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Examining Level Of Differentiation And Conflict Resolution Styles Used In Romantic Relationships And Implications For Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

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**EXAMINING LEVEL OF DIFFERENTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
STYLES USED IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

by

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DISSERTATION

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of Wayne State University,

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are a basis upon which families are established and are a central factor that guides the dynamics within a family system. Research has consistently demonstrated that utilizing the integrating and compromising conflict resolution styles is associated with enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Pistole, 1989), suggesting that conflict resolution styles are central to sustaining a romantic relationship. Research has additionally shown that level of differentiation has significant implications for romantic relationships, with those experiencing a high level of differentiation exhibiting stronger stress coping skills (Murdock, 2004) as well as enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction (Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000). Informed by Bowen's theory of differentiation, this study consequently examines the relationship between level of differentiation and conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships, and the implications for romantic relationship satisfaction.

Rationale for Examining Relationship Satisfaction, Conflict Resolution, and Differentiation

Romantic Relationships are the basis upon which couples are formed, families are developed, and generations of offspring are established. Romantic relationships are central to a vast majority of individuals' lives, and engagement in a committed romantic relationship and relationship quality have significant implications for individuals' overall functioning, being associated with fewer mental health problems as well as increased levels of happiness (Briathwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010; Demir, 2008). Researchers have documented that individuals in satisfying romantic relationships are at an increased likelihood of staying together (Hendrick, 1988) as well as perceiving fewer romantic relationship stressors and experiencing more romantic relationship positive events (Tolpin, Cohen, Gunthert, Farrehi, 2006). Often

preceded by low relationship satisfaction levels, marital dissolution and divorce is associated with negative outcomes for children, adults, and parents (See literature review by Amato, 2000). Unresolved conflict in romantic relationships is a strong predictor of romantic relationship dissatisfaction (Cramer & Duncan, 2000), with chronic conflict also being a strong predictor of increased stress responses, depression, anxiety, and physiological arousal (Burman & Margolin, 1992). Conflict resolution styles (depressive, angry, and constructive styles) have also been found to act as a mediator for the relationship between marital dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms (Schudlich, Papp, & Cummings, 2012). However, research has demonstrated that an effort to improve conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships can lead to increased romantic relationship satisfaction (Cramer & Duncan, 2000).

The importance of examining conflict resolution styles and associated romantic relationship satisfaction levels within romantic relationships lends itself to several societal implications. First, romantic relationship and marriage trends are ever-changing in the U.S., with marriage and divorce rates currently decreasing, although the divorce rate is still relatively high. As of 2013, less than half of Americans were married, with this being a record low for the past 40 years (Lamidi & Payne, 2014). Specifically, in 2013, there were about 33.2 marriages per every 1000 unmarried persons, with those of higher education demonstrating higher marriage rates. The 2013 marriage rate was a significant decrease from that observed in 2012, in which 56.7 marriages per every 1000 unmarried persons occurred (Payne, 2014).

According to Bradbury (2000), the divorce rate has declined in recent years, with the increasing age at marriage being a possible reason for this decline. Currently, half of marriages in the United States are expected to end in divorce, with the divorce rate being lowest amongst the most and least educated (Bradbury, 2000; Payne, 2014). Marital dissolution has been

demonstrated to have significant and negative implications for adults, parents, and children. For example, according to a literature review conducted by Amato (2000), adults who have experienced divorce, compared to their married counterparts, tend to demonstrate lower levels of psychological well-being, poor self concepts, greater psychological distress, more health problems, a greater mortality risk, and more social isolation. Additionally, parents who have experienced divorce tend to demonstrate parenting characterized by greater parental role strain, investment of less time with one's children, the provision of less support and fewer rules, harsher discipline, and less supervision. Effects of divorce on children have been found to include lower academic achievement levels, more conduct behavior problems and psychological adjustment issues, lower self concept, and increased social competence difficulties (Amato, 2000). Overall, it is unclear what socio-cultural factors are implicated in changing marital and divorce trends, but examining factors related to conflict resolution among romantic partners may contribute to enhancing interpersonal satisfaction and thus decrease the likelihood of a relational dissolution.

Marital satisfaction levels are a logical precipitator of divorce. Since the 1970's reported marital satisfaction levels have been decreasing (Bradbury, 2000; Rogers & Amato, 1997). While it was originally thought that marital satisfaction levels followed a U-Shaped pattern, research has recently demonstrated that marital satisfaction levels tend to follow a more linear pattern, dropping significantly in the first year of marriage, after which there is a gradual decline (Glen, 1998). As the divorce rate is still relatively high in the U.S. and because research has shown that divorce has negative implications for both adults and children, it is important to examine factors that influence romantic relationship satisfaction levels, such that these levels can be enhanced and marital and relationship dissolution limited. Further, due to the fact that previous research (e.g. Cramer & Duncan, 2000) has determined that conflict resolution styles

utilized in romantic relationships influence romantic relationship satisfaction, there is a need for research to also examine the factors which effect conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships.

Early psychological theories posited the importance of a “healthy” self for successful interpersonal relationships. Bowen emphasized his theory of differentiation as a central component of establishing a healthy self within interpersonal relationships. Specifically, Bowen’s theory of differentiation stipulates that healthy relationships are based on a balance between maintaining autonomy while also staying connected in romantic relationships (Johnson, 1998, Knudson- Martin, 1994). Research has consistently demonstrated that those experiencing high levels of differentiation tend to experience less stress and distress (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004), exhibit more adaptive coping methods when presented with stress (Murdock, 2004), experience less anxiety and fear of evaluation (Peleg-Popko, 2002), demonstrate stronger self regulation skills (Skowron, 2004), experience fewer mental health issues (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006), demonstrate adaptive psychosocial development and adjustment (Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz, & Johnson, 2005), and exhibit a secure attachment style (Skowron, 2004), all of which have implications for establishing a “healthy” self in the context of one’s interpersonal relationships and enhancing relationship success.

Previous research has shown that conflict resolution styles are influenced by biological factors, such as personality (Boora & Shanti; Chanin & Schneer, 1984; Jones & Melcher, 1982) as well as ecological/experiential factors, such as attachment (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Creasey, 1999; Pistole, 1989; Skowron, 2004). Informed by Bowen’s Theory of Differentiation, this study expands on previous research findings by examining the extent to which conflict resolution styles relate to romantic relationship satisfaction and differentiation, a

family systems construct which has been shown to share similarities to attachment (Skowron, 2004). One's level of differentiation has implications for their ability to think rationally and autonomously and to establish and maintain a well defined sense of self within a relationship (Johnson, 1998; Knudson- Martin, 1994). Further, differentiation has been shown via research to influence self regulation skills (Skowron, 2004) as well as stress perceptions and the coping methods utilized in response to stress (Murdock, 2004). Due to these specific dynamics, it is believed that level of differentiation likely also influences the type of conflict resolution styles used in romantic relationships.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework- Theory of Differentiation

Differentiation of Self is a central concept of Bowen's Family Systems Theory. Differentiation is defined as the extent to which one is able to be autonomous within their romantic relationships, while limiting their feelings of being controlled by their family or romantic partner (Johnson, 1998). According to Bowen, there are three related systems that influence individuals' level of differentiation in relationships: Emotional, Feelings, and Intellectual. The emotional system regulates human behavior and functions sub-consciously. Feelings are related to emotions, but are more evolved and are felt more consciously. In contrast, the intellectual system allows individuals to understand and observe their emotional and feeling states, giving individuals some control regarding how they react to such states. The development of the intellectual system is believed to be central to the differentiation process, according to Bowen. An underdeveloped intellectual system allows intense feelings and emotional responses to overcome rational thinking within relationships. Bowen asserted that, while those with high differentiation levels exhibit a well developed intellectual system, those with low differentiation levels tend to exhibit an emotional system that over-powers their intellectual system (Knudson-Martin, 1994).

