the pre-established partner influence measurements. *Time management* appeared to have the most similarity in that it represented assistance of completing goals and plans, whereas *affect, agreeableness, conversations* offered nuances not formerly explored. *Agreeableness* and *conversations* particularly emphasized the theoretical framework of social exchange embedded into the conceptualization of partner facilitation. The social exchange perspective emphasizes the notion of rewards-cost ratio and a comparison of alternatives (e.g., Burgess & Huston, 1979). When partners become more invested in a relationship, there are increased rewards and costs associated with growing intimacy. Social exchange emphasizes how rewards and costs contribute to stability and satisfaction in relationship interaction. This perspective highlights how individuals make decisions about relationship continuation suggesting that rewards outweigh costs for maintenance (relative to alternatives).

Mutual influence continues to develop over time and reaches a threshold as each partner's ability to complete common behavioral routines becomes contingent upon the actions of the partner (Kelley et al., 1983; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Prior research indicates that interference and facilitation gradually increase as intimacy increases; intuitively, as partners begin to influence each other's day-to-day operations, both interference and facilitation occur. Because previous research fails to show support for facilitation at high levels, it could be inferred that interference is more readily recognizable in the beginning stages of a relationship, whereas facilitation becomes engrained in the fabric of a relationship and becomes more subconscious and less

214

noticeable to relational partners (LeFebvre, 2011). Consequently, partner disruption (e.g., interference) subsides and is replaced with partner coordination (e.g., facilitation) through their ability to reach agreements through *accommodation, collaboration, decision-making,* and *reconciliation* (e.g., *agreeableness)* as well as toward their ability to provide opportunities for interpersonal communication through meaningful and transformative *conversations* for one or both partners (often changing the nature of their interactions and relationship). Again, future investigations of partner facilitation should include these features as influences assisting relational partners in their assessment of relational turbulence.

Partner interdependence precision. More specifically, the first RTM mechanism, relational uncertainty, has delineated self, partner, and relationship as sources for uncertainty and specified content issues that arise in regards to the relationship (e.g., *desire, evaluation,* and *goals* for self and partner uncertainty) and similarly for relationship uncertainty. Partner interference and facilitation research should undertake similar steps. The broad overarching influence of activities, goals, plans, routines, and work does not afford the nuances communicated by individuals in this study. It is necessary for scholars to advance the measurement to include more specific examples of interferences and facilitation, especially when examining at the episodic rather than global level.

The partner interdependence measurements do not parallel the specificity provided in the relational uncertainty measurements (e.g., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty) and secondary level of uncertainty measurements (e.g., self uncertainty –

215

desire, evaluation, and *goals*) (see Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Although the partner interdependence specifics (e.g., ways that partners interfere with each other's schedules or routines) may be unique to relationships, more global aspects could be assessed. More development is necessary to assess the global measures more accurately and holistically; the findings presented here provided conceptualizations to be considered and incorporated. This is even more essential in studies that investigate episodic levels of turbulence because partner interference and facilitation yield minimal specificity.

Additionally, in the examination of *affect*, these results indicated that *affect* causes interruptions to the coordination and completion of activities when it *prompts negative arousal* or *affection toward/from other,* and acts to assist partners when they provide *empathy, expressions of affection,* or *support.* Consistent with other empirical scholarship, intensified or negative emotional arousal is detrimental to the relationship. Explaining that, as relationships develop, individuals consciously or unconsciously activate behaviors that incorporate their partners into their own sequences. The more emotionally invested in a relationship, the greater the risk of experiencing favorable or unfavorable interruptions from a partner (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Knobloch, Miller, and Carpenter (2007) applied emotion-in-relationship (ERM) to dating relationships and found a similar result that showed negative emotions are positively correlated with partner interference and uncertainty and partner facilitation negatively correlated with negative emotions. In their study, they found that relational uncertainty and interference mediated the association between negative emotions and relational intimacy, whereas, my dissertation results suggest that prompting negative emotions may

216

be interference in and of itself. Thus, it is difficult to know whether *affect* originates the

interference, acts as a response to another interference, or simultaneously can be viewed

as both instigator and outcome of interference or facilitation. Scholars need to enhance

the precision of the measure by first drawing information from inductive scholarship and

then expanding on the current construction of partner influence.

   Positive – negative valence. Furthermore, Solomon and Knobloch (2001) when

conceptualizing partner influence anchor partner interference as negative-valence (e.g.,

disrupts and interferes) and partner facilitation as positive-valence (e.g., helps and

makes). Although interference disrupts day-to-day activities, it does not inherently

insinuate negative outcomes, much like facilitation does not necessarily produce positive

outcomes (Berscheid, 1983). Moreover, the valence assigned to a particular action or

behavior depends on the individual completing or receiving the interference or facilitative

act. For instance, Chelsea and Jaime had unique perspectives on the same behavior –

one, interference and the other, facilitation. Jaime continued conversing with his

previous girlfriend after initiating a relationship with Chelsea. In order to continue

texting and prevent Chelsea from getting upset, Jaime changed the name on his phone to

facilitate or reduce potential conflict between them – facilitation in his perspective.

Chelsea later intruded on his privacy and searched for the random and unknown alias

named Edward; she found out that it was his previous girlfriend and immediately

confronted Jaime about his concealment and deception. Simply put, Jaime continuously

caused Chelsea to question their relationship and incite jealousy and anger when

conversations or actions surrounded his previous girlfriend. In turn, Chelsea woke Jaime

217

up and invaded his privacy. The ability to first have a good night's sleep was prevented and moreover the ability to trust her with his personal belongings was breached.

As with all communication, the dyadic perspective offers the ability to examine the same action and its repercussions. Hence, it should be advised that framing interference as negative and facilitation as positive does not always represent an accurate perspective.

Individual and Relational Identity Themes

This dissertation argued that it was vital to consider identity as it develops and fluctuates throughout the life of relationships; thus, I initiated the exploration of identity as an integral third mechanism in the relational turbulence model beyond previous conceptualizations. The results, *static* and *dynamic identities*, demonstrated the duality of identity of individual and relational identities reflected in narratives especially during the transition from relational initiation to intimacy. Despite the fact that *static* and *dynamic identities* emerged only *dynamic identities* translated to the relational turbulence model.

Transitions can lead to changes in partners' identities and how partners see themselves, their relationships, and corresponding roles, behaviors, and expectations (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Solomon & Theiss, 2011). Identity, in this study, was conceptualized as an internalized and evolving story that expressed a way of telling about the self through story (McAdams et al., 1997) revealed in individual and joint stories that functioned to relate occurrences between past experiences, present orientation, and anticipation for future plans in the face of stressful events (Stueve & Pleck, 2001). The opportunities to enact, stabilize, and alter individual and relational identities emerge

through everyday talk (Linde, 1993; McAdams, 1993). This research builds on Solomon and colleagues' (2010) recommendation for additional research on identity issues that confront couples in turbulent transitions. This dissertation's findings offer a better understanding of how and why some individual and relational identities shift (*identity fluctuation, identity development,* and *identity disintegration)*, while others strengthen their relational bonds *(relational identity)*.

RTM linkage. My dissertation incorporated the fluctuation of identities embodied within narratives as they correspond to turbulent experiences – both individual and relational identities. Clarifying the role of identity during transitions may assist our understanding of identity initiated by turbulent processes or represented as adaptive changes in personal and relational identities (Solomon et al., 2010). The fortification or affirmation of an identity, *static identity*, most likely is associated with decreased relational uncertainty and increased facilitation. More specifically, if there is a strong *relational identity* personified, less individual and relationship uncertainty is probably present. This third mechanism spotlights how experiences of identity shift are an interpersonal phenomenon that results when individuals set or alter their identities following a change to their circumstances. When partners become more intimate, they allow their individual identity to establish or fuse to a relational identity. Eventually, as the interdependence increases, the association with and to another relational partner increases. This new mechanism offers an ability to provide connections to better understand the cognitive and psychological ambiguity assessed in relational uncertainty and the behaviors, roles, and expectations performed as a result of partner

219

interdependence. For all that, future research should continue to examine *static* and *dynamic identities* and the associations with relational uncertainty and partner interdependence to determine the causes and outcomes of dynamic identity changes that happen during and after turbulence.

Movement. The third mechanism, *identity,* existed within these stories, as similarly noted in previous RTM research, (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; Nagy, 2011; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Weber & Solomon, 2008). Thereby, this dissertation's results further reinforce and extend the relational turbulence model by providing distinctions about the movement and intensity of identity. *Static identities* represented a fixed or constant characteristic that was reinforced in participant stories, whereas *dynamic identities* represented a movement toward or away from a current identity. The metaphor of the earthquake enables, for the first time, the turbulence to be assessed in association to its strength. For instance, *identity fluctuation* under *dynamic identity* reflected an adaptation. During turbulence—or a quake in a relationship—if it is a micro or minor disruption it was felt but did not alter, damage, or change the identity; thus illustrating a movement within rather a movement between identities. On the other hand, *identity development* and *disintegration* emphasize movement to another identity toward or away. Thus, when the quake is significant and causes great seismic tremors—an intense quake in the relationship—dynamic identity represents the magnitude or strength of identity movement. The previously utilized airplane metaphor helped understand turbulence; I have added the use of an earthquake metaphor to extend the conceptualization regarding the immensity and importance of a transitional event.

220

Participant stories offered meaning and identities that were still in negotiation and could be observed through the act of storytelling (Koenig Kellas, 2005). The identification of identity themes highlighted here through the stabilizing and shifting identities may provide compelling associations between other relational turbulence mechanisms (e.g., relational uncertainty and facets of partner interdependence) for romantic relationships. This inductive approach should begin the steps towards also establishing a deductive approach similar to the other two mechanisms, relational uncertainty and partner interdependence.

Narrative Completeness

Within this dissertation, I established a narrative completeness measure asking participants to rate their own stories extending it to the storytellers' perspective utilizing Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) framework. I argue that it is appropriate to have those telling the story assess their own understanding of their narrative completeness upon recalling their experience, especially since they are knowledgeable, to a higher degree, than a stranger (or outsider coder). Their information conveyed in narrative yields evidence to how the storyteller sees the events that compromise his or her story (Vangelisti et al., 1999). This is a relevant perspective since RTM relies on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of an individual experiencing turbulence. In comparison to outsider coders, storytellers assessed their own narrative completeness on average less complete than outsider coders. Therefore, audience members could easily overlook turbulence and misattribute narrative completeness.

221

Nonetheless, I cannot discount the inconsistency or conflict that arises, rather these properties are worth studying because they tell us something that about the way individuals bias their perceptions of relationships (e.g., Duck, 1985; Duck & Sants, 1983; Fiese & Spagnola, 2005; McGhee, 1987). As a result, the individuals who had and tell about their experience are best able to assess their own understanding of their relationships and the communication of that understanding through their stories. As Fiese and Spagnola (2005) go on to posit, it is important to carefully specify which narrative aspects should be logically related to global self-report scales. The aspects created in narrative completeness reflected Koenig Kellas and Manusov's (2003) framework – further refinement within completeness must take place. The inconsistencies between participants judgment of narrative aspects (e.g., difference between females and males assessment of narrative completeness elements) may have confounded results, and this may have led to the mainly non-significant statistical findings in the narrative completeness findings in the quantitative dissertation findings.

Sorenson et al. (1993) previously investigated the completeness by rating accounts individuals offered regarding their "understanding of why the relationship ended." Their examination of completeness found that participants with more complete accounts expressed greater control over their recovery process. Similar to relationship dissolution distress, Wigren (1994) later explored narrative completion in the treatment of trauma. Narratives formed during and after traumas frequently are incomplete suggesting that trauma disrupted narrative processing. In the current study, participants were prompted to think of a time their relationship had a stressful experience (similar to

222

trauma) and to think of a *specific story* of this stressful event to then share (as opposed to asking them about 'stress' in general). I was attempting to capture a specific stressor that caused turbulence. This previous research on incomplete narratives evidences distress or trauma and clouds the ability to formulate completeness; although, not supported by empirical backing in these findings – these were all retrospective accounts enabling participants to reformulate more holistic narratives. I would argue that those in the midst of turbulence, at the global or episodic level, and asked to convey their stories would reflect similar findings to Sorenson and colleagues, especially my participants were likely at the height of the transition from casual to serious dating status. However, theoretically those at the height of this transition should resemble Sorenson's findings, they did not. But my dissertation focused on a stressor as an instance of turbulence (and not the transition from casual to serious dating); thereby it may have emphasized the dating transition less.