Bowen's theory of differentiation also outlines competing needs of individuality and togetherness. The need for other people is thought to enhance individual's emotional reactivity in response to others within relationships. Those with higher levels of differentiation within their relationships tend to experience a better developed sense of individuality, with their togetherness needs being less intense. In contrast, those experiencing low levels of differentiation tend to develop excessive togetherness needs in their relationships, resulting in the suppression of their

individuality and autonomy in relationships. According to Bowen, anxiety and stress within relationships develops when individuals react with excessive emotionality, and experience excessive togetherness needs (Knudson-Martin, 1994).

Bowen stipulated that one's level of differentiation is a reflection of their parents' levels of differentiation, with this transfer occurring via a multigenerational transmission and family projection process. As part of these processes, children become the recipients of their parents' anxieties, and they model their parents' anxiety-related behavior (Brown, 1999; Johnson, 1998). Research has failed to consistently demonstrate support for Bowen's hypothesis that differentiation is transmitted from parents to child via a multigenerational transmission process. For example, Tuason (2000) examined this hypothesis using structural equation modeling, with findings indicating that parents' levels of differentiation were not significant predictors of their children's levels of differentiation.

Bowen outlined four processes that underlie his theory of Differentiation: Emotional Reactivity, "I" Position, Fusion, and Emotional Cutoff. Emotional Reactivity refers to the extent to which one responds to environmental stimuli with automatic emotional responses, emotional flooding, and emotional lability. The "I" Position entails the extent to which one possesses a well defined sense of self within their relationships, as well as the extent to which they can uphold their beliefs despite pressure from others. Fusion refers to the extent to which one is overly involved with their significant others. Emotional Cutoff entails the extent to which one fears intimacy in their relationships and utilizes behavioral defenses such as avoidance in order to cope with such fears (Skowron & Dendy, 2004).

High Differentiation. Highly differentiated individuals demonstrate a strong "I" Position, as well as low levels of fusion, emotional cutoff, and emotional reactivity in their

relationships. Those with high levels of differentiation tend to function autonomously in their relationships, and they tend to be principle and goal oriented (Knudson-Martin, 1994). Highly differentiated individuals are able to experience a healthy balance of autonomy and intimacy within their interpersonal relationships (Skowron, 2000). These individuals tend to process emotions and feelings objectively such that the intellectual system overrides the emotional systems, allowing them to maintain more control within their relationships. They tend to be less affected by praise or criticism, and they take greater responsibility for the self (Knudson-Martin, 1994; Kosek, 1998). Individuals with high differentiation levels demonstrate and maintain a solid sense of self within their relationships, being able to take a strong “I” position. Consequently, these individuals’ convictions tend to be influenced by the self rather than from persuasion from others. (Knudson-Martin, 1994; Skowron, 2000). Those who are highly differentiated are better able to maintain connections with those holding different opinions, being better able to tolerate differences of opinion. These individuals demonstrate greater role flexibility and less emotional reactivity within relationships (Skowron, 2000).

Low Differentiation. Individuals with low levels of differentiation within their relationships demonstrate a weak “I” Position, as well as high levels of fusion, emotional reactivity, and emotional cutoff. Low levels of differentiation occurs when the intellectual system becomes overwhelmed by the feeling and emotional systems, resulting in excessive emotional reactivity within relationships (Knudson-Martin, 1994). Individuals with low levels of differentiation tend to invest a significant amount of focus and energy into their togetherness needs and expression of feelings, and consequently they tend to experience blurred emotional boundaries (Knudson-Martin, 1994; Peleg, 2008). These individuals tend to be more affected by their partner’s emotions, and they tend to experience difficulty thinking, feeling, or acting for

themselves (Kosek, 1998; Peleg, 2008). They tend to engage in a borrowing and trading of selves, putting aside their own needs, in order to maintain emotional equilibrium and harmony, and this dynamic often results in the establishment of polarized roles within their relationships (Brown, 1999; Skowron, 2000). Those with low levels of differentiation feel an intense responsibility for their partner's reactions, they react to the demands of their partner, and they have difficulty talking over issues with their partner (Brown, 1999). In order to cope with their relationship anxiety and high levels of fusion, Bowen proposed that individuals engage in emotional cutoff, a form of physical or emotional escape and withdrawal. While emotionally cutting oneself off can provide immediate relief from one's anxieties, one's tendencies towards emotional reactivity within a relationship remain intact. This can create significant enduring emotional pressure within a relationship (Brown, 1999).

Differentiation and Stress. Research has demonstrated that one's level of differentiation influences their experience of stress. Skowron, Wester, and Azen (2004) determined that differentiation functions as a mediator between stress and psychological symptoms, with emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff together accounting for 66.6 percent of this mediation. Findings additionally indicated that college stress is negatively associated with differentiation, and differentiation is positively associated with psychological adjustment. According to the researchers, these findings suggest that college stress and adjustment stem from one's ability to regulate their emotions, maintain healthy connections with others, avoid engaging in emotional cutoff, and establish and maintain a strong "I" Position. Further, the researchers concluded that differentiation, specifically autonomy, independence, emotional regulation, and healthy family connections, accounts for one third of the association between stress and college adjustment (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004).

Supporting the aforementioned findings regarding the association between level of differentiation and stress, Krycak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) determined via their research that differentiation of self partially mediates the relationship between stress and psychological distress, as well as the relationship between stressful events and perceived stress. Further, findings suggested that those with low levels of differentiation have difficulty coping with stressful events, especially as they tend to react emotionally and they fail to demonstrate assertive behavior. Another central finding of this study indicated that a low "I" Position and high emotional reactivity tends to result in high levels of stress perceptions, likely associated with the fact those demonstrating these differentiation levels tend to become overwhelmed by emotion when they experience relationship stressors (Krycak, Murdock, & Marszalek, 2012).

Research conducted by Murdock (2004) supports the aforementioned assertions that differentiation of self is associated with stress, however this study found that differentiation of self moderates rather than mediates the association between psychological distress and stress perceptions. Specifically, findings indicated that those experiencing lower levels of differentiation demonstrated a stronger relationship between psychological distress and perceived stress levels compared to their counterparts (Murdock, 2004). Additionally, according to Murdock (2004), predictors of psychological distress include perceived stress, differentiation of self, and the interaction of perceived stress and differentiation of self.

Differentiation additionally affects coping methods utilized when one is confronted with stress, which in turns effects stress perceptions. Murdock (2004) determined that those with higher differentiation levels tend to utilize a more reflective, approach oriented, and thoughtful coping style. In contrast, those with lower differentiation levels tend to utilize more reactive and

emotion-focused as well as suppressive and avoidant coping styles. These findings are especially crucial as reactive and suppressive coping styles are positively associated with poor psychological functioning. Likely influenced by the coping methods utilized, those with higher differentiation levels have been found to report fewer psychological symptoms compared to their counterparts (Murdock, 2004).

Differentiation and Physical and Mental Health. Differentiation of Self also holds implications for one's mental health. Peleg-Popko (2002) examined the relationships between differentiation, anxiety, and somatic symptoms. Results of this study showed that those experiencing greater differentiation levels tend to experience fewer somatic symptoms and lower social anxiety levels, fear of evaluation in particular, in comparison to their counterparts. The researchers conjectured that this finding supports the assertion that one's ability to cope when being evaluated by others is likely influenced by their differentiation levels, with low differentiation levels hindering one's ability to cope effectively. The finding that those with lower levels of differentiation demonstrate greater fear of evaluation may indicate that individuals experiencing low differentiation levels may experience evaluative events as threatening and anxiety-provoking (Peleg-Popko, 2002). In a more recent study conducted by Peleg and Yitzhak (2010), gender differences were identified in terms of the association between level of differentiation and separation anxiety. For men, separation anxiety was found to be positively associated with fusion with others. In contrast, women demonstrated a positive association between separation anxiety and emotional reactivity (Peleg & Yitzhak, 2010).

Additional research has identified implications of differentiation for one's mental and physical health. Thorberg and Lyvers (2006) determined that lower levels of differentiation are exhibited by those in treatment for alcohol and substance addiction, with those in treatment

demonstrating greater levels of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff and a less well defined “I” Position compared to their counterparts. Daniels, Murray and Murray (2006) also identified a negative relationship between level of differentiation and fibromyalgia symptoms. Findings of this particular study indicated that differentiation moderates the relationship between perceived stress and fibromyalgia symptoms. The researchers conjectured that stress perceptions and coping methods likely contribute to the increased fibromyalgia symptoms demonstrated by those with low levels of differentiation (Daniels, Murray, & Murray, 2006).

Level of Differentiation is also associated with psychological reactance, a dynamic that can be akin to misconduct behavior. Psychological Reactance occurs when one’s behavioral freedom is limited, causing one to engage in that behavior in order to regain control. As part of this dynamic, one may increase the frequency with which they engage in the prohibited behavior, or they may demonstrate aggression oriented towards the person prohibiting the behavior (Johnson & Buboltz, 2000). Findings of the study carried out by Johnson and Buboltz (2000) indicated that differentiation predicts psychological reactance. Specifically, difficulty functioning autonomously as well as difficulty functioning without being controlled by or feeling responsible for others was found to be associated with greater psychological reactance. The researchers asserted that these findings suggest that psychological reactance has a developmental etiology (Johnson & Buboltz, 2000).

Differentiation and Psychosocial Development. Level of Differentiation is related to psychosocial development, as demonstrated by a study carried out by Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz, and Johnson (2005). Findings of this study suggest that emotional reactivity is related to the identity formation process such that those who engage in emotional flooding and demonstrate emotional lability also tend to exhibit less confidence and a less stable identity.

Additionally, having a stable and well defined “I” position was found to be positively associated with healthy psychosocial development, while emotional cutoff was found to be negatively associated with this development (Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz, & Johnson, 2005).

Research has also demonstrated that Bowen’s theory of differentiation has significant similarities to Bowlby’s theory of attachment, with both theories outlining the processes through which individuals internalize familial experiences, and how such processes influences one’s development of the self (Skowron, 2004). Research conducted by Skowron (2004) confirmed that there is a significant relationship between differentiation and attachment, demonstrating that differentiation predicted forty and sixty-two percent of the variance in attachment anxiety and avoidance respectively. Further, attachment anxiety was determined to be significantly and positively related to emotional reactivity, while attachment avoidance is related to emotional cutoff. These findings are of particular significance as insecure attachment is associated with negative developmental outcomes such as increased aggression, antisocial behavior, social withdrawal, and maladaptive attributions (Dwyer, Fredstrom, Booth-Laforce, Rose-Krasnor, & Burgess, 2010; Lewis, Feiring, McGuffog, & Jaskir, 1984; Renken, 1989). Overall, Skowron (2004), concluded that the findings of this study illustrate that differentiation and attachment are different processes, but also show similar dimensions such as the need for intimacy and autonomy in relationships.

Skowron (2004) additionally determined that the interaction of differentiation of self and attachment has implications for one’s self-regulation and effortful control. Self regulation refers to one’s ability to modulate their arousal, emotional feelings, attention, and behavior (Skowron, 2004). Findings suggested that those demonstrating less attachment anxiety and avoidance as well as higher levels of differentiation of self exhibit greater ability to achieve effortful,

attentional, and behavioral control. Skowron (2004) asserts that these findings lend support to the assertion by Bowen that increased differentiation between the thinking and feeling/emotional systems influences one's ability to cope effectively when anxious and think clearly when experiencing strong emotions.

Differentiation and Relationship Satisfaction. Differentiation of self is associated with relationship satisfaction, with differentiation levels being positively related to marital and relationship satisfaction (Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000). Peleg (2008) conjectured that the aforementioned association between differentiation and marital/relationship satisfaction is due to the fact that those who experience high levels of differentiation can experience a full range of emotional intimacy in their relationships, and they don't feel the need to sacrifice their basic selves in their relationships. Further, fused partners may perceive that they are responsible for their partner's pain and failures, establishing a cycle of guilt and blame and resulting in lower relationship satisfaction levels. In a study conducted by Skowron (2000), differentiation of self scores accounted for two-third and one-half of the variance observed in husband and wife marital adjustment scores respectively, with the researcher asserting that this finding suggests that the ability to balance connectedness and individuality is important for marital satisfaction. According to the researchers, being emotionally present and available appears to have significant implications for marital satisfaction, with this study demonstrating that emotional cutoff is most highly and negatively associated with marital satisfaction. Overall, the findings of this study suggested that high husband emotional cutoff and wife emotional reactivity predicts marital discord (Skowron, 2000).

Differentiation and Gender Differences. Males versus females tend to demonstrate different patterns in terms of their levels of differentiation, with such patterns affecting their

experience of romantic relationship satisfaction. Kosek (1998) determined that wives demonstrate more emotional reactivity compared to husbands, and they also demonstrate a less solidified “I” Position, indicating that they tend to adhere less to their beliefs and that they tend to develop their sense of self via their interpersonal connections. In contrast, husbands tend to express their emotionality via disengagement and emotional cutoff. In a more recent study conducted by Peleg and Yitzhak (2010), it was determined that spouses demonstrate similar emotional cutoff and I Position scores, however wives tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional reactivity and fusion with others. In terms of relationship satisfaction, Peleg (2008) found that men’s relationship satisfaction levels tend to be related to low emotional reactivity, low emotional cutoff, and a solid “I” Position, while women’s relationship satisfaction levels tend to be related to low emotional cutoff. These findings are likely due to the fact that, according to Peleg (2008), when men are unsatisfied they tend to cope via withdrawal. In contrast, women tend to be more affected by conflict such they internalize conflict and do not withdraw.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict Dynamics in Romantic Relationships. According to Christensen and Pasch (1993), conflict within romantic relationships is characterized by the progression through seven distinct stages. First, a couple experiences a conflict of interest such that the needs of each partner are incompatible. Second, stressful circumstances and demands are present, increasing the likelihood of conflict occurring. Third, a precipitating event occurs, influenced by one or both partners’ behavior, which leads to conflict. Fourth, partners either engage in or avoid discussion of the problem. If they engage, the fifth stage is initiated, in which an interactional scenario occurs. As part of the sixth stage, an immediate outcome is achieved such that partners feel that the problem is resolved, they feel understood, or they feel validated regarding their

perceptions of their partner. The seventh stage involves the re-establishment of normality. During this stage, the impact of the conflict is terminated in regards to the current interaction, but the conflict can have future implications for the relationship (Christensen & Pasch, 1993).

Of particular pertinence to the current study are the fourth and fifth stages proposed by Christensen and Pasch (1993), the avoidance versus engagement stage and the resultant interactional stage. Engagement of conflict is healthier for a romantic relationship, as it allows a couple to differentiate from each other, and to problem solve. A couple's inclination to engage or avoid conflict can be a function of their self efficacy, in terms of their ability to successfully resolve conflict. Those couples who believe that they can successfully resolve conflict, tend to engage. In contrast, those couples who believe that they are not able to successfully resolve conflict, tend to pursue avoidance. Additionally, relationship commitment as well as the affect felt towards one's partner also likely influences a couple's engagement versus avoidance of conflict (Christensen & Pasch, 1993).