Additionally, the subjective narrative completeness measurement needs to be further refined to more accurately assess the narrative elements as well as before the assessment to other more theoretically established mechanisms. This may have also influenced the research questions and hypotheses. Because most were non-significant, additional analysis into the specific narrative elements from both the subjective and objective completeness as well as the similarities and differences between storytellers and audiences must be explored. Since this is the preliminary test of subjective narrative completeness further development and refinement for subjective and objective testing must take place. Females and males had slight differences that existed for the narrative

223

completeness elements; thus, the association between narrative completeness and RTM mechanisms needs to be examined more specifically utilizing several control factors to better specify its ability to assess completeness. As Koenig Kellas and Manusov (2003) note, scholars can more precisely highlight how story completion relates to other individual and relational variables. In the context of relationships, individuals must make sense of what happened in their relationship before they could then communicate control of their understanding in a complete narrative structure.

Practical Implications

When it comes to message production about relational uncertainty, partners are left to a myriad of potentially embarrassing outcomes that can unfold for individuals or relationships. These may include disappointment, dependence, discomfort, and relational damage or jeopardy (Knobloch, 2010; Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). Hence, construction and management of communication about relational uncertainty harbors risk and vulnerability for relationship participation and continuance.

Initially, relational uncertainty might be detrimental to effective message production by encouraging avoidance, elevating face threat, and impeding planning (e.g., Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). Previous research has found when it comes to relational uncertainty, individuals avoid relationship conversations (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), withhold information (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), or employ indirect communication (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) because they do not want to broach potentially unpleasant or risky outcomes. Specifically, Solomon and Theiss (2011) argued that negative cognitions and emotions that coincide with relational uncertainty correspond

224

with more topic avoidance (Knobloch-Carpenter-Theune, 2004) and more indirect communication about irritations about the relationship (Theiss & Knobloch, 2009; Theiss & Solomon, 2006b). This dissertation found that relational partners expressed self, partner, and relationship uncertainties directly to and with their partners as exhibited in the joint storytelling message production; thereby, there is a certain level of directness as evidenced in the stories that should not be ignored and further explored in practical arenas. With further analyses, stories could be examined to see when relational partners are more likely to be open and direct about their uncertainties and the impact it has on improving relational communication.

Narrative approaches as employed in this dissertation captured how individuals make and give sense to their actions, experiences, events, and relationship (Weber et al., 1987). Storytelling can shift between individual accounts and joint activities (Koenig Kellas & Manosuv, 2003). Joint storytelling involves an interactive collaborative construction of telling an account about a particular event (Mandelbaum, 1987). Weber and colleagues (1987) argued that storylines are ongoing throughout the relational narrative, and if partners agree with each other in the versions they construe through storytelling, they in turn validate their relationship. The individual and joint storytelling experience ideally affords those telling their stories to attribute meanings to their behaviors and clarify understanding. While examining written narrative, Knobloch (2007a) discovered that writing about a stressful experience could have positive effects on individuals' well-being (Pennebaker & Keough, 1997). The same is likely true for *telling* stories.

As exemplified by Erik and Nadia, they spoke of experiencing stress surrounding her constantly changing employment schedule. Both had been aware that her schedule interfered with their coordination of activities and strained their interaction and communication. Nevertheless, through the individual and then joint storytelling experience, they were able to communicate their feelings as well as even generate a solution for the stressor during the storytelling experience. Erik suggested that he could park on the street, which would then allow Nadia to have his parking space at night and prevent her from walking alone late at night through the campus. They were elated at resolving their turbulence. Nadia ended their story by saying, "That is actually a good idea and that this [study asking participants to share their stories] is actually helping our relationship." For the most part, participants disclosed their stories to both the one-person "audience" and their relational partner; this might be because they knew that the researcher would not probe or ask further questions rather allow them the opportunity to share their perspective to an outsider without judgment. As a result, storytelling enabled participants to tell about their experience that reflected their own understanding of their relationships and even allowed for opportunities for relational partners to learn new information about each other and their stressful events. That communication extended understanding of the stressors in their relationships, exposed information previously unknown, and even in some cases helped them resolve or reduce the influence of their stressors.

Relationships are complex, involving different adjustments and processes, yet there are few scripts or narratives for handling stressor processes. Difficult experiences

may shift between individual to joint processes, as such that an interdependent and collaborative nature afforded through storytelling may create a new set of exigencies for sense-making in a less confrontational manner (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). Individual storytellers expressed uncertainty in approximately 71.4% of the stories and joint storytellers expressed uncertainty in approximately 80.5% of the stories; thus, most stories did report some uncertainty. Although, the comparison is difficult to directly make since: (1) the participants told their individual stories first, followed by joint stories and (2) there were twice as many individual stories as joint stories. Nevertheless, the percentages indicated that uncertainty was expressed in stories about a stressor. As a result, joint storytelling enabled couples to navigate content and process discrepancies and differences in an open communication that is more avoidant and indirect. Practical implications as exemplified through these participants' stories may indicate, as well as future research, whether participants view storytelling as an indirect or direct communication about relational uncertainty, partner, and identity.

Strengths and Limitations

This study examined dyadic data or perceptions from both relational partners highlighting a major contribution, or strength of the dissertation. When relating to RTM, Knobloch (2006) recommended research must continue to examine the stream of conversation between couples in the back and forth flow of interaction in both individual and dyadic perspectives. Also, for individual perspectives, there has been a recent call for psychological narrative study and interpersonal communication research approaches to incorporate dyadic investigations examining the relational stories of both partners in a

227

couple – told separately – to determine the extent to which similarities and differences exist in their narrative construction (Frost, 2013). This dissertation responds to the calls of action for more dyadic data.

Dyadic designs are useful for providing insight into the interdependence between partners, which is especially relevant to understanding the holistic experience of relational turbulence couples experienced transitioning courtship. Additionally, dyadic data allowed for the employment of the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) to examine the interpersonal complexities of developing romantic relationships (e.g., Kashy & Kenny, 2000). This analytic strategy can commonly reveal the reciprocal influence that partners had on each other within ongoing romantic relationships (Theiss & Solomon, 2009).

However, with any study there are also limitations. Relational partners that opt to participate in relationship scholarship studies often report high relational qualities (e.g., satisfaction, intimacy, trust, passion, and love); therefore, it is difficult to substantiate how less satisfied couples experience turbulence. Previous research (e.g., Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Grote & Frieze, 1998; Holmberg & Holmes, 1994; Oring, 1984) indicated that individual recollections of their relational pasts are often idealized in light of their present feelings and current satisfaction levels, positively valancing their memories. Nonetheless, these findings are likely limited by both more satisfactory couples participation as well as by idealized recollections of their stressful experiences.

Moreover, even when participants participated in studies, their recollections could be further biased. The participants' selection of stressors varied and therefore timeframes

228

varied. Participants selected their stressor and completed all measures about the stressor, and some couples discussed past events while others spoke about current or pending events. Although, these recollections should not be discounted outright because of their inconsistency or conflict that arises, these properties are worth studying because they tell us something that about the way individuals bias their perceptions of relationships regardless of the time since (e.g., Duck, 1985; Duck & Sants, 1983; Fiese & Spagnola, 2005; McGhee, 1987).

Furthermore, in this study participants generated between 1 and 7 stories ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.31$, $Mdn = 2$). When asked to rate their stories using a 5-point Likert-type scale in terms of its stressfulness, on average participants rated the story they selected to tell as 3.66 ($SD = .97$, $Mdn = 3.67$). Couples spoke about stressful events that ranked average on stressfulness; even so, they may have chosen stories that were easier to communicate for face-saving purposes, had previously been shared, already had been resolved or selected for other reasons.

Additionally, in many stories participants emphasized external triggers for turbulence placing agency outside the relationship, in comparison to internal triggers locating agency within the relationship on one or both of the relational partners. On average participants rated external factors as 4.14 ($SD = .92$, $Mdn = 4$) and internal factors as 3.75 ($SD = 1.06$, $Mdn = 4$). Therefore, participants may have been narrowing the scope of story selection to share only moderately stressful experiences with external triggers. This may minimize the magnitude of turbulence examined. Highly stressful stories, directed by internal triggers, may provide more insight as to the functionality and

229

practicality of turbulence.

This study offered an examination of narration through the framework of relational turbulence. Nevertheless, there was no significance of narrative completeness between many of the associations of completeness which likely means that there are limitations to the narrative completeness measurement. One limitation may have been the assessment of past versus current measurements. For instance, assessing their current uncertainty (versus past uncertainty) may have shown a connection with narrative completeness. The timeframe for the stressor varied and no data assessed how long ago the stressor occurred; however, from the stories, it was apparent that their stressors had a range (e.g., years ago to ongoing stressors). I asked participants to assess or recall that time and answer the questions about that stressor. Future research should investigate both and see how they change. For example, if the stressor had been resolved (prior to their participation in the study) and the resolution did not emerge as they told their story – their more current perspective and associated current uncertainty may have been low and thus narrative completeness may have been higher (despite their low uncertainty at the time of the stressor). Nonetheless, this study offers the first empirical conceptualization allowing participants to assess their own completeness. This unique perspective explores the structuration of narration from the storyteller, which is especially relevant to understanding the operations of relational partners experiencing their turbulence. This measurement needs further refinement in order to reduce the difference found between couples as well as between constructs that are likely hindering possible associations.

230

Lastly, this study focused on relational turbulence in the context of collegiate, young adult relationships from a convenience sample of students from two universities. This exposed unique nuances not previously observed in prior research; however, it fails to extend RTM to other young adults relationships outside of the collegiate atmosphere as well as changes throughout the lifespan. The diversity of courtship needs to be further extended to understand how relational turbulence influences couples outside and beyond academic contexts to determine whether the findings are consistent and generalizable to other populations.

Future Directions

This section explores the next directions for future research based on preliminary steps and key findings supported in this dissertation. I propose future directions for extending and integrating RTM mechanisms, examining differentiations between episodic and global level narration, expanding identity through linguistic markers, and exploring storytelling and retelling to diverse audiences.

Expanding and Integrating RTM Mechanisms

This dissertation examined relational turbulence mechanisms, (1) relational uncertainty, (2) partner interdependence, and (3) identity. I discussed the expansion and integration of findings described and defined from individual and joint stories.

First, relational uncertainty and its pre-existing themes and subthemes were verified through these results. However, the addition of two new themes emerged, *perceived social network involvement* and *retrospection.* Earlier scholarship (e.g., Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006) had already conceived of the *perceived network*

231

involvement as a mediator, which indicates its presence in turbulence across samples. Nevertheless, future research should begin to also include *retrospection* and attempt to find replication of its emergence in other samples.

Second, research regarding partner interdependence needs to replicate methodological procedures that parallel the construction of relational uncertainty. My results indicated that several new interference themes emerged, *physical proximity, relational de-escalation, unfulfilled relational standards,* and *withholding* as well as facilitation themes that emerged, *affect, agreeableness, conversations.* These findings highlight that more nuances exist within that conceptualizations; thus, I argue that research on partner interdependence and facilitation should include more triangulation to expand and refine the current five statements on interference and five statements on beyond activities, goals, plans, routines, and schedules.

Third, individual and relational identities emerged as *static* and *dynamic* configurations. Prior research and this study's findings indicate that identity is a reoccurring mechanism that needs exploration. I further initiated identity as an integral third mechanism in the relational turbulence model beyond previous conceptualizations; nonetheless, additional research is necessary to also triangulate these inductive findings with deductive conclusions.

Episodic and Global Narration

Understanding if a narrative can achieve completeness may hinge on the whether the turbulence event is episodic or global. Unfortunately, this dissertation's results did not provide evidence that sense-making incompleteness was related to relational

232

turbulence mechanisms occurring in their relationship narrative. However, I speculate on future directions within the level of relational turbulence that might more specifically find those distinctions in more or less complete narratives.

When assessing relational transitions, it is necessary to examine how episodic and global uncertainty influences communicative exchanges. Episodic levels examine ambiguity elicited by discrete events, whereas global levels assesse people's general sense of ambiguity about involvement in a relationship (Knobloch, 2007a). However, the distinction for laypersons may not be as clear-cut. Participants were asked to think of a specific story related to a stressful event in their relationship (e.g., episodic event), but based on their stories, some participants and couples focused on global levels (e.g., employment choices, long-distance relationships, on-again/off-again relationship, and social network approval).