There are three interactional styles that can characterize how conflict is addressed in romantic relationships, according to Christensen and Pasch (1993). Couples can engage in a demand/withdraw scenario in which one partner wants to discuss the problem, engages in criticism of their partner, and makes demands for change. Meanwhile, the other partner avoids the conflict, defends their position, and withdraws. Research has shown that women tend to be more likely to demand, while men are more likely to withdraw. This demand/withdraw dynamic tends to originate from a conflict of interest, for example when one partner wants change to occur in the relationship while the other partner wants things to stay the same (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). Couples' interactional style can also encompass a negative mutual engagement, such that partners attack, blame, dominate and criticize each other as well as compete and find

fault with each other. While this interactional style can result in short term gains and changes, no long term and sustaining change tends to be achieved (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). Mutual Positive Engagement is an additional interactional style that can occur when couples are confronted with conflict within their relationship. As part of this interactional style, couples discuss their feelings and positions, find areas of agreement, and engage in compromise with the goal of finding a solution to the conflict. Mutual Positive Engagement tends to be synonymous with the integrative conflict resolution style (Christensen & Pasch, 1993).

Conflict Resolution Styles. Conflict resolution styles entail the way in which one responds to their partner when conflict develops in their relationship (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008). According to Rahim (1983), conflict resolution strategies incorporate two dimensions, including the extent to which one attempts to satisfy their own needs and the extent to which one attempts to satisfy the needs of their partner. Rahim (1983) proposed five interpersonal conflict resolution strategies: Integrating, Obliging, Avoidant, Compromising, and Dominating.

The integrating conflict resolution style entails a high concern for the needs of the self, as well as a high concern for the needs of one's partner such that the outcomes for both partners are maximized (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Rahim, 1983). When one uses an obliging conflict resolution style, they demonstrate a low concern for their own needs and a high concern for those needs of their partner, such that they make concessions in order to meet the needs of their partner (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Rahim, 1983). The avoidant conflict resolution style entails a low concern for the self and a low concern for one's partner such that minimal effort is put towards resolving conflict in a relationship (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Rahim, 1983). The dominating conflict resolution style

is such that one places emphasis on ensuring that their own needs are met when presented with conflict (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Rahim, 1983). Finally, the compromising conflict resolution style is such that partners attempt to find a middle ground between concern for oneself and for their partner (Pistole, 1989; Rahim, 1983).

Conflict Resolution Styles and Personality. Conflict resolution styles have a biological etiology, with research demonstrating that personality factors influence the styles individuals use. In a study conducted by Boora and Shanti, the researchers examined the effect of the big five personality traits on conflict resolutions styles. Neuroticism was found to be negatively associated with the collaborating style and positively correlated with the avoiding style, likely due to the fact that those with high levels of neuroticism demonstrate impulse control difficulties as well as difficulties coping with stress. Openness is negatively correlated with the competing conflict resolution style, with those demonstrating high levels of openness preferring more compromising and collaborative styles likely due to their inherent flexibility and adaptability. In terms of extraversion, this personality style was shown to be negatively correlated to the accommodation style. Individuals demonstrating high levels of extraversion also tend to exhibit assertiveness as well as little respect for their partner's needs. Likely due to their inclinations towards cooperation and consideration, those demonstrating high levels of agreeableness tend to utilize the compromising resolution style (Boora & Shanti).

Additional personality factors are also associated with the conflict resolution styles utilized in interpersonal interactions. Those demonstrating inclinations towards feeling tend to use the accommodating, cooperative, and distributing resolution styles. Inclination towards thinking is positively associated with the competing, assertive, and proactive resolution styles. Those demonstrating inclinations towards sensing tend to attend to all sensory information,

including their partner's concerns, and consequently they tend to demonstrate the compromising resolution style (Chanin & Schneer, 1984). Positive correlations have also been found between affiliation/nurturance needs and the smoothing resolution style, deference needs and the forcing style, and dogmatism/Machiavellianism and the confronting style. Negative correlations have been found between affiliation needs and the forcing resolution style as well as Machiavellianism and the smoothing style (Jones & Melcher, 1982).

Conflict Resolution Styles and Attachment. Conflict resolution styles also have a developmental and ecological etiology. A vast amount of research has focused on the association between conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships and attachment, a familial socialization and developmental process that has been shown to have a significant association with differentiation (Skowron, 2004). Research has determined that an integrating and compromising conflict resolution style tends to be associated with a secure attachment style (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, Calhoun, 2008; Pistole, 1989). In contrast, the utilization of the obliging and avoidant conflict resolution styles tends to be associated with an insecure attachment style, with anxious attachment being linked to the obliging resolution style and avoidant attachment being linked to the avoidant resolution style (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, Calhoun, 2008; Pistole, 1989).

Creasey (1999) examined the association between attachment style and conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships, also assessing the role that mood regulation plays in this association. Findings of this study suggest that those with an insecure attachment style are more likely compared to their securely attached counterparts to feel that they have little control over their negative moods, which in turn predicts conflict management skills. According to Creasey (1999), having confidence in one's ability to regulate their mood has significant

implications for conflict resolution, as strong emotions such as anger and sadness can impede one's ability to accurately interpret their partner's behaviors and actions, thus making it challenging to collect one's thoughts. Findings further indicated that those demonstrating an anxious attachment style tend to exhibit high levels of negativity, and engage in conflict management behaviors such as nagging, whining, defensiveness, and cross complaining, hindering their ability to resolve conflict positively. In contrast, those demonstrating an avoidant attachment style tend to engage in more withdrawal when presented with conflict in romantic relationships, as these individuals tend to accept the unavailability of their partners (Creasey, 1999).

Conflict Resolution Styles and Relationship Satisfaction. Research has consistently demonstrated that conflict resolution styles influence romantic relationship satisfaction levels. Cramer and Duncan (2000) examined the effect of conflict style, unresolved conflict, and frequency of conflict on relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships. Findings indicated that reported relationship satisfaction levels are negatively correlated with negative conflict resolution styles (becoming irritated, engaging in avoidance), with negative conflict resolution styles being positively correlated with unresolved conflict. Further, relationship satisfaction was found to be more strongly correlated with negative conflict resolution style and unresolved conflict than it was with conflict frequency, suggesting that how conflict is handled and the extent to which it is resolved, rather than conflict frequency, influences relationship satisfaction levels (Cramer & Duncan, 2000).

According to Christensen and Pasch (1993), conflict engagement styles vary between distressed and non-distressed couples. Distressed couples tend to engage in negative mutual engagement when presented with conflict, engaging in criticism, put downs, hostility, and

counter complaining. Distressed couples also tend to experience negative affect when confronted with conflict. Avoidance of conflict is associated with dissatisfaction. In contrast, non-distressed couples tend to engage in mutual positive engagement, with satisfied couples being more likely to express approval and caring and empathy. Further, satisfied couples tend to engage in problem solving, and they tend to experience positive affect when confronted with conflict. Compared to divorcing couples, non-distressed couples tend to engage in mutual discussion of the problem, express their feelings and to understand each other's views. Additionally, non-distressed couples tend to engage in negotiation in order to achieve a resolution and to achieve a resolution to the conflict (Christensen & Pasch, 1993).

Romantic relationship satisfaction has also been determined to be a function of an interaction between attachment style and conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships. Pistole (1989) established research findings indicating that those experiencing a secure attachment style demonstrate greater relationship satisfaction compared to their insecurely attached counterparts, with those individuals reporting higher relationship satisfaction also being more likely to use a compromising conflict resolution style compared to their dissatisfied counterparts. Further, this research indicated that individuals reporting high and medium relationship satisfaction levels are more likely to use the integrating conflict resolution style in their romantic relationships compared to their dissatisfied counterparts (Pistole, 1989).

Cann, Norman, Welbourne, and Calhoun (2008) also found an interaction effect between attachment and conflict resolution styles through their research, with those demonstrating low avoidance being more likely to utilize obliging and integrating conflict resolution styles, resulting in greater reported relationship satisfaction levels. Further, those experiencing less anxious attachment were more likely to use the integrating conflict resolution styles and less

likely to use the dominating style, resulting in greater reported relationship satisfaction. These researchers concluded that when one perceives themselves positively (i.e. experiences low attachment anxiety) and views others positively (i.e. experiences low attachment avoidance), they are more likely to seek integrative solutions when experiencing conflict in their relationships, they are more likely to make concessions during conflict, and they are less likely to seek a solution to the conflict that is at their partner's expense (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, Calhoun, 2008).

Gender and Conflict Resolution Styles. Early investigations on gender differences in conflict resolution strategies reveal that males utilize more denial-avoidant strategies as compared to females (Haferkamp, 1992). That is, males are less inclined to acknowledge conflict and rely on avoidant strategies such as changing the subject or putting off discussing the conflict (Haferkamp, 1992). Additionally, males tend to use more obliging conflict resolution strategies than do females, indicating that males tend to be especially inclined to respond to conflict by ensuring that their partner's needs are maximized (Rahim, 1983). On the other hand, females rely on cooperative conflict resolution strategies more often as compared to males (Haferkamp, 1992). In an early study by Rahim (1983), females were found to use more integrating and compromising conflict resolution strategies in comparison to males. That is, females are able to integrate their concerns as well as the concerns of their partner such that outcomes for both partners are maximized (Rahim, 1983). More recent research in this area replicates these previous findings. Shi (2003) established that males tend to utilize more avoidant conflict resolution styles, while females tend to utilize more integrative styles. This research did not find any gender differences in terms of the use of the obliging conflict resolution style (Shi, 2003).

The association between gender, conflict resolution strategies, and marital satisfaction was considered in a study by Kurdek (1995). Findings indicated that low levels of marital satisfaction are associated with female spousal conflict engagement and male spousal withdrawal. For female spouses, the use of withdrawal as a conflict resolution strategy was determined to be negatively associated with marital satisfaction. In contrast, for male spouses, the aforementioned negative association between withdrawal and marital satisfaction was dependent on wives' compliance, conflict engagement and withdrawal (Kurdek, 1995).

Present Study

Past research has examined biological and environmental/experiential/ecological factors that affect the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationship, as well as how such styles influence romantic relationship satisfaction. The present study contributes to and expands on the previous research by investigating whether Bowen's levels of differentiation are associated with the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships. This study attempts to answer the following question: Does level of differentiation influence the type of conflict resolution strategies utilized in romantic relationships? Currently, there is a scarcity of literature examining this couple and family systems theoretical construct and the role it plays in the way romantic partners resolve conflict in their relationship. This study attempts to address this gap in the literature with greater depth and theoretical specificity.

Another aim of this study is to examine the role that conflict resolution styles play in the previously determined positive association between levels of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. This study attempts to answer the question: does the type of conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships help explain why high levels of differentiation are associated with high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction? Establishing the relationship

between differentiation, conflict resolution styles, and romantic relationship satisfaction has significant implications for our understanding of how and why levels of differentiation influence romantic relationship satisfaction. Additionally, if a statistical association were to emerge among the aforementioned three variables, this research would have implications for therapy as well. It may suggest that differentiation and conflict resolution styles should be examined conjointly in therapy in order to maximize couples' romantic relationship satisfaction levels. Further, enhancing romantic relationship satisfaction levels is crucial in preventing relationship dissolution, as current marital rates continue to decline and one in two marriages in the U.S. currently end in divorce (Bradbury, 2000; Lamidi & Payne, 2014; Payne, 2014).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine how level of differentiation influences the type of conflict resolution strategies utilized in romantic relationships. Bowen's theory of differentiation provides the theoretical foundation for this study. One's emotional reactivity level likely holds implications for their ability to approach conflict rationally and to problem solve effectively. Additionally, fusion levels likely have implications for one's ability to discern their own needs and concerns from those of their partner, which is a central component of conflict resolution. The extent to which individuals have a well developed "I" position likely influences their assertiveness in regards to pursuing their needs when attempting to resolve conflict in their relationships. Finally, emotional cutoff levels likely influence one's tendency to avoid conflict in their romantic relationships. Consequently, it is believed that level of differentiation likely influences conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships. The following hypotheses are proposed below. Two central research questions guide this study:

1. Does level of differentiation influence the type of conflict resolution strategies utilized in romantic relationships?
 - a) It is hypothesized that the utilization of the avoidant conflict resolution style would vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that males who experience low levels of differentiation will report using the avoidant conflict resolution style significantly more often than will females who experience high levels of differentiation.
 - b) It is hypothesized that the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style will vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that males who experience low levels of differentiation will report using the obliging conflict resolution style significantly more often than will females who experience high levels of differentiation.
 - c) It is hypothesized that the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style will vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that females who experience high levels of differentiation will report using the integrating conflict resolution style significantly more often than will males who experience low levels of differentiation.

2. Does the type of conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships help explain why high levels of differentiation are associated with high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction?
 - a) Individuals with high differentiation levels will report greater romantic relationship satisfaction levels than will individuals with low differentiation levels.

- b) Individuals who report using high levels of the integrating conflict resolution style will report greater relationship satisfaction levels compared to individuals who report using low levels of the integrating conflict resolution style.
- c) When controlling for the integrating conflict resolution style, it is expected that differentiation level will not be related to relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER 3 METHOD

The following chapter outlines this study's methodology, with descriptions of the research design, participants, sample demographics, procedure, materials, and data analyses.

Research Design

This study employed a non experimental research design, and as such no manipulation of the independent variables were carried out. Table 1 outlines the variables employed in this study:

Table 1

Study Variables

Research Question 1:	
Independent Variables	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender (Male, Female) 2. Level of Differentiation (High, Low)
Dependent Variables	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrating Conflict Resolution Style 2. Obliging Conflict Resolution Style 3. Avoidant Conflict Resolution Style
Research Question 2:	
Independent Variables	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Level of Differentiation (High, Low) 2. Utilization of the Integrating Conflict Resolution Style (High, Low)
Dependent Variable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Romantic Relationship Satisfaction
Covariate Variable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilization of the Integrating Conflict Resolution Style

Participants

The sample for this study included male and female students and employees ages 18 and older, who are part of Wayne State, a large Midwestern urban university located in Detroit, MI. This study included individuals who reported being in a committed romantic relationship for the last three months. A committed relationship was defined as a relationship in which the labels of boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse are used. The aim of this study was to assess individual participants' differentiation levels, and how one's own differentiation level influences the

conflict resolution style that they utilize in their romantic relationships. Therefore, assessing differentiation complementarity between couples was not within the scope of the current study.

A power analysis using G* Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was performed to estimate a sample size for this study. An effect size ($f=0.0625$) was selected and power set at .95 and a probability of .05 with four groups (each factor has 2 levels), yielding an estimated total sample size of 170. After the data collection process was completed, this study's sample included 189 participants.

Sample Demographics

A total number of 189 participants completed the study questionnaires, which consisted of 53% women ($n = 100$) and 48% men ($n = 89$), ranging in ages between 18 and 64 years. Approximately half of the participants were between 18 and 25 years of age (48%), with 32% of participants falling in the 26 to 35 age range and about 20% falling in the 36 plus age range. Almost three fourths of participants (73%) held a non-minority status and the remaining quarter of participants held a minority status (i.e. African American, Asian American). A little over half (56%) of participants identified themselves as undergraduate college students or holding an undergraduate degree, and 41% self reported as graduate students or having a graduate degree. 60% of participants reported that they are currently cohabitating with their romantic partners. The majority of participants indicated that they are either employed full or part time (44% and 38% respectively), with 18% of participants reporting that they are currently unemployed. A specific religious identification was reported among 61%, whereas 39% indicated that they are not affiliated with a specific religion. The majority of participants reported that they do not have children (71%).