Knobloch (2007a) asserts that future research needs to examine the link between episodic and global levels. This is particularly pertinent because she goes onto emphasize that relational scholars must address how discrete episodes are woven into global fabric of everyday experiences (e.g., Duck & Mielli, 1986; Planap, 1987). Understanding the distinction and intersection between episodic and global levels may help distinguish variations in narrative completeness elements. Duck and Sants (1983) note that people reduce fluctuations in close relationships when providing global accounts. More specially, the episodic events are discrete and often likely have a complete narrative with beginning, middle, and end. Bamberg (2007) argues that narratives have individuals reconstruct their history of what happened as a backdrop

233

against what they recall, formulating a story about those events and simultaneously creating meaningful connections to those events. The ability to craft better character development with more coherent and sequential order becomes more manageable if the event is discrete and specific. In comparison, if a general sense of ambiguity penetrates the relationship, the conclusion about the relationship is yet to be determined which parallels fragmented, nonlinear storytelling. The global level embodies a larger framework inherent within the heart of the field (Knobloch, 2007a). Solomon and Knobloch (2001) argue that global estimates may be confounded by perceptions of intimacy. Furthermore, as Knobloch (2007a) posits the intersection between episodic and global levels needs additional investigation for people's reports at the global level may depend on recent fluctuations in the episodic. Thus, future research should continue to explore both the distinctions and intersection between episodic and global levels.

Moreover, this question about the distinction and intersection may simultaneously influence the ability to speculate about the impact and conclusion of stories. Depending on the level, stories may be more or less in flux as they reflect the sense-making experienced through the development of the relationship. Specifically, the construction of the narrative might encapsulate the lived experiences of story still in flux, or an *antenarrative*. Antenarratives are an attempt to provide speculative direction to lessen the ambiguous nature of sense-making (Weick, 1995) which simultaneously reinforces what turbulence embodies (e.g., changes in people's circumstances raising questions about their romantic relationship and disrupting their everyday routines). The art of reflection through storytelling allows individuals to make sense of their world that is

constantly occurring within and between relational partners as they navigate from the unknown to known.

Utilizing episodic levels emphasizes retrospective narrative theory, where the audience experiences storytelling as an after-effect with an ending already predisposed, foretold, and most likely known (Bamberg, 2006). Global levels reflected more 'in progress,' blow-by-blow analysis that analyzes narratives as it is occurring rather than offering post-hoc interpretations (LeFebvre & Blackburn, 2013). The antenarrative perspective contends that stories exist as ongoing interactive processes attributed from the selected available antenarratives (e.g., fragmented events) (Boje, 2006). These stories serve to highlight the context of a living story space where there is still opportunity for evaluation and concretization into the formulation of narrative. Thereby, as couples transverse their relationships, their stories should resemble an approaching 'bet' on their future (symbolizing less narrative completeness). As couples resolve doubts these stories should highlight the context of a living story space where there is still opportunity for evaluation and concretization into the formulation of relational narrative.

To summarize, the characterization of episodic and global levels appeared to be blurred for laypersons. Their conceptualization and operationalization may have confounding effects on the understanding of narrative completeness. Those expressing episodic level stories should, to a greater extent, have retrospective narratives with a beginning, middle, and end; whereas, for those with global level stories of turbulence, to a greater extent, have stories where the overall perceptions create antenarratives. Future research needs to assess narrative completeness for each of these levels differently.

235

Identity as Linguistic Markers

Beyond thematic narrative understanding, analyzing more specific nuances in linguistic identity markers may indicate individual and relational identities. McAdams, and colleagues (1997) conceptualize identity as an internalized and evolving story that expresses a way of telling about the self through story. Identity then is argued as a dependent story function relating to occurrences between past experiences and anticipation for future plans (Stueve & Pleck, 2001). Hence, the ways people think are constantly fluctuating and this shift between the use of *I* and *we* can be remarkably subtle yet telling (Pennebaker, 2011). Words can indicate powerful markers of identity for conveying autonomous and individualistic or shared and joint entities especially in relationships.

Previously, Knobloch and Solomon (2003) explored manifestations of relationship conceptualizations in partner conversations. Within their study, they examined reliance on relational knowledge, interdependence, and mutual commitment. In particular, they argued that grammatical use of dyadic pronouns (e.g., we, we've, let's, our) in partner conversations were negatively associated with interference and positively associated with facilitation. Participants' use of dyadic pronouns revealed that partners' interference shared small negative associations with dyadic pronoun usage, whereas partner's facilitation was not correlated with dyadic pronoun usage. They found a decrease in the use of *we* associated with couples experiencing interference in their communication, which can generate a communicative environment with a lower ability to converse freely about relationship participation (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). This

investigation began exploring dyadic conversation and identifying important conversational variables that may coincide with interdependence and mutual commitment. Although pronoun usage in discussing relational turbulence has marginal associations (see Knobloch & Solomon, 2003), conversational exploration may be more appropriately applied to assess identity.

Furthermore, Knobloch and Solomon (2003) argued that partner interdependence, the second RTM mechanism, highlights behavior modifications. Because analyzing pronoun usage has emphasized cognition and emotion in individual and relational interdependence, I argue that pronoun usage may more appropriately represent the orientation of individual and relational identity as stabilization or alteration as couples experience transitions. Interdependence theory assumes that individuals transform internal processes accompanying interpersonal events and their linguistic markers relating to inclusive and exclusive pronoun usage should evidence this. Thus, continuing to expand the orientation of individual and relational identities in RTM as a cognitive restructuring (e.g., Agnew, Arriaga, & Wilson, 2008) may highlight interdependence as articulated in storytelling identities. Therefore, future research should continue to examine the static and dynamic identities identified within this dissertation as well as investigate other linguistic markers that evidence identities solidification and alternation.

Storytelling and Retelling to Diverse Audiences

The recollections of storytelling were completed to a single unfamiliar audience member. The retelling could be a key determinant in how stories solidify over time as individuals and relationships create a more scripted narrative for their audience and

themselves (LeFebvre & Blackburn, 2013). In the retelling of a narrative, it functions to

find elements that are essential and most relevant for individuals to tell to their audiences.

For this study, 60.6% of participants in their individual storytelling indicated that they

had previously told their story, and of these 52.1% retold their story multiple times.

Similarly, for joint storytelling participants 55.3% had previously told their story,

although this is with less frequency than with individual retelling their stories. The ways

in which people construct meaning via their telling and retelling of relationship stories

provides key insights into their individual and relational health (Frost, 2013). Future

research should examine the telling and retelling of individual and joint narratives to

determine the consistencies that are maintained within the stories' content and their

influences on relational health.

Additionally, the individual's audience (researcher) may have influenced their

choosing to retell particular stories or to craft various identities indicated by their

memberships to and with others. "Because legitimation by others is crucial to the

identity of a relationship, third-party storytelling does important relational identity work

for a pair by constructing a public image of the relationship" (Baxter & Pittman, 2001, p.

14). Thereby, the public image may alter depending on to whom and how many times

individuals have told and retold their individual and relational stories. Future research

should begin to examine how storytelling functions to communicate relational turbulence

mechanisms in qualitative and quantitative methodologies in storytelling and retellings to

diverse audiences.

Conclusion

In Chapter 7, I discussed the theoretical and practical implications associated the qualitative and quantitative results that emerged in the individual and joint stories through the theoretical model of relational turbulence. Additionally, this chapter highlighted several limitations as well as future directions for relational turbulence and narratives. In Chapter 8, I will summarize the examination of individual and joint sense-making in stressful relational narratives.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This dissertation examined individual and joint storytelling as a communicative process to explore relational turbulence displayed in relational stories about stressful events. I began with three goals. The first goal examined the specific stressful events that exhibited turbulence in individual and relational communication. In this dissertation, I argued that it is valuable to examine how individuals and relationships negotiate discomfort, negative emotions, and difficulties that often ensue during times of change. The process of seeking and reducing information surrounding similarity or difference between relational partners occurs naturally as they responded to change through stressful events. Next, the story form encompasses linguistic expressions used to hold thought together but also the human effort to cope with the untoward and unexpected in life (Bruner, 1986). Thus, the second dissertation goal focused on the particular expressions individuals chose to highlight within their stories through three relational turbulence mechanisms: relational uncertainty, partner interdependence, and individual and relational identity. I examined previous and new conceptualizations that captured nuances about relational turbulence not previously examined through narration. The third goal examined how relational turbulence within relationships influences the storytelling structure used in individual and joint stories. Difficult experiences may shift between individual to joint processes, as such an interdependent and collaborative nature of storytelling creates a new set of exigencies for sense-making (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). As a result, I articulated joint storytelling forces couples to navigate content and

240

process discrepancies and differences. In sum, I engaged in an investigation that combines (1) a review of the theoretical framework for relational turbulence model and (2) an examination of the content and structure of individual and joint relational storytelling.

Tables

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Proportions

Age

	Female		Male		Total	
	M = 20.15		*M* = 20.93		*M* = 20.54	
	n	%	*n*	%	*N*	%
18	4	8.5	1	2.1	5	5.4
19	11	23.4	8	17	19	20.2
20	18	38.3	12	25.5	30	31.9
21	10	21.3	10	21.3	20	21.3
22	2	4.3	8	17	10	10.6
23	1	2.1	3	6.4	4	4.3
24	--	--	2	4.3	2	2.1
25	--	--	2	4.3	2	2.1
29	1	2.1	--	--	1	1.1
	47		46		93	

Note: One male participant did not indicate his age.

Ethnicities

	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Caucasian	29	61.7	32	68.1	61	64.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	8	17	7	14.9	15	16
Latino/a or Hispanic	5	10.6	3	6.4	8	8.5
Black or African American	1	2.1	2	4.3	3	3.2
Middle Eastern	--	--	2	4.3	2	2.1
Native American	1	2.1	--	--	1	1.1
Other or Multiple Ethnicities	3	6.4	1	2.1	4	4.3
	47		47		94	

Table 2

Differences between Samples in Participants' Demographic Proportions

Age

	University 1		University 2		Total	
	$M = 20.75$		$M = 20.45$		$M = 20.54$	
	n	%	*n*	%	*N*	%
18	2	8.3	3	4.3	5	5.4
19	2	8.3	17	24.6	19	20.2
20	8	33.3	22	28.9	30	31.9
21	5	20.8	15	21.7	20	21.3
22	5	20.8	5	7.2	10	10.6
23	--	--	4	5.7	4	4.3
24	1	4.2	1	1.4	2	2.1
25	1	4.3	1	1.4	2	2.1
29	--	--	1	1.4	1	1.1
	24		69		93	

Note: One male participant did not indicate his age.

Ethnicities

	University 1		University 2		Total	
	n	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Caucasian	16	66.7	45	64.3	61	64.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	4.2	14	20.0	15	16
Latino/a or Hispanic	5	20.8	3	4.3	8	8.5
Black or African American	--	--	3	4.3	3	3.2
Middle Eastern	2	8.3	--	--	2	2.1
Native American	--	--	1	1.4	1	1.1
Other or Multiple Ethnicities	--	--	4	5.7	4	4.3
	24		70		93	

Table 3

Participants' Relationship Statuses Proportions

Relationship Status

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	*%*	*n*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Casually Dating	2	4.3	3	6.4	5	5.3
Seriously Dating	10	21.3	6	12.8	16	17
Long-term Committed Relationship	32	68.1	34	72.8	66	70.2
Engaged	2	4.3	2	4.3	4	4.3
Domestic Partnership	1	2.1	2	4.3	3	3.2
	47		47		94	

On-Again/Off-Again Relationship Status

	Female		Male		Total	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*N*	*%*
On-Off Status	9	19.1	13	27.7	22	23.4

Table 4

Pre-Relationship Story Elicitation Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities

Relationship Quality Components

	Female			Male			Total		
	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*
Commitment	.97	6.44	1.03	.93	6.52	.77	.95	6.48	.90
Intimacy	.78	6.25	.71	.84	6.14	.80	.82	6.2	.76
Love	.94	6.39	1.04	.90	6.32	.93	.92	6.36	.98
Passion	.74	5.21	1.11	.87	5.32	1.28	.82	5.27	1.19
Satisfaction	.91	6.26	.81	.92	6.25	.82	.91	6.25	.81
Trust	.68	6.47	.64	.84	6.36	.89	.78	6.41	.77
Total	.86	6.17	.70	.95	6.15	.76	.94	6.19	.46

Note. Females ($n = 47$), Males ($n = 47$), and Total ($N = 94$)

Table 5

Relationship Story Generation

Number of Stories Generated

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Stories Generated	2.34	1.33	2	2.13	1.3	2	2.24	1.31	2

Note. Female (*n* = 41), Male (*n* = 39), and Total (*N* = 80)