Relationship Status. About two thirds (65%) of the participants reported that they are currently engaged in a committed romantic relationship and one third (35%) reported that they are currently married. The majority (97%) of participants reported that they are currently not engaged in a same sex relationship. About one third (35%) of participants indicated that their current relationship has lasted 1-3 years, about a quarter each 8 or more years (26%) and less than 12 months (21%), with the remaining 17% reporting that their current relationship has lasted 4-7 years. The majority (89%) of participants indicated that they are sexually active. (See Table 2 for a full review of participant characteristics).

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Sample (n = 189)

Characteristics	N	%	Valid %
Gender			
Female	100	52.9	52.9
Male	89	47.1	47.1
Missing	0		
Age			
Young: 18-25	89	47.1	48.1
Middle: 26-35	60	31.7	32.4
Old: 36+	36	19	19.5
Missing	4	2.1	
Ethnicity			
Non-Minority	137	72.5	72.5
Minority	52	27.5	27.5
Missing	0		
Education			
High School Graduate	6	3.2	3.2
Undergraduate	105	55.6	55.9
Graduate	77	40.7	41
Missing	1	.5	
Parental Marital Status			
Married	113	59.8	59.8
Not Married	76	40.2	40.2
Missing	0		

Characteristics	N	%	Valid %
Living Arrangement			
Cohabiting w/ Romantic Partner	96	50.8	51.3
Not Cohabiting w/ Romantic Partner	91	48.1	48.7
Missing	2	1.1	
Employment Status			
Employed Full Time	83	43.9	43.9
Employed Part Time	72	38.1	38.1
Unemployed	34	18	18
Missing	0		
Religion			
Religious Affiliation	115	60.8	60.8
No Religious Affiliation	74	39.2	39.2
Missing	0		
Children			
Children	54	28.6	29.2
No Children	131	69.3	70.8
Missing	4	2.1	
Medication			
Taking Medication	30	20.6	20.6
Not Taking Medication	150	79.4	79.4
Missing	0		
Therapy			
Therapy	81	42.9	42.9
No Therapy	108	57.1	57.1
Missing	0		
Number of Committed Relationships			
1-2 Relationships	101	53.4	54.9
3+ Relationships	83	43.9	45.1
Missing	5	2.6	
Longest Time Spent in a Relationship			
3 months- 2 years	67	35.4	36
3-5 years	52	27.5	28
6+ years	67	35.4	36
Missing	3	1.6	

Characteristic	N	%	Valid %
Relationship Status			
In a Relationship	122	64.6	64.6
Married	67	35.4	35.4
Missing	0		
Same Sex Relationship			
Same Sex	6	3.2	3.2
Different Sex	183	96.8	96.8
Missing	0		
Length of Current Relationship			
<12 months	38	20.1	21.3
1-3 years	62	32.8	34.8
4-7 years	31	16.4	17.4
8+ years	47	24.9	26.4
Missing	11	5.8	
Frequency of Seeing Partner			
Everyday	106	56.1	56.7
Fewer than Everyday	81	42.9	43.3
Missing	2	1.1	
Sexually Active			
Sexually Active	166	87.8	89.2
Sexually Inactive	20	10.6	10.8
Missing	3	1.6	

Procedures

This study's participants were administered one questionnaire containing four sessions: the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised, the Conflict Resolution Scale, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and a Demographic profile constructed by the researcher. Participants completed an informed consent form, outlining the study approved by the University Institutional Review Board.

Recruitment. Various recruitment methods approved by the committee to protect human subjects were implemented to invite volunteers to participate in completing a questionnaire. Participants were recruited via various methods. The principle investigator recruited participants

at two separate university campuses via an information booth providing informed consent packets, questionnaire forms, and small rewards for completing the questionnaire including pens and key chains. Further, participants were recruited from various graduate and undergraduate courses in the College of Education. All questionnaires were completed anonymously and assigned an arbitrary identification number for the purposes of data entry.

Measures

Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised. The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) was originally developed by Skowron and Friedlander (1998), with a revision to the Fusion with Others scale being conducted by Skowron & Schmitt (2003) leading to the establishment of the Differentiation of Self Inventory- Revised (DSI-R). The DSI-R (see Appendix C) was administered to this study's participants in order to assess participants' level of Differentiation. The DSI-R is a 46-item scale consisting of the following 4 subscales: Emotional Cutoff, Emotional Reactivity, Fusion with Others, and "I" Position (Skowron & Friedlaner, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The Emotional Cutoff subscale examines the extent to which one fears intimacy in their relationships and utilizes behavioral defenses such as avoidance in order to cope with such fears (Skowron & Dendy, 2004). An example of an item on the Emotional Cutoff subscale is as follows: "I have difficulty expressing my emotions to people that I care for" (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The Emotional Reactivity subscale assesses the extent to which one responds to environmental stimuli with automatic emotional responses, emotional flooding, and emotional lability (Skowron & Dendy, 2004), with an example item including "People have remarked that I am overly emotional" (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The Fusion with Others subscale examines the extent to which one is overly involved with their significant others (Skowron & Dendy, 2004). An example item on this subscale includes "I usually need a lot of

encouragement from others when starting a big job or task” (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The “I” Position subscale examines the extent to which one possesses a well defined sense of self within their relationships, as well as the extent to which they can uphold their beliefs despite pressure from others (Skowron & Dendy, 2004), with an example item being “No matter what happens in my life, I know that I’ll never lose my sense of who I am” (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003).

The DSI-R items are scored using a 6-point Likert scale format (1 = Not at all true of me; 6 = Very True of Me). Subscale item scores are reverse coded on the Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Cutoff, and Fusion with Others subscales, with one item on the “I” Position subscale also being reverse-coded. The sum of the item scores on each subscale is calculated, and then divided by the number of items on the subscale such that the subscale total score ranges from a 1 to a 6, with higher scores indicating a greater level of differentiation of self. In order to obtain a Differentiation of Self total score, subscale total scores are summed (Skowron & Dendy, 2004).

Skowron and Friedlander (1998) reported high reliabilities for all four subscales of the DSI (Emotional Reactivity = .83; “I” Position = .80; Emotional Cutoff = .80; Fusion with Others = .82). The DSI-R has also been shown to possess strong internal consistency, with the following Cronbach’s alpha coefficients being reported: DSI-R Full Scale = .92; Fusion with Others = .86; Emotional Reactivity = .89; “I” Position = .81; Emotional Cutoff = .84 (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). In a study conducted by Murdock and Gore (2004), in which the researchers tested the hypothesis that those with low levels of differentiation would feel the effects of stress more so than would their counterparts, an internal consistency alpha for the DSI total score was determined to be .88 for their sample of 119 university students. The DSI has also been shown to have inter-correlations between the four subscales ranging from -.17 to .45, with the DSI-R having subscale inter-correlations ranging from .24-.66 as well as an inter-correlation between

the DSI-R total score and subscale scores ranging from .62 to .86 (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The DSI has been shown to have strong construct validity as well. Murdock and Gore (2004) found the total DSI score to be negatively related to suppressive coping methods ($r = -.40$), and reactive coping methods ($r = -.37$). Additionally, Skowron and Friedlander (1998) achieved statistically significant correlations in the expected direction between Trait Anxiety ratings on the STAI-T and all four of the DSI subscales, with these correlations ranging from .16 for Fusion with others to .58 for Emotional Reactivity. The construct validity of the Fusion with Others subscale on the DSI-R has also been established, with scores on the Fusion with Other subscale being significantly associated with scores on the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS) spousal fusion subscale, as well as the fear of abandonment and desire to merge with others subscales on the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (ECR) (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003).

Conflict Resolution Scale. The Conflict Resolution Scale (see Appendix C), developed by Rahim (1983), was used in this study in order to examine the conflict resolution styles that participants' utilize in their romantic relationships. The Conflict Resolution Scale is composed of twenty-eight items and five subscales: Integrating, Compromising, Dominating, Obliging, and Avoiding. Due to the poor psychometric properties of the compromising and dominating subscales, only the following three subscales were used for this study: Integrating, Avoiding, and Obliging, reducing the scale to 19 items. Items are scored using 1 to 7 likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). Subscale total scores are calculated by summing the item scores of the subscale. The scale is preceded by the following root statement: "In my current romantic relationship, I try to..."

The Integrating subscale, being composed of 7 items, assesses the extent to which one possesses a high concern for both the self and partner, and consequently pursues a resolution to experienced conflict that achieves the desired outcomes for each. One of the integrating scale items is as follows: “In my current romantic relationship, I try to investigate an issue with my significant other to find a solution that is acceptable to us”. The Obliging subscale, being composed of 6 items, assesses the extent to which one concedes to their partner in order to enhance their partner’s desired outcome, entailing a low concern for self and a high concern for one’s partner. One of the obliging scale items is as follows, “In my current romantic relationship, I try to satisfy the expectations of my significant other”. The Avoiding subscale, which is composed of 6 items, examines the extent to which one refrains from attempting to resolve conflict, possessing a low concern for one’s self and their partner. One of the avoidant scale items is as follows: “In my romantic relationship, I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my significant other” (Rahim, 1983).

The Conflict Resolution Scale has been shown to have test re-test reliabilities of .83, .81, and .79 for the Integrating, Obliging, and Avoiding subscales respectively. Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients have been determined to be .77, .72, and .72 for the aforementioned subscales respectively (Rahim, 1983). Rahim (1983) performed a discriminate analysis between males versus females in terms of their use of specific conflict resolution styles, finding that these two groups do differ significantly in terms of the conflict resolution style used. Discriminate coefficients were found to be .32, -.41, and .82 for the integrating, obliging, and avoiding styles respectively, with results suggesting that females use more integrating and avoiding conflict resolutions styles, and less obliging conflict resolution styles than do males.

Relationship Assessment Scale. The Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RAS) (see Appendix C), developed by Hendrick (1988) was administered to this study's participants in order to assess their current satisfaction with their romantic relationship. The RAS is a brief scale composed of seven items, one of which being "How often do you wish that you hadn't gotten into this relationship?" Items are scored using a 1 to 7 likert scale format. Higher scores on this scale are indicative of higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The RAS exhibits strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .86, and the mean inter-correlation of RAS items is .49. The RAS has been shown to have a moderate correlation with commitment, and it has also been shown to be positively associated with love attitude styles of passionate and altruistic love, self-esteem and self disclosure to a lover, and one's self perceived ability to elicit self-disclosure. The RAS has been shown to distinguish significant group differences between couples who stay together and couples who break up in terms of their reported relationship satisfaction levels ($F(1,29) = 28.41, p < .0001$), with those couples who stay together reporting significantly higher relationship satisfaction levels on the RAS ($M = 4.34$) compared to those couples who break up ($M = 3.33$) (Hendricks, 1988).

Demographics. Participants completed a brief demographic section (see Appendix C), including the following: gender (Male, Female, Intersex), age, current romantic relationship status (Single, In a relationship and using boyfriend/girlfriend titles, Married), and the length of their current romantic relationship (number of months or years), ethnic/racial reference group (White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab-American/Pakistan) current education level (High School Graduate, GED, Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Masters, Doctorate), and their parent's marital status (married, divorced, separated, never married). If the respondent indicated a parental

divorce or separation, age at which their parents divorced/separated was collected. Additional characteristics included current living arrangements (living alone, living with a roommate, cohabitating with partner, living with parents), employment status (employed full time, employed part time, unemployed), religious affiliation, number of children, history of counseling/therapeutic services, and current medication.

Relational Status. Information pertaining to previous and current relationship experiences was collected. A series of open-ended questions inquiring about length of longest relationship (# months/years), number of committed relationships, sexual orientation of relationship (e.g. same sex, heterogenous), frequency of contact with romantic partner (Every day, 2-4 days per week, 4-6 days per week, Twice a month, Once a month, Other), presence/absence of sexual activity with romantic partner.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze this study's data, the principal investigator coded the surveys and input the subsequent data into SPSS for statistical analysis. Data analyses carried out included frequency distributions of demographic variables and preliminary MANOVA analyses of demographic variables in order to assess for covariates, as well as MANOVA, ANOVA, and ANCOVA analyses in order to examine this study's hypotheses. Table 3 outlines the research questions, hypotheses, variables, and data analyses carried out as part of this study.

Table 3

Research Questions, Hypotheses, Variables, Data Analyses

<u>Research Question 1:</u>	Does the level of differentiation influence the type of conflict resolution strategies utilized in romantic relationships?
Hypothesis a	It is hypothesized that the utilization of the avoidant conflict resolution style will vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that males who experience low levels of differentiation will report using the avoidant conflict resolution style significantly more often than will females who experience high levels of differentiation.
Hypothesis b	It is hypothesized that the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style will vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that males who experience low levels of differentiation will report using the obliging conflict resolution style significantly more often than will females who experience high levels of differentiation.
Hypothesis c	It is hypothesized that the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style will vary by level of differentiation and gender, such that females who experience high levels of differentiation will report using the integrating conflict resolution style significantly more often than will males who experience low levels of differentiation.
Variables	<p><u>Independent Variables:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Differentiation Level (High, Low) 2. Gender (Male, Female) <p><u>Dependent Variables:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Avoidant Conflict Resolution Style 2. Obliging Conflict Resolution Style 3. Integrating Conflict Resolution Style
Statistical Test	MANOVA
<u>Research Question 2:</u>	Does the type of conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships help explain why high levels of differentiation are associated with high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction?
Hypothesis a	Individuals with high differentiation levels will report greater romantic relationship satisfaction levels than will individuals with low differentiation levels.
Hypothesis b	Individuals who report using high levels of integration conflict resolution style will report greater relationship satisfaction levels compared to individuals who report using low levels of the integrating conflict resolution style.
Variables	<p><u>Independent Variables:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Differentiation Level (High, Low) 2. Integration Conflict Resolution Style (High, Low) <p><u>Dependent Variable:</u> Relationship Satisfaction</p>
Statistical Test	ANOVA
Hypothesis c	When controlling for the integrating conflict resolutions style, differentiation level will not be related to relationship satisfaction.