Average Story Stressor

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Stress per Story	3.65	.85	3.58	3.58	1.09	4	3.66	.97	3.67

Note. Female (*n* = 41), Male (*n* = 39), and Total (*N* = 80)

Table 6

Relational Turbulence Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities

Relational Uncertainty

	Female			Male			Total		
	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*
Self Uncertainty	.99	2.39	.17	.98	2.19	.16	.98	2.29	.15
Partner Uncertainty	.99	2.50	.16	.99	2.31	.10	.99	2.41	.11
Relationship Uncertainty	.97	2.59	.29	.97	2.55	.22	.97	2.57	.24
Total	.99	2.36	.22	.99	2.35	.21	.99	2.35	.20

Partner Interdependence

	Female			Male			Total		
	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	A	*M*	*SD*
Interference	.91	2.52	.25	.90	2.38	.19	.90	2.45	.20
Facilitation	.76	4.54	.25	.88	4.46	.17	.83	4.50	.20

Table 7

Relational Turbulence Bivariate Correlations

		V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1	Self Uncertainty	--				
V2	Partner Uncertainty	.58**	--			
V3	Relationship Uncertainty	.70**	.77**	--		
V4	Partner Interference	.24*	-.16	-.27**	--	
V5	Partner Facilitation	.20	-.26*	.32**	-.43**	--

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

Table 8

Relational Turbulence Female and Male Bivariate Correlations

		V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1	Self Uncertainty	--	.51**	.72**	-.10	.20
V2	Partner Uncertainty	.70**	--	.71**	.03	.07
V3	Relationship Uncertainty	.68**	.84**	--	-.13	.18
V4	Partner Interference	-.41**	-.34*	-.43**	--	-.30*
V5	Partner Facilitation	.21	.42**	.45**	-.56**	--

Note. Split bivariate correlations for females (upper diagonal) and males (lower diagonal). *p < .05, **p < .01

249

Table 9

Individual Story Time in Seconds

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Individual Stories	226.7	145.59	167	213.87	108.92	182	220.29	128.04	174

Note. Female ($n = 47$), Male ($n = 47$), and Total ($N = 94$)

Table 10

Individual Narrative Completeness Bivariate Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1	Arranged the experience in event sequence	--																								
2	Explained the occurrence chronologically	.73	--																							
3	Discussed the experience based on the events that happened	.64	.55	--																						
4	Told the experience in the order it occurred	.65	.75	.60	--																					
5	Contained causes for the explained events	.41	.38	.50	.53	--																				
6	Presented causes for the explained events	.35	.32	.46	.38	.48	--																			
7	Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred	.19	.36	.27	.44	.65	.31	--																		
8	Described individuals involved in the event	.03	.03	.12	.16	.20	.13	.25	--																	
9	Explained the characters involved	.20	.25	.17	.30	.16	.07	.10	.66	--																
10	Revealed who was involved in the situation	.24	.33	.19	.33	.15	.10	.07	.44	.63	--															
11	Correctly described your feelings	.17	.14	.12	.26	.15	.30	.17	-.10	.16	.11	--														
12	Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved	.02	-.01	.23	.17	.10	.33	.05	.09	.12	.09	.39	--													
13	Used emotions to describe the experience	.13	.18	.26	.34	.30	.37	.25	.15	.19	.19	.45	.51	--												
14	Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence	.13	.20	.24	.36	.33	.39	.35	.01	.14	.08	.47	.60	.68	--											
15	Expressed an overall meaning for the experience	.25	.13	.37	.38	.29	.30	.30	.10	.19	.13	.32	.49	.52	.57	--										
16	Provided a thorough account of the events	.27	.32	.36	.33	.31	.28	.27	.30	.29	.28	.10	.16	.34	.30	.42	--									
17	Detailed a clear history of the events	.37	.49	.42	.46	.33	.21	.25	.31	.27	.40	.14	.16	.41	.34	.40	.72	--								
18	Made an overall point	.25	.20	.37	.38	.42	.36	.36	.18	.16	.18	.23	.17	.35	.37	.43	.44	.45	--							
19	Detailed events in an easy to follow manner	.44	.45	.34	.54	.42	.26	.33	.19	.26	.32	.19	.13	.31	.33	.32	.45	.53	.35	--						
20	Described a straightforward event description	.32	.47	.31	.47	.34	.27	.35	.28	.43	.39	.27	.13	.31	.26	.29	.46	.52	.36	.62	--					
21	Outlined actions in clear fashion	.41	.47	.36	.51	.44	.28	.32	.16	.38	.37	.17	.22	.33	.36	.41	.40	.53	.39	.62	.70	--				
22	Presented a complete understanding of the events	.23	.33	.35	.41	.34	.20	.36	.21	.27	.37	.18	.26	.31	.37	.48	.48	.62	.54	.58	.60	.66	--			
23	Assigned responsibility to the story's characters	.08	.09	.11	.22	.15	.22	.28	.21	.26	.23	.34	.34	.40	.38	.39	.36	.24	.04	.14	.30	.35	.36	--		
24	Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the .36situation	.10	.10	.10	.20	.21	.12	.18	.24	.26	.22	.32	.23	.27	.29	.27	.37	.26	.35	.18	.31	.36.	.37	.71	--	
25	Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence	-.13	.06	-.07	.24	-.17	.08	.05	.00	.06	.05	.19	.22	.25	.25	.14	.07	.06	.20	.07	.21	.14	.15	.36	.37	--

Table 11

Total Participants Factor Loadings for Principal Components Analysis of Individual Narrative Completeness

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Communality
1	Arranged the experience in event sequence					.8		.75
2	Explained the occurrence chronologically					.82		.81
3	Discussed the experience based on the events that happened					.47		.64
4	Told the experience in the order it occurred					.67		.76
5	Contained causes for the explained events						.78	.76
6	Presented causes for the explained events						.50	.58
7	Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred						.73	.64
8	Described individuals involved in the event			.88				.81
9	Explained the characters involved			.86				.82
10	Revealed who was involved in the situation			.71				.69
11	Correctly described your feelings		.53					.58
12	Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved		.88					.72
13	Used emotions to describe the experience		.73					.66
14	Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence		.76					.74
15	Expressed an overall meaning for the experience		.62					.61
16	Provided a thorough account of the events	.64						.61
17	Detailed a clear history of the events	.75	.71					.74
18	Made an overall point						.47	.56
19	Detailed events in an easy to follow manner	.68						.64
20	Described a straightforward event description	.59						.67
21	Outlined actions in clear fashion	.62						.68
22	Presented a complete understanding of the events	.80						.74
23	Assigned responsibility to the story's characters				-.68			.72
24	Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the situation				-.74			.70
25	Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence				-.70			.52
	Eigenvalues	8.47	2.68	2.22	1.38	1.21	1.19	
	% of variance	33.9	10.7	8.87	5.51	4.85	4.74	

Note. Direct Oblimin Rotation and loadings less than .40 were omitted to improve clarity.

Table 12

Female Factor Loadings for Principal Components Analysis of Individual Narrative Completeness

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Communality
1	Arranged the experience in event sequence	.84						.77
2	Explained the occurrence chronologically	.83						.78
3	Discussed the experience based on the events that happened	.48					-.63	.81
4	Told the experience in the order it occurred	.58						.68
5	Contained causes for the explained events				-.84			.79
6	Presented consequences for the explained events		.45					.53
7	Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred				-.90			.84
8	Described individuals involved in the event					.87		.71
9	Explained the characters involved					.84		.83
10	Revealed who was involved in the situation					.62		.6
11	Correctly described your feelings		.68					.68
12	Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved		.75					.69
13	Used emotions to describe the experience		.85					.84
14	Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence		.70					.77
15	Expressed an overall meaning for the experience						-.72	.66
16	Provided a thorough account of the events						-.61	.66
17	Detailed a clear history of the events	.40						.64
18	Made an overall point						-.58	.52
19	Detailed events in an easy to follow manner	.74						.68
20	Described a straightforward event description	.57						.68
21	Outlined actions in clear fashion	.63						.68
22	Presented a complete understanding of the events	.42						.69
23	Assigned responsibility to the story's characters			.70				.74
24	Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the situation			.78				.72
25	Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence			.72				.57
	Eigenvalues	7.84	2.9	2.4	1.76	1.47	1.2	
	% of variance	31.37	11.61	9.58	7.04	5.87	4.8	70.26

Note. Direct Oblimin Rotation and loadings less than .40 were omitted to improve clarity.

Table 13

Male Factor Loadings for Principal Components Analysis for Individual Narrative Completeness

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Communality
1	Arranged the experience in event sequence		.88					.81
2	Explained the occurrence chronologically		.86					.83
3	Discussed the experience based on the events that happened		.58					.71
4	Told the experience in the order it occurred		.71					.79
5	Contained causes for the explained events				.77			.82
6	Presented consequences for the explained events				.83			.72
7	Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred				.68			.66
8	Described individuals involved in the event			.79				.84
9	Explained the characters involved			.92				.87
10	Revealed who was involved in the situation			.79				.76
11	Correctly described your feelings					.84		.72
12	Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved					.74		.72
13	Used emotions to describe the experience	.47						.66
14	Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence					.57		.87
15	Expressed an overall meaning for the experience	.45						.71
16	Provided a thorough account of the events	.81						.77
17	Detailed a clear history of the events	.91						.8
18	Made an overall point	.53						.63
19	Detailed events in an easy to follow manner	.82						.76
20	Described a straightforward event description	.55						.63
21	Outlined actions in clear fashion	.73						.76
22	Presented a complete understanding of the events	.80						.73
23	Assigned responsibility to the story's characters						.60	.76
24	Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the situation						.51	.59
25	Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence						.95	.79
	Eigenvalues	9.59	2.94	2.38	1.64	1.16	1.01	
	% of variance	38.36	11.77	9.52	6.54	4.62	4.02	74.85

Note. Direct Oblimin Rotation and loadings less than .40 were omitted to improve clarity.

Table 14

Individual and Joint Narrative Completeness Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities

Individual Narrative Completeness Elements

	Female			Male			Total		
	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*
Coherence	.87	3.94	.07	.92	3.97	.15	.89	3.95	.09
Meaningfulness	.81	3.87	.26	.80	3.71	.29	.80	3.79	.27
Character Development	.78	4.31	.16	.84	4.31	.17	.81	4.31	.16
Attribution	.72	3.58	.47	.71	3.79	.31	.72	3.68	.38
Sequence	.86	4.28	.11	.89	4.08	.09	.88	4.18	.09
Cause	.66	4.14	.13	.80	4.06	.16	.89	4.09	.09
All Elements	.89	4.03	.29	.92	3.96	.25	.91	4.00	.26

Note. Female (*n* = 47), Male (*n* = 47), and Total (*N* = 94)

Joint Narrative Completeness Elements

	Female			Male			Total		
	α	*M*	*SD*	A	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*
Coherence	.88	4.12	.11	.93	3.96	.07	.91	4.04	.07
Meaningfulness	.87	4.00	.09	.86	3.92	.14	.87	3.96	.10
Character Development	.86	4.28	.15	.88	4.24	.09	.87	4.26	.11
Attribution	.81	3.92	.19	.80	3.95	.24	.81	3.94	.21
Sequence	.83	4.07	.19	.91	4.03	.05	.87	4.05	.11
Cause	.80	4.20	.11	.78	4.05	.06	.79	4.12	.06
All Elements	.94	4.12	.16	.97	4.00	.14	.96	4.06	.14

Note. Female (*n* = 47), Male (*n* = 47), and Total (*N* = 94)

Table 15

Individual and Joint Narrative Repetitiveness Proportions

Individual Narrative Repetitiveness

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	*n*	%	*N*	%
Once	5	10.6	3	6.4	8	8.5
Two to Four	17	36.2	16	34	33	35.1
Five to Nine	6	12.8	3	6.4	9	9.6
Ten plus	0	0	2	4.2	2	2.1
Total	28	59.6	24	51.1	52	55.3

Note: For individual storytelling 52 (55.3%) participants previously told their story.

Joint Narrative Repetitiveness

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	*n*	%	*N*	%
Once	7	14.9	10	21.3	17	18.1
Two to Four	17	36.2	15	31.9	32	34
Five to Nine	5	10.6	3	6.4	8	8.5
Ten plus	0	0	1	2.1	1	1.1
Total	29	61.7	29	61.7	58	61.7

Note: For joint storytelling 58 (61.7%) participants previously told their story.

Table 16

Individual and Joint Narrative Accuracy Means and Standard Deviations

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Individual	4.43	.68	5	4.55	.62	5	4.49	.65	5
Joint	4.24	.6	4	4.49	.55	5	4.37	.59	4

Note. Female ($n = 47$), Male ($n = 47$), and Total ($N = 94$)

Table 17

Narrative Intensity and Responsibility Means and Standard Deviations

Narrative Intensity

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Self	4.09	1.05	4	3.74	1.03	4	3.91	1.05	4
Partner	3.73	1.07	4	4.09	1.04	4	3.91	1.07	4
Relationship	3.96	1.09	4	3.85	1.06	4	3.9	1.07	4

Note. Female (*n* = 47), Male (*n* = 47), and Total (*N* = 94)

Narrative Responsibility

	Female			Male			Total		
	M	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*
Internal	3.85	.97	4	3.66	1.15	4	3.75	1.06	4
External	4.17	.83	4	4.11	1.01	4	4.14	.92	4
Self	3.50	1.07	4	3.53	1.32	4	3.52	1.19	4
Partner	3.15	1.41	4	2.98	1.31	3	3.06	1.36	4
Relationship	3.04	1.3	3	2.68	1.29	3	2.86	1.30	3

Note. Female (*n* = 47), Male (*n* = 47), and Total (*N* = 94)

Table 18

Transitional Events Reported in Dating Relationship Stories

Categories	Frequency (%)	Subcategories
Career/Academic-related obstacles	18 (24.7)	Status
		Relocation
		Temporary relocation
		Distraction
		Employment demands
		Employment choice
Relational de-escalation	12 (16.4)	Relationship dissolution
		Conflict
		Quality time
External relational threats	10 (13.7)	New potential partners
		Previous partners
Social networks	10 (13.7)	Family and/or friends disruptions
		Disapproval by family and/or friends
		Negative association
Relational escalation	6 (8.2)	Discussion about the relationship
Relational transgression	5 (6.9)	General transgression
		Infidelity
		Lying
Health	3 (4.1)	Acute health condition
		Chronic health condition
		Family-related health conditions
Finances	2 (2.7)	Overspending
		Insufficient funds
Physical encounters	2 (2.7)	
Get-to-know you time	1 (1.4)	
Personality characteristics	1 (1.4)	
Realization about the relationship	1 (1.4)	
Pets	1 (1.4)	
Special events	1 (1.4)	

Table 19

Individual and Joint Narrative Comparison of Relational Uncertainty Themes

	Self Uncertainty			
	Desire	Evaluation	Goals	Perceived Network Involvement
Individual	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joint	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Partner Uncertainty			
	Desire	Evaluation	Goals	Perceived Network Involvement
Individual	✓	✓	✓	
Joint	✓	✓		

	Relationship Uncertainty					
	Behavioral Norms	Mutuality	Definition	Future	Perceived Network Involvement	Retrospection
Individual	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joint	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Table 20

Individual and Joint Narrative Comparison of Partner Interference Themes

Individual Stories	Joint Stories
Affect	*Affect*
Prompting negative emotions	Prompting negative emotions
Affection toward/from others	Affection toward/from others
Physical proximity	*Physical proximity*
Absence	Absence
Mediated communication	Mediated communication
	Neglect
Relational de-escalation	*Relational de-escalation*
Breakup	Breakup
Conflict	Conflict
Unfulfilled relational standards	*Unfulfilled relational standards*
Expectations	Expectations
Intrusion	Intrusion
Rules or norms	
Time Management	*Time Management*
Goals	Goals
Plans	Plans
	Withholding
	Concealment
	Deception

Note: The italicized names are the main themes and indented non-italicized are the subthemes.

Table 21

Individual and Joint Narrative Comparison of Partner Facilitation Themes

Individual Stories	Joint Stories
Affect	*Affect*
Empathy	Empathy
Expression of affection	Expression of affection
Support	Support
Agreeableness	*Agreeableness*
Accommodation	Accommodation
Collaboration	Collaboration
Decision-making	Decision-making
Reconciliation	Reconciliation
Conversation	*Conversation*
Concealing	
Heart-to-heart	
Time management	*Time management*

Note: The italicized names are the main themes and indented non-italicized are the subthemes.

Table 22

Individual and Joint Narrative Comparison of Identity Themes

Individual Stories	Joint Stories
Static	*Static*
Individual identity	Individual identity
Relational identity	Relational identity
Identity fluctuation	Identity fluctuation
Dynamic	*Dynamic*
Relational identity development	Relational identity development
Relational identity disintegration	Relational identity disintegration

Note: The italicized names are the main themes and indented non-italicized are the subthemes.

Table 23

Bivariate Correlations among Variables at the Individual- and Couple-Level

	Individual-Level	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9
V1	Sex	--								
V2	Self Uncertainty	-.16	--							
V3	Partner Uncertainty	-.03	.58**	--						
V4	Relationship Uncertainty	-.02	.70**	.77**	--					
V5	Partner Interference	.07	.24*	-.16	-.27**	--				
V6	Partner Facilitation	.04	.20	-.26*	.32**	-.43**	--			
V7	Individual Narrative Completeness	.04	.13	.06	.12	-.04	.13	--		
V8	Joint Narrative Completeness	.06	.11	.01	.02	-.02	.23*	.59**	--	
V9	Total Narrative Completeness	-.06	.85**	.89**	.93**	-.25*	.29**	.11	.05	--

*Note. N = 94. *p < .05, **p < .01*

	Couple-Level	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9
V1	Sex	--								
V2	Self Uncertainty	--	--							
V3	Partner Uncertainty	--	.78**	--						
V4	Relationship Uncertainty	--	.75**	.86**	--					
V5	Partner Interference	--	-.40**	-.29	-.35*	--				
V6	Partner Facilitation	--	.24	.32*	.39**	-.38**	--			
V7	Individual Narrative Completeness	--	.05	.09	.08	-.03	.03	--		
V8	Joint Narrative Completeness	--	.04	-.002	-.03	-.02	.21	.62**	--	
V9	Total Narrative Completeness	--	.90**	.95**	-.94**	-.37*	.34*	.08	.002	--

*Note. N = 47. *p < .05, **p < .01*

Table 24

MLM Analyses Predicting Individual Composite Narrative Completeness

	Model 3a		Model 3b		Model 3c	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*t*	Coeff. (*SE*)	*t*	Coeff. (*SE*)	*T*
Intercept	3.89 (0.26)	14.96**	4.09 (0.16)	25.24**	3.36 (0.31)	10.64**
Relational Uncertainty	0.04 (0.05)	0.67	--	--	--	--
Partner Interference	--	--	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.25	--	--
Partner Facilitation	--	--	--	--	0.16 (0.07)	2.35*

Note. The null model (Model 1) indicated composite narrative completeness was interdependent $\chi 2$ (46) = 74.34, p < .05, variance components: u_{0j} (Level 2) = 0.09, r_{ij} (Level 1) = 0.22, ICC = 0.24 Accounting for the interdependence thus is necessary for this dependent variable because there are residuals between group variance. Variance Explained = estimate of variance explained by each model as compared to the null model reported in the text = ((null model u_{0j} subtract each model u_{0j})/ null model u_{0j}); see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002. ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p < .05, **p < .01)

Table 25

MLM Analyses Predicting Composite Narrative Completeness in Joint Storytelling

	Model 6b	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*t*
Intercept	3.91 (0.24)	16.22**
Actor Self Uncertainty	0.06 (004)	1.65
Partner Self Uncertainty	-0.05 (0.04)	-1.23

Note. The null model (Model 1) indicated joint composite narrative completeness was not interdependent $\chi2$ (46) = 56.37, p = .14, variance components: u_{0j} (Level 2) = 0.02, r_{ij} (Level 1) = 0.22, ICC = 0.26 Accounting for the interdependence would thus not be necessary for this dependent variable because there was no residual between group variance; however, to assess the partner effects on actors scores, I still employed APIM. Variance Explained = estimate of variance explained by each model as compared to the null model reported in the text = (null model u_{0j} subtract each model u_{0j})/ null model u_{0j}); see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002. ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p < .05, **p < .01)

Table 26

MLM Analyses Predicting Composite Narrative Completeness in Individual Storytelling

	Model 7b	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*T*
Intercept	3.87 (0.21)	18.32**
Actor Partner Uncertainty	0.01 (0.04)	0.41
Partner Partner Uncertainty	0.01 (0.04)	0.36

Note. The null model (Model 1) depicted in Table 28.

ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p* < .05, **p* < .01)

Table 27

MLM Analyses Predicting Composite Narrative Completeness in Individual Storytelling

	Model 8b	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*T*
Intercept	3.89 (0.21)	18.18**
Actor Relationship Uncertainty	0.06 (0.04)	1.53
Partner Relationship Uncertainty	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.40

Note.　The null model (Model 1) depicted in Table 28.

ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p* < .05, **p* < .01)

Table 28

MLM Analyses Predicting Narrative Completeness in Individual Storytelling

	Model 9b	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*T*
Intercept	4.03 (0.17)	23.37**
Actor Partner Interference	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.38
Partner Partner Interference	0.01 (0.05)	0.11

Note. The null model (Model 1) depicted in Table 28.
   ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p* < .05, **p* < .01)

Table 29

MLM Analyses Predicting Total Narrative Completeness in Individual Storytelling

	Model 10b	
Fixed Effects	Coeff. (*SE*)	*T*
Intercept	3.94 (0.34)	11.70**
Actor Partner Facilitation	0.09 (0.06)	1.62
Partner Partner Facilitation	-0.08 (0.06)	-1.39

Note.   The null model (Model 1) depicted in Table 28.
        ICC = intraclass correlation; APIM = actor-partner interdependence model (*p* < .05, **p* < .01)

Appendix A
Demographics

This survey asks about your current dating relationship. Please keep your partner and relationship in mind as you complete the questions.

What is your age? _____ years

What is your sex?
_____Male
_____Female

What is your ethnicity? (Please mark all that apply)
_____African-American or Black
_____Asian or Pacific Islander
_____Caucasian/White
_____Hispanic or Latino/a
_____Middle Eastern
_____Native American
_____Other, please specify _____

In total, how long were you (have you been) in this relationship? In other words, please indicate the length of time from when you first started dating until today.
_____years
_____months
_____weeks
_____days

When did you first start dating this partner? If you can't recall exactly, please approximate the date. Please use the following format: e.g., 01/20/2012 _____

Who initiated the relationship?
(1) I initiated the relationship.
(2)
(3)
(4) We mutually initiated the relationship.
(5)
(6)
(7) My partner initiated the relationship.

How would you characterize your relationship now? Please choose only one.
_____We are casually dating.
_____We are seriously dating.
_____We are in a long-term, committed relationship.
_____We are engaged.
_____We are in a domestic partnership.

Please more specifically identify the stage of your relationship:

     _____We are in the beginning stages of the relationship.

     _____We are renewing the relationship.

     _____We are maintaining the relationship.

     _____I am thinking about breaking up.

Do you consider this relationship an on-again/off-again relationship? In other words, has this relationship broken up and renewed at least once?

     _____Yes

     _____No

Appendix B
Perceived Relationship Quality Component (PRQC) Inventory

This measurement consists of 18 items. Each perceived relationship quality component (e.g., relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love) is assessed by three questions. Each statement is answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely). Instructions are to rate the current partner and relationship on each item. Component categories are shown as subheadings (which are omitted when the scale is administered).

Relationship Satisfaction
1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?
2. How content are you with your relationship?
3. How happy are you with your relationship?

Commitment
4. How committed are you to your relationship?
5. How dedicated are you to your relationship?
6. How devoted are you to your relationship?

Intimacy
7. How intimate is your relationship?
8. How close is your relationship?
9. How connected are you to your partner?

Trust
10. How much do you trust your partner?
11. How much can you count on your partner?
12. How dependable is your partner?

Passion
13. How passionate is your relationship?
14. How lustful is your relationship?
15. How sexually intense is your relationship?

Love
16. How much do you love your partner?
17. How much do you adore your partner?
18. How much do you cherish your partner?

Appendix C
Relational Uncertainty

General Instructions. Participants were instructed to recall their specific stressful experience when answering these statements. Often times the stressful events were retrospective; therefore, participants were asked to complete these measurements reflecting the stressful experience rather their current relationship state.

Measurement Instructions. Please answer all items completing the question, "How certain are you about…?" using a 6-point scale: 1 = Completely or Almost Completely Uncertain to 6 = Completely or Almost Completely Certain.

Self Uncertainty – Please answer the statements about how certain you are about YOUR OWN INVOLVEMENT in the relationship. How certain are you about…?

Desire
1. How committed you are to the relationship?
2. Your feelings for your partner?
3. How much you want this relationship right now?
4. How you feel about the relationship?
5. How much you want to pursue this relationship?
6. Whether or not you are ready to commit to your partner?
7. Whether you want a romantic relationship with your partner or to be just friends?

Evaluation
8. How important this relationship is to you?
9. How much you are romantically interested in your partner?
10. How ready you are to get involved with your partner?
11. Whether or not you want to maintain your relationship?
12. Your view of this relationship?

Goals
13. Whether or not you want this relationship to work out in the long run?
14. Whether or not you want this relationship to last?
15. Whether or not you want to be with your partner in the long run?
16. Your goals for the future of your relationship?
17. Whether or not you want to stay in a relationship with your partner?
18. Where you want this relationship to go?

Partner Uncertainty -- Please answer the statements about how certain you are about YOUR PARTNER'S INVOLVEMENT in the relationship. How certain are you about…?

Desire
1. How committed your partner is to the relationship?
2. Your partner's feelings for you?

3. How much your partner wants this relationship right now?
4. How your partner feels about the relationship?
5. How much your partner wants to pursue this relationship?
6. Whether or not your partner is ready to commit to your partner?
7. Whether your partner wants a romantic relationship with you or to be just friends?

Evaluation
8. How important this relationship is to your partner?
9. How much your partner is romantically interested in you?
10. How ready your partner is to get involved with your partner?
11. Whether or not your partner wants to maintain your relationship?
12. Your partner's view of this relationship?

Goals
13. Whether or not your partner wants this relationship to work out in the long run?
14. Whether or not your partner wants this relationship to last?
15. Whether or not your partner wants to be with you in the long run?
16. Your partner's goals for the future of your relationship?
17. Whether or not your partner wants to stay in a relationship with you?
18. Where your partner wants this relationship to go?

Relational Uncertainty -- Please answer the statements about how certain you are about YOUR RELATIONSHIP. How certain are you about…?

Behavioral Norms
1. What you can and cannot say to each other in this relationship?
2. The boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship?
3. The norms for this relationship?
4. How you can or cannot behave around your partner?

Mutuality
5. Whether you and your partner feel the same way about each other?
6. How you and your partner view the relationship?
7. Whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him or her?
8. The current status of this relationship?

Definition
9. The definition of this relationship?
10. How you and your partner would describe this relationship?
11. The state of the relationship at this time?
12. Whether or not this a romantic or platonic relationship?

Future
13. Whether or not you and your partner will stay together?
14. The future of the relationship?
15. Whether or not this relationship will end soon?

16. Where this relationship is going?

Appendix D
Partner Influence

General Instructions. Participants were instructed to recall their specific stressful experience when answering these statements. Often times the stressful events were retrospective; therefore, participants were asked to complete these measurements reflecting the stressful experience rather their current relationship state.

Measurement Instructions. Please indicate your level of agreement in response to statements characterizing your partner's impact on your everyday lives. Please utilize the 6-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree

Interference from your partner
1. This person interferes with the plans I make.
2. This person disrupts my daily routine.
3. This person interferes with how much time I devote to my work.
4. This person interferes with whether I achieve my everyday goals I set for myself.
5. This person interferes with the things I need to do each day.

Facilitation from your partner
6. This person helps me in my efforts to make plans.
7. This person helps me do things I need to do each day.
8. This person helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.
9. This person helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
10. This person makes it easier for me to schedule my activities.

Appendix E
Narrative Completeness

Instructions. This measurement consists of 25 items. Each element of narrative completeness statement is answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale: (1 = Not Represented to 5 = Completely or Almost Completely Represented). Please think about the story you just told and select how you would characterize it by indicating your level of agreement with the following statements. "My story clearly …"

Sequence
 (1) Arranged the experience in event sequence.
 (2) Explained the occurrence chronologically.
 (3) Discussed the experience based on the events that happened.
 (4) Told the experience in the order it occurred.
Causes
 (5) Contained causes for the explained events.
 (6) Presented consequences for the situation.
 (7) Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred.
Character Development
 (8) Described individuals involved in the event.
 (9) Explained the characters involved.
 (10) Revealed who was involved in the situation.
Affect
 (11) Correctly described your feelings.
 (12) Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved.
 (13) Used emotions to describe the experience.
Meaning
 (14) Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence.
 (15) Expressed an overall meaning for the experience.
 (16) Provided a thorough account of the events.
 (17) Detailed a clear history of the events.
 (18) Made an overall point.
Coherence
 (19) Detailed events in an easy to follow manner.
 (20) Described a straightforward event description.
 (21) Outlined actions in clear fashion.
 (22) Presented a complete understanding of the events.
Attribution
 (23) Assigned responsibility to the story's characters.
 (24) Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the situation.
 (25) Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence.

Appendix F
Narrative Completeness Factors

Sequence
    (1) Arranged the experience in event sequence.
    (2) Explained the occurrence chronologically.
    (3) Discussed the experience based on the events that happened.
    (4) Told the experience in the order it occurred.

Cause
    (5) Contained causes for the explained events.
    (6) Presented consequences for the situation.
    (7) Discussed the reasons why the scenario occurred.
    (18) Made an overall point.

Character Development
    (8) Described individuals involved in the event.
    (9) Explained the characters involved.
    (10) Revealed who was involved in the situation.

Meaningfulness
    (11) Correctly described your feelings.
    (12) Portrayed the feelings felt by others involved.
    (13) Used emotions to describe the experience.
    (14) Expressed meaning individuals drew from the occurrence.
    (15) Expressed an overall meaning for the experience.

Coherence
    (16) Provided a thorough account of the events.
    (17) Detailed a clear history of the events.
    (19) Detailed events in an easy to follow manner.
    (20) Described a straightforward event description.
    (21) Outlined actions in clear fashion.
    (22) Presented a complete understanding of the events.

Attribution
    (23) Assigned responsibility to the story's characters.
    (24) Attributed responsibility to the people involved in the situation.
    (25) Placed blame on individuals who were accountable for the occurrence.

References

Acitelli, L. K. (1988). When spouses talk to each other about their relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5,* 185-199. doi:10.1177/0265401758800500204

Agnew, C. R., Arriaga, X. B., & Wilson, J. E. (2008). Committed to what? Using the bases of relational commitment model to understand continuity and change in social relationships. In J. P. Forgas & J Fitness (Eds.), *Social relationships: Cognitive, affective, and motivational processes. The Sydney symposium on social psychology.* New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Afifi, T. D., & Afifi, W. A. (2009). Introduction. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 26-44). New York, NY: Routledge.

Afifi, T. D., & Reichert, T. (1996). Understanding the role of uncertainty in jealousy experience and expression. *Communication Reports, 9,* 93-103. doi:10.1177/0093650205275384

Afifi, T. D., & Schrodt, P. (2003). Uncertainty and the avoidance of the stage of one's family in stepfamilies, post divorce single-parent families, and first marriage families. *Human Communication Research, 29*(4)*,* 516-532. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2003.tb00854.x

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., Tudor, M., & Nelson, G. (1991). Close relationships as including other in self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60,* 241-253. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.60.2.241

Bamberg, M. (2009). Identity and narration. In P. Huhn, J. Pier, W. Schmid, & J. Schonert (Eds.), *Handbook of narratology* (pp. 132-143). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.

Baumeister, R. F., & Newman, L. S. (1994). How stories make sense of personal experiences: Motives that shape autobiographical narratives. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 20,* 676-690. doi:10.1177/0146167294206006

Baxter, L. A. (1987). Self-disclosure and relationship disengagement. In V. J. Derlaga & J. H. Berg (Eds.), *Self-disclosure: Theory, research, and therapy* (pp. 155-174). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Baxter, L. A. (1992). Interpersonal communication as dialogue: A response to the "social approaches" forum. *Communication Theory, 2,* 330-337. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1992.tb00048.x

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2009). Reclaiming uncertainty: The formation of new meanings. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 26-44). New York, NY: Routledge.

Baxter, L. A., & Bullis, C. (1986). Turning points in developing romantic relationships. *Human Communication Research, 12,* 469-494. doi:10.111/j.1468-2958.1986.tb00088.x

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York, NY: Guildford Press.

Baxter, L. A., & Pittman, G. (2001). Communicatively remembering turning points of relational development in heterosexual romantic relationships. Communication Reports, 14(1), 1-17. doi:10.1080/08934210109367732

Baxter, L. A., & Wilmot, W. W. (1984). "Secret tests": Strategies for acquiring information about the state of the relationship. *Human Communication Research, 11,* 171-201. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1984.tb00044.x

Baxter, L. A., & Wilmot, W. W. (1985). Taboo topics in close relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 2,* 253-269. doi:10.1177/0265407585023002

Berger, C. R. (1979). Beyond initial interactions: Uncertainty, understanding, and the development of interpersonal relationships. In H. Giles & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Language and social psychology* (pp. 122-144). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Berger, C. R. (2002). Strategic and nonstrategic information acquisition. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 287-297. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00809.x

Berger, C. R., & Bradac, J. J. (1982). *Language and social knowledge: Uncertainty in interpersonal relationships.* London: Edward Arnold.

Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1,* 99-112. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x

Berger, C. R., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1991). Uncertainty and communication. In B. Drevin & M. J. Voight (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences* (Vol. 10, pp. 21-66). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Berscheid, E. (1983). Emotion. In H. H. Kelly, E. Berscheid, A. Christensen, J. H. Harvey, T. L. Huston, G. Levinger, E. McClintock, L. A. Peplau, & D. R. Peterson (Eds.), *Close relationships* (pp. 110-168). New York: NY: Freeman.

Berscheid, E., Snyder, M., & Omoto, A. M. (1989). The relational closeness inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(5), 792-807. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.57.5.792

Blackburn, K., Brody, N., & LeFebvre, L. (2012). *The I's, We's and She/He's of breakups: Public and private pronoun usage in relationship dissolution accounts.* Paper presented

at the National Communication Conference Association in Orlando, FL.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). "You gotta know how to tell a story": Telling tales and tellers in
American and Israeli narrative events at dinner. *Language in Society, 22,* 361-402.
doi:10.1017/S0047404500017280

Bochner, A. P. (2002). Perspectives on inquiry III: The moral of stories. In M. L. Knapp & J. A.
Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd ed.; pp. 73-101). Thousand
Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bochner, A. P., Ellis, C., & Tillman-Healy, L. M. (1997). Relationships as stories. In S. W. Duck
(Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research, and interventions* (2nd ed.,
pp. 107-124).

Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative methods for organizational & communication research.* Thousand
Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bolton, C. D. (1961). Mate selection as the development of a relationship. *Marriage and Family
Living, 23,* 234-240.

Bradac, J. J. (2001). Theory comparison: Uncertainty reduction, problematic integration,
uncertainty management, and other curious constructs. *Journal of Communication, 51*(3)
456- 476. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02891.x

Braiker, H. B., & Kelley, H. H. (1979). Conflict in the development of close relationships. In R.
L. Burgess & T. L. Huston (Eds.), *Social exchange in developing relationships* (pp. 135-
168). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Browning, L., & Morris, G. H. (2012). Stories of life in the workplace: An open architecture for
organizational narratology. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* London: Harvard University Press

Bullis, C., Clark, C., & Sline, R. (1993). From passion to commitment: Turning points in
  romantic relationships. In P. Kalbfleisch (Ed.), *Interpersonal communication: Evolving*
  interpersonal relationships (pp. 213-236). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum

Buehlman, K. T., Gottman, J. M., & Katz, L. F. (1992). How a couple views their past predicts
  their future. *Journal of Family Psychology, 5,* 295-318. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.5.3-4.295

Bulmer, M. (1979). Concepts in the analysis of qualitative data. *Sociological Review, 27,* 651-
  677.

Burgess, R. L., & Huston, T. L. (Eds.). (1979). *Social exchange in developing relationships.*
  New York, NY: Academic Press.

Burnett, R. (1987). Endpiece. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. D. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for*
  relationships: Explanation, representation, and knowledge (pp. 316-320). London:
  Methuen.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative*
  analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Clatterbuck, G. W. (1979). Attributional confidence and uncertainty in initial interaction. *Human*
  Communication Research, 5, 147-157. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1979.tb00630.x

Conville, R. L. (1991). *Relational transitions: The evolution of personal relationships.* New
  York, NY: Praeger

Conville, R. L. (1997). Between spearheads: Bricolage and relationships. *Journal of Social and*
  Personal Relationships, 14(3), 373-386. doi:10.1177/0265407597143006

Cowan, P. A. (1999). Commentary. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child*
  Development, 64(2), 163-176.

Czarniawska, B. (1998). *A narrative approach to organization studies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dailey, R. M., Brody, N., LeFebvre, L., & Crook, B. (2013). Charting changes in commitment: Trajectories of on-again/off-again relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 30*(8), 1020-1044. doi:10.1177/0265407513480284

Dailey, R. M., Romo, L. K., & Thompson, C. M. (2011). Confirmation in couples' communication about weight management: An analysis of how both partners contribute to individuals' health behaviors and conversational outcomes. *Human Communication Research, 37,* 553-582. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2011.01414x

Dillard, J. P., & Knobloch, L. K. (2011). Interpersonal influence. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication (4th ed.),* (pp. 389-422). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Duck, S. W. (1982). A topography of relationship disengagement and dissolution. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), *Personal relationships 4: Dissolving personal relationships* (pp. 1-30). London: Academic Press.

Duck, S. W. (1985). Social and personal relationships. In G. Miller & M. Knapp (Eds.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 655-686). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Duck, S. W. (1986). *Human relationships: An introduction to social psychology.* London: Sage Publications.

Duck, S. W. (1995). Talking relationships into being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12,* 535-540. doi:10.1177/0265407595124006

Duck, S. W., & Mielli, D. (1986). Charting the development of personal relationships. In R.

    Gilmour, & S. Duck (Eds.), *The emerging field of personal relationships* (pp. 133-143).

    Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Duck, S. W., Rutt, D. I., Hurst, M., & Strejc, H. (1991). Some evident truths about everyday

    communication: All conversations are not created equal. *Human Communication*

    Research, 18, 228-267. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1991.tb00545.x

Duck, S. W., & Sants, H. K. A. (1983). On the origin of the specious: Are personal relationships

    really interpersonal states? *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 1,* 27-41.

    doi:10.1521/jscp.1983.1.1.27

Eriksson, M., & Svedlund, M. (2006). "The intruder": Spouses' narratives about life with a

    chronically ill partner. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 15,* 324-333. doi:10.1111/j.1365-

    2702.2006.01290.x

Fiese, B. H., & Grotevant, H. D. (2001). Introduction to special issue on "Narratives in and about

    relationships." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18,* 579-581.

    doi:10.1177/0265407501185001

Fiese, B. H., & Sameroff, A. J. (1999). The family narrative consortium: A multidimensional

    approach to narratives. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development,*

    64(2), 1-36. doi:10.1111/1540-5834.00017

Fiese, B. H., Sameroff, A. J., Grotevant, H. D., Wamboldt, F. S., Dickstein, S., Fravel, D. L.,

    …Schiller, M. (1999). The stories that families tell: Narrative coherence, narrative

    interaction, and relationship beliefs. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child*

    Development, 64(2), 1-162.

Fiese, B. H., & Spagnola, M. (2005). Narratives in and about families: An examination of coding schemes and a guide for family researchers. *Journal of Family Psychology, 19*(1), 51-61. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.19.1.51

Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs, 51,* 1-22. doi:10.1080/03637758409390180

Fisher, W. R. (1989). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Fivush, R., Hazzard, A., Sales, J. M., Sarfati, D., & Brown, T. (2003). Creating coherence out of chaos: Children's narratives of emotionally positive and negative events. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 17,* 1-19. doi:10.1002/acp.854

Fletcher, G. J. O., Simpson, J. A., & Thomas, G. (2000). The measurement of perceived relationship quality components: A confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 340-354. doi:10.1177/0146167200265007

Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Frost, D. M. (2011). Stigma and intimacy in same-sex relationships: A narrative approach. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(1), 1-10. doi:10.1037/a0022374

Frost, D. M. (2013). The narrative construction of intimacy and affect in relationship stories: Implications for relationship quality, stability, and mental health. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 30,* 247-269. doi:10.1177/0265407512454463

Gallie, W. B. (1968). *Philosophy and the historical understanding*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1983). Narratives of the self. In T. R. Sarkin & K .E. Scheibe

(Eds.), *Studies in social identity* (pp. 254-273). New York, NY: Praeger.

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1987). Narratives of relationship. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, &

D. C. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships* (pp. 269-315). London: Methuen.

Goldsmith, D. J. (2009). Uncertainty and communication in couples coping with serious illness.

In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty, information management, and*

disclosure decisions: Theories and applications (pp. 203-225). New York, NY:

Routledge.

Graham, E. E. (1997). Turning points and commitment in postdivorce relationships.

Communication Monographs, *64*, 350-368. doi:10.1080/03637759709376428

Grote, N. K., & Frieze, I. H. (1998). Remembrance of things past: Perceptions of marital

love from its beginnings to the present. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,*

15(1), 91-109. doi:10.1177/0265407598151006

Grotevant, H. D., Fravel, D. L., Gorall, D., & Piper, J. (1999). Narratives of adoptive parents:

Perspectives from individual and couple interviews. *Monographs of the Society for*

Research in Child Development, 64(2), 69-83.

Holmberg, D., & Holmes, J. G. (1994). Reconstruction of relationship memories: A mental

models approach. In N. Schwarz & S. Sudman (Eds.), *Autobiographical memory and the*

validity of retrospective reports (pp.267–288). New York, NY: Springer Verlag.

Holmberg, D., Orbuch, T. L., & Veroff, J. (2004*). Thrice told tales: Married couples tell their*

stories. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishing Company.

Honeycutt, J. M. (1993). Components and functions of communication during initial interaction, with extrapolations to beyond. In S. A. Deetz (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 16* (pp. 461-490). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hopper, J. (1993). The rhetoric of motives in divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55,* 801-813.

Huston, T. L., Surra, C., Fitzgerald, N. M., & Cate, R. (1981). From courtship to marriage: Mate selection as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck & R. Gilmour (Eds.), *Personal relationships 2 Developing personal relationships* (pp. 53-88). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Kashy, D. A., & Kelly, D. A. (2000). The analysis of data from dyads and groups. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), Handbook of research methods in social psychology. (pp. 451-477). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kelley, H. H., Berscheid, E., Christensen, A., Harvey, J. H., Hutson, T. L., Levinger, G., McClintock, E., Peplau, L. A., & Peterson, D. R. (1983). Analyzing close relationships. In H. H. Kelley, E. Christensen, J. H. Harvey, T. L. Hutson, G. Levinger, E. McClintock, L. A. Peplau, & D. R. Peterson (Eds.). *Close relationships* (pp. 20-67). New York: NY: Freeman.

Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence.* New York, NY: Wiley-Interscience.

Kendler, K. S., Hettema, J. M., Butera, F., Gardner, C. O., & Prescott, C. A. (2003). Life event dimensions of loss, humiliation, entrapment, and danger in the prediction of onsets of major depression and generalized anxiety. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 60,* 789-796. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.60.8.789.

Kenny, D. A., Kashy, D. A., & Cook, W. L. (2006). *Dyadic data analysis.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Knapp, M. L., & Vangelisti, A. (2005). *Interpersonal communication and human relationships* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Knobloch, L. K. (2005). Evaluating a contextual model of responses to relational uncertainty increasing events: The role of intimacy, appraisals, and emotions. *Human Communication Research, 31*(1), 60-101. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2005.tb00865.x

Knobloch, L. K. (2006). Relational uncertainty and message production within courtship: Features of date request messages. *Human Communication Research, 32,* 244-273. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.206.00275.x

Knobloch, L. K. (2007a). The dark side of relational uncertainty: Obstacle or opportunity. In B. H. Spitzberg & W. R. Cupach (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (pp. 31-60). Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.

Knobloch, L. K. (2007b). Perceptions of turmoil within courtship: Associations with intimacy, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 24,* 363-384. doi:10.1177/026540757077227

Knobloch, L. K. (2008a). The content of relational uncertainty within marriage. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 25,* 467-496. doi:10.1177/0265407508090869

Knobloch, L. K. (2008b). Uncertainty reduction theory: Communication under conditions of ambiguity. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication* (pp. 133-144). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Knobloch, L. K. (2010). Relational uncertainty and interpersonal communication. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research* (pp. 115-134). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Knobloch, K. L., & Carpenter-Theune, K. E. (2004). Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: Associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research, 31,* 173-205. doi:10.1177/0093650203261516

Knobloch, K. L., & Delaney, A. L. (2012). Themes of relational uncertainty and interference from partners in depression. *Health Communication, 27*(8), 750-765. doi:10.1080/10410236.2011.639293

Knobloch, K. L., & Donovan-Kicken, E. (2006). Perceived involvement of network members in courtships: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Personal Relationships, 13,* 281-302. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00118.x

Knobloch, K. L., Miller, L. E., Bond, B. J., & Mannone, S. E. (2007). Relational uncertainty and message processing in marriage. *Communication Monographs, 74,* 154-180. doi:10.1080/03637750701390069

Knobloch, K. L., Miller, L. E., & Carpenter, K. E. (2007). Using relational turbulence model to understand negative emotion within courtship. *Personal Relationships, 14,* 91-112. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00143.x.

Knobloch, K. L., & Satterlee, K. L. (2009). Relational uncertainty: Theory and application. *Uncertainty, information management, and disclosure decisions: Theories and applications* (pp. 106-127). New York, NY: Routledge.

Knobloch, K. L., & Solomon, D. H. (1999). Measuring the sources and content of relational uncertainty. *Communication Studies, 50,* 261-278. doi:10.1080/10510979909388499

Knobloch, K. L., & Solomon, D. H. (2002a). Information-seeking beyond initial interaction: Negotiating relational uncertainty within close relationships. *Human Communication Research, 28*(2), 243-257. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00806.x

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2002b). Intimacy and the magnitude and experience of episodic relational uncertainty within romantic relationship. *Personal Relationships, 9,* 457-478. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.09406

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2003a). Manifestations of relationship conceptualizations in conversation. *Human Communication Research, 29,* 482-515. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2003.tb00853.x

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2003b). Responses to changes in relational uncertainty within dating relationships: Emotions and communication strategies. *Communication Studies, 54,* 282-305. doi:10.1080/10510970309363287

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2004). Interference and facilitation from partners in the development of interdependence within romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships, 11,* 115-130. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00074.x

Knobloch, K. L., & Solomon, D. H. (2005). Relational uncertainty and relational information processing: Questions without answers? *Communication Research, 32,* 349-388. doi:10.1177/009350205275384

Knobloch, K. L., & Theiss, J. A. (2008). *Tracking perceptions of turmoil over time: A longitudinal test of the relational turbulence model.* Paper presented to the Interpersonal Communication Division at the National Communication Association Conference, San Diego, California.

Knobloch, K. L., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Relational uncertainty and relationship talk within

    courtship: A longitudinal actor-partner interdependence model. *Communication*

    Monographs, 78(1), 3-26. doi:10.1080/03637751.2010.542471

Koenig, J. (2002). *Family ties: Identity, process, and relational qualities in joint family*

    storytelling. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

    doi:Thesis 51497

Koenig Kellas, J. (2005). Family ties: Communicating identity through jointly told family

    stories. *Communication Monographs, 72,* 365-389. doi:10.1080/03637750500322453

Koenig Kellas, J. (2008). *Narrative theories.* In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.),

    Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives (pp. 241-254).

    Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Koenig Kellas, J., Bean, D., Cunningham, C., & Cheng, K. Y. (2008). The ex-files: Trajectories,

    turning points, and adjustment in the development of post-dissolutional relationships.

    Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 25, 23–50.

    doi:10.1177/0265407507086804

Koenig Kellas, J., & Manusov, V. (2003). What's in a story? The relationship between narrative

    completeness and adjustment to relationship dissolution. *Journal of Personal and*

    Relationships, 20(3), 285-307. doi:10.1177/0265407503020003002

Koenig Kellas, J., & Trees, A. R. (2005). Rating interactional sense-making in the process of

    joint storytelling. In V. Manusov (Ed.), *The sourcebook of nonverbal measures: Going*

    beyond words (pp. 264-277). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Koenig Kellas, J., & Trees, A. R. (2006). Finding meaning in difficult family experiences: Sense-making and interaction processes during joint family storytelling. *Journal of Family Communication, 6*(1), 49-76. doi:10.1207/s15327698jfc0601_4

Koenig Kellas, J., Trees, A., Schrodt, P., LeClair-Underberg, C., & Willer, E. K. (2010). Exploring links between well-being and interactional sense-making in married couple's jointly told stories of stress. *Journal of Marriage Communication, 10,* 174-193. doi:10.1080/15267431.2010.489217

Koenig Kellas, J., Willer, E. K., & Kranstuber, H. (2011). Fairytales and tragedies: Narratively making sense of the dark side (and the dark side of making sense) of personal relationships. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of close relationships II* (pp. 63-94). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kranstruber, H., & Koenig Kellas, J. (2011). "Instead of growing under her heart, I grew in it": The relationship between adoption entrance narratives and adoptees' self-concept. *Communication Quarterly, 59*(2), 179-199. doi:10.1080/01463373.2011.563440

Labov, W., & Waletsky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts: Proceedings of the 1966 annual spring meeting of the American Ethnological Society.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

LaRossa, R. (1995). Stories and relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12,* 553-558. doi:10.1177/0265407595124009

LeFebvre, L. (2011). *Co-experiencing menopause: Examining the marital aging transition.* Paper presented to the Interpersonal Communication Division at the National Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

LeFebvre, L., & Blackburn, K. (2013). Choosing Emma's ending: Exploring the intersection of

    small and big stories, antenarrative, and narrative. *Narrative Inquiry*, *22*(2), 211-225.

    doi:10.1075/ni.22.2.01lef

LeFebvre, L., & Damron, J. (2010). *Coming home from deployment: Relational turbulence and*

    marital relationships on the home front. Poster session presented at National

    Communication Association Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Linde, C. (1983). *Life stories: The creation of coherence.* New York, NY: cOxford University

    Press.

Lloyd, S., & Cate, R. (1984). *Attributions associated with significant turning points in*

    premarital relationship development and dissolution. Paper presented at the Second

    International Conference on Personal Relationship, Madison, WI.

Maines, D. R. (1993). Narratives' moment and sociology's phenomena: Toward a narrative

    sociology. *Sociological Quarterly, 34*, 17-37.

Mandelbaum, J. (1987). Couples sharing stories. *Communication Quarterly, 35,* 144-170.

Marineau, M. (2005). Health/illness transition and telehealth: A concept analysis using the

    evolutionary method. *Nursing Forum, 40,* 96-106. doi:10.1111/j.1744-

    6198.2005.00017.x

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New

    York, NY: Guildford Press.

McAdams, D. P., Diamond, A., de St. Aubin, E., & Mansfield, E. D. (1997). Stories of

    commitment: The psychosocial construction of generative lives. *Journal of Personality*

    and Social Psychology, 72, 678-694. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.3.678

McGhee, P. (1987). From self-reports to narrative discourse: Reconstructing the voice of experience in personal relationship research. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. D. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships: Explanation, representation, and knowledge* (pp. 289-315). London: Methuen.

McLaren, R. M. (2008). *Integrating the relational turbulence model and relational communication to explain reactions to hurtful messages in personal relationships.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

McLaren, R. M., Solomon, D. H., & Priem, J. S. (2008). *A relational turbulence model of experiences of hurt in premarital romantic relationships.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, Montreal, Ontario.

McLean, K. C., Breen, A. V., & Fournier, M. A. (2010). Constructing the self in early, middle, and late adolescent boys: Narrative identity, individuation, and well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 20*(1), 166-187. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00633.x

Nagy, M. E. (2011). *The communicative and physiological manifestations of relational turbulence during the empty-nest phase of marital relationships* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

Nagy, M. E. & Theiss, J. A. (2011, November). *Applying the relational turbulence model to the empty-nest transition: Sources of relationship change, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners.* A paper presented at the meeting of the National Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.

Nezlek, J. B. (2003). Using multilevel random efficient modeling to analyze social interaction diary data. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 20,* 437-469. doi:10.1177/02654075030204002

Ohman, M., & Soderberg, S. (2004). The experiences of close relatives living with a person with serious chronic illness. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*, 396-410.

Oppenheim, D., Wamboldt, F. S., Gavin, L. A., & Renouf, A. G. (1996). Couples' co-construction of the story of their child's birth: Association with marital adaptation. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 6,* 1-21.

Orbuch, T. L. (1997). People's accounts count: The sociology of accounts. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23,* 455-478.

Orbuch, T. L., Veroff, J., & Holmberg, D. (1993). Becoming a married couple: The emergence of meaning in the first years of marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 55*(4), 815-826.

Oring, E. (1984). *The jokes of Sigmund Freud: A study in humor and Jewish identity.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Parks, M. R. (2011). Social networks and the life of relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication (4th ed.),* (pp. 355-388). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Paul, E. L., Wenzel, A., & Harvey, J. (2008). Hookups: A facilitator or a barrier to relationship initiation and intimacy development? In S. Sprecher, A. Wenzel, J. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of relationship initiation* (pp. 375-390). New York, NY US: Psychology Press.

Planap, S. (1987). The interplay between relational knowledge and events. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships: Explanation, representations, and knowledge* (pp. 175-191). New York, NY: Metheun.

Planalp, S., & Honeycutt, J. M. (1985). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationships. *Human Communication Research, 11,* 593-604. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00062.x

Planalp, S., Rutherford, D. K., & Honeycutt, J. M. (1988). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationships II: Replication and extension. *Human Communication Research, 14,* 516-547. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1988.tb00166.x

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Raudenbush, S. W., Bryk, A. S., Cheong, Y., & Congdon, R. T. (2004). *HLM 6: Hierarchical linear and nonlinear modeling.* Chicago, IL: Scientific Software International.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Rollie, S. S., & Duck, S. (2006). Divorce and dissolution of romantic relationships: Stage models and their limitations. In M. A. Fine & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of divorce and relationship dissolution* (pp. 223-240). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Seider, B. H., Hirschberger, G., Nelson, K. L., Levenson, R. W. (2009). We can work it out: Age differences in relational pronouns, physiology, and behavior in marital conflict. *Psychology and Aging, 24,* 604-613. doi:10.1037/a0016950

Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication.* Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.

Solomon, D. H. (1997). A developmental model of intimacy and date request explicitness. *Communication Monographs, 64*, 99-118. doi:10.1080/03637759709376409

Solomon, D. H., & Knobloch, L. K. (2001). Relational uncertainty, partner interference, and intimacy within dating relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18,* 804-820. doi:10.1177/0265407501186004

Solomon, D. H., & Knobloch, L. K. (2004). A model of relational turbulence: The role of

    intimacy, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners in appraisals of irritations.

    Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21, 795-816.

    doi:10.1177/0265407504047838

Solomon, D. H., & Theiss, J. A. (2007). Cognitive foundations of communication in close

    relationships. In D. R. Roskos-Ewoldson, & J. L Monahan (Eds.), *Communication and*

    social cognition: Theories and methods (pp. 117-140). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Solomon, D. H., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Relational turbulence: What doesn't kills us makes us

    stronger. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of close relationships*

    II (pp. 197-216). New York, NY: Routledge.

Solomon, D. H., & Vangelisti, A. L. (2010). Establishing and maintaining relationships. In C. R.

    Berger, M. E. Roloff, & D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen (Eds.), *The Handbook of*

    Communication Science (pp. 327-344). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Solomon, D. H., Weber, K. M., & Steuber, K. R. (2010). Turbulence in relational transitions. In

    S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication*

    research (pp. 115-134). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational network approach.

    Theory and Society, 23(5), 605-649.

Sorenson, K. A., Russell, S. M., Harkness, D. J., & Harvey, J. H. (1993). Account-making,

    confiding, and coping with the ending of a close relationships. *Journal of Social Behavior*

    and Personality, 8, 73-86.

Spence, D. P. (1982). *Narrative truth and historical truth: Meaning and interpretation in*

    psychoanalysis. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Sternberg, R. J. (1995). Love as story. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12, 541-546. doi:10.1177/0265407595124007

Steuber, K. R., & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Relational uncertainty, partner interference, and infertility: A qualitative study of discourse within online forums. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 25,* 831-855. doi:10.1177/0265407508096698

Strine, M. S., & Pacanowsky, M. E. (1985). How to read interpretative accounts of organizational life: Narrative bases of textual authority. *Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50,* 283-297.

Stueve, J. L., & Pleck, J. H. (2001). "Parenting voice': Solo parent identity and co-parent identities in married parents' narratives of meaningful parenting experiences. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18,* 691-708. doi:10.1177/0265407501185007

Sunnafrank, M. (1986). Predicted outcome value during initial interactions: A reformulation of uncertainty reduction theory. *Human Communication Research, 13,* 3-33. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1986.tb00092.x

Sunnafrank, M. (1990). Predicted outcome value and uncertainty reduction theories: A test of competing perspectives. *Human Communication Research, 17,* 76-103. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1990.tb00227.x

Surra, C. (1984). *Attributions about changes in commitment: Variations by courtship style*. Paper presented at the Second International Conference on Personal Relationships, Madison, WI.

Surra, C. A. (1985). Courtship types: Variations in interdependence between partners and social networks. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49,* 357-375. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.49.2.357

Surra, C. A., Arizzi, P., & Asmussen, L. A. (1988). The association between reasons for

    commitment and the development and outcome of marital relationships. *Journal of Social*

    and Personal Relationships, 5, 47-63. doi:10.1177/0265407588051003

Surra, C. A., & Hughes, D. K. (1997). Commitment processes in accounts of the development of

    premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 59,* 5-21.

Theiss, J. A., & Knobloch, L. K. (2009). An actor-partner interdependence model of the

    experience and expression of irritations in romantic relationships. *Communication*

    Research, 36, 510-536. doi:10.1177/0093650209333033

Theiss, J. A., Knobloch, L. K., Checton, M. G., & Magsamen-Conrad, K. (2009). Relationship

    characteristics associated with the experience of hurt in romantic relationships: A test of

    the relational turbulence model. *Human Communication Research, 35,* 588-615.

    doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01364.x

Theiss, J. A., & Nagy, M. E. (2013). A relational turbulence model of partner responsiveness and

    relationship talk across cultures. *Western Journal of Communication, 77*(2), 186-209.

    doi:10.1080/10570314.2012.720746

Theiss, J. A., & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Parsing the mechanisms that increase relational

    intimacy: the effects of uncertainty amount, open communication about uncertainty, and

    the reduction of uncertainty. *Human Communication Research, 34,* 625-654.

    doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2008.00335.x

Toolan, M. (2009). Coherence. In P. Huhn, J. Pier, W. Schmid, & J. Schonert (Eds.), *Handbook*

    of narratology (pp. 44-62). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.

Tracy, K., & Munoz, K. (2011). Qualitative methods in interpersonal communication. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 59-86). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Trees, A. R., & Koenig Kellas, J. (2009). Telling tales: Enacting family relationships in joint storytelling about difficult family experiences. *Western Journal of Communication, 73,* 91-111. doi:10.1080/10570310802635021

Turner, L. H. (1990). The relationship between communication and marital uncertainty: Is her marriage different from his marriage? *Women's Studies in Communication, 13,* 57-83.

Vangelisti, A. L., Crumley, L. P., Baker, J. L. (1999). Family portraits: Stories as standards for family relationships. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 16, 335-368. doi:10.1177/0265407599163004

Veroff, J., Sutherland, L., Chadiha, L., & Ortega, R. M. (1993a). Newlyweds tells their stories: A narrative method for assessing marital experiences. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10,* 437-457. doi:10.1177/0265407593103010

Veroff, J., Sutherland, L., Chadiha, L., & Ortega, R. M. (1993b). Predicting marital quality with narrative assessments of marital experience. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 55*(2), 326-337.

Wamboldt, F. S. (1999). Co-constructing a marriage: Analyses of young couples' relationship narratives. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 64*(2), 37-51. doi:10.1111/1540-5834.00018

Wamboldt, F. S., & Reiss, D. (1989). Defining a family heritage and a new relationship identity: Two central tasks in the making of a marriage. *Family Process, 28*(3), 317-335. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1989.00317.x

Wamboldt, F. S., & Wolin, S. J. (19889). Reality and myth in family life: Changes across generations. *Journal of Psychotherapy & the Family, 4,* 141-166. doi:10.1300/J287v04n03_08

Weber, A. L., Harvey, J. H., & Stanley, M. A. (1987). The nature and motivation of accounts for failed relationships. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. D. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships: Explanation, representation, and knowledge* (pp. 114-133). London: Methuen.

Weber, K. M., & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Locating relationship and communication issues among stressors associated with breast cancer. *Health Communication, 23,* 548-559. doi:10.1080/10410230802465233

Weick. K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Weiss, R. S. (1975). *Marital separation.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Wigren, J. (1994). Narrative completion in the treatment of trauma. *Psychotherapy, 31*(3), 415-423.