Variables	<u>Independent Variable:</u> Differentiation Level (High, Low) <u>Dependent Variable:</u> Relationship Satisfaction <u>Covariate Variables:</u> Integrating Conflict Resolution Style
Statistical Test	ANCOVA

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of level of differentiation on the utilization of conflict resolution styles, and to examine whether the type of self-reported conflict resolution style explains the association between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. Preliminary analyses identified seven outliers, which were removed to yield a final sample of 182 participants. Descriptive Statistics are outlined in Table 4, and inter-correlations among variables are displayed in Table 5.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics (N = 182)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Range</u>	
				Minimum	Maximum
*Integrating Style	182	39.78	26.25	19.00	55.00
*Obliging Style	182	29.57	5.22	12.00	42.00
*Avoidant Style	182	19.34	7.36	6.00	38.00
*Differentiation	182	192.27	26.25	130.00	254.00
*Relationship Satisfaction	174	40.33	6.77	11.00	49.00
Age	182	30.29	12.11	18.00	64.00
Length of Current Relationship	176	7.35	9.87	.25	47.00
Number of Children	181	0.71	1.31	0.00	6.00
Number of Committed Relationships	181	2.66	1.54	1.00	10.00
Length of Longest Relationship	184	7.52	9.45	.25	47.00
*Study Variables					

Table 5

Inter-correlation Matrix (N = 182)

	*Int. Style	*Obl. Style	*Av. Style	*Rel. Satis.	Diff.	Age	Num. Child	Leng. Current Rel.	Num. Rel.	Leng. Longest Rel.
*Integrating Style	---	.28**	-.33**	.54**	.26**	-.09	-.12	-.09	-.13	-.05
*Obliging Style	.28**	---	.25**	.23**	-.03	-.08	-.11	-.06	-.01	-.02
*Avoidant Style	-.33**	.25**	---	-.18*	-.31**	.01	.01	-.03	-.05	-.04
*Relation- ship Satisfaction	.54**	.23**	-.18*	---	.34**	.005	-.07	.06	-.22**	.07
Differentia- tion	.26**	-.03	-.31**	.34**	---	.21**	.28**	.25**	-.02	.26**
Age	-.09	-.08	.003	.005	.21**	---	.74**	.86**	.11	.86
Number of Children	-.12	-.11	.01	-.07	.28**	.74**	---	.64**	.003	.65**
Length of Current Relationship	-.09	-.06	-.03	.06	.25**	.86	.64**	---	-.07	.96**
Number of Relationships	-.13	-.01	-.05	-.22**	-.02	.11	.003	-.07	---	-.08
Length of Longest Relationship	-.05	-.02	-.04	.07	.26**	.86**	.65**	.96**	-.08	---

Note: **p < .01, *p < .05

***Study Dependent Variables**

Preliminary Analyses:

A series of two-way, between-groups Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) were carried out to assess for the presence of covariates. When examining combined dependent variables, an alpha level of .05 was used. When examining dependent variables separately, a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .013 was used in order to limit the chance of a Type 1 error occurring (Pallant, 2005). The following MANOVA assumptions were met for these analyses: Adequate sample size, normality, assessment and removal of outliers, linearity, homogeneity of regression, multicollinearity and singularity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance. The following preliminary analyses were performed to assess any covariance on the variables of interest. The following demographic variables were selected as possible covariates due to the plausible significant effect that they may have on this study's dependent variables.

Gender and Parental Marital Status. A 2 (Gender: Male, Female) by 2 (Parental Marital Status: Married, Unmarried) MANOVA was carried out with the avoidant, obliging, and integrating conflict resolution styles as well as relationship satisfaction acting as the combined dependent variable. Results exhibited a statistically significant difference between males and females on the combined dependent variable: $F(4, 166) = 5.23, p = .001$; Wilks' Lambda = .89; partial eta squared = .11. A review of the univariate analyses revealed that the integrating conflict resolution style was used more often among females ($M = 41.25, SD = 6.97$) as compared to males ($M = 38.19, SD = 7.36$), $F(1, 169) = 7.37, p = .007$, partial eta squared = .04. Additionally, univariate analyses demonstrated that the avoidant conflict resolution styles was used more often among males ($M = 21.14; SD = 7.33$) as compared to females ($M = 17.48; SD = 6.91$), $F(1, 169) = 10.16, p = .002$, partial eta squared = .06. Gender differences were expected and hypothesized to vary on self reported conflict resolution styles, therefore gender remained as

part of the further analyses. No significant effect of gender on romantic relationship satisfaction was observed, $F(1, 169) = .07, p = .80, \text{partial eta squared} = .000$. Consequently, gender was not entered into further analyses examining romantic relationships satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Results exhibited a statistically significant difference between those whose parents are and are not married on the combined dependent variable: $F(4, 166) = 2.53, p = .04; \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .94; \text{partial eta squared} = .06$. A review of the univariate analyses did not reveal a significant effect of parental marital status on the separate dependent variables. Consequently, parental marital status was not entered into further analyses.

Living Arrangement and Length of Current Relationship. A 2 (Living Arrangement: Cohabiting with partner, Not cohabiting with partner) by 4 (Length of Current Relationship: <11 months, 1-3 years, 4-7 years, 8 plus years) MANOVA was carried out with the avoidant, obliging, and integrating conflict resolution styles as well as relationship satisfaction acting as the combined dependent variable. Results did not exhibit a statistically significant difference between those cohabiting and not cohabiting with their romantic partner on the combined dependent variable: $F(4, 155) = 1.02, p = .40; \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .97; \text{partial eta squared} = .03$. Consequently, living arrangement was not entered into further analyses.

Additionally, results did not exhibit a statistically significant effect of length of current relationship on the combined dependent variable, $F(4, 157) = 1.73, p = .06; \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .88; \text{partial eta squared} = .04$. Consequently, length of current relationship was not entered into further analyses.

Education and Age. A 3 (Education: High School, Undergraduate student/degree, Graduate student/degree) by 3 (Age: 18-25, 26-35, 36 plus) MANOVA was carried out with the

avoidant, obliging, and integrating conflict resolution styles as well as relationship satisfaction acting as the combined dependent variable. Results exhibited a statistically significant effect of education on the combined dependent variable: $F(4, 157) = 2.88, p = .004$; Wilks' Lambda = .87; partial eta squared = .07. A review of the univariate analyses did not reveal a significant effect of education on the separate dependent variables. Consequently, education was not entered into further analyses.

Results did not exhibit a statistically significant effect of age on the combined dependent variable, $F(4, 157) = 1.44, p = .18$; Wilks' Lambda = .93; partial eta squared = .04. Consequently, age was not entered into further analyses.

Main Analyses

Research Question 1: Does level of differentiation influence the type of conflict resolution strategies utilized in romantic relationships?

A two (Gender: Male, Female) by two (Level of Differentiation: High, Low) between subjects Multivariate of Analysis was carried out in order to examine the effect of gender and level of differentiation on the utilization of the integrating, avoidant, and obliging conflict resolution styles. For this analysis, the utilization of the integrating, obliging, and avoidant conflict resolution styles acted as the combined dependent variable. The following MANOVA assumptions were met for these analyses: Adequate sample size, normality, assessment and removal of outliers, linearity, homogeneity of regression, multicollinearity and singularity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance. When examining the combined dependent variable, an alpha level of .05 was used. When examining dependent variables separately, a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .02 was used in order to limit the chance of a Type 1 error occurring (Pallant, 2005).

Gender. Results exhibited a statistically significant effect of gender on the combined dependent variable: $F(3, 176) = 7.56, p = .000, \text{Wilks Lambda} = .89, \text{partial eta squared} = .11$ (See Table 6). A review of the univariate analyses revealed that the avoidant conflict resolution style was used more often among males ($M = 21.37, SD = 7.39$) as compared to females ($M = 17.64, SD = 6.92$), $F(1, 178) = 14.93, p = .000, \text{partial eta squared} = .08$ (See Table 7). Additionally, univariate analyses indicated that the integrating conflict resolution style was used more often among females ($M = 41.03, SD = 6.94$) as compared to males ($M = 38.29, SD = 7.30$), $F(1, 178) = 8.78, p = .003, \text{partial eta squared} = .05$ (See table 7). A review of univariate analyses did not exhibit a significant effect of gender on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style, $F(1, 178) = 3.43, p = .07, \text{partial eta squared} = .02$ (See Table 7).

Level of Differentiation. Results exhibited a significant effect of level of differentiation on the combined dependent variable, $F(3, 176) = 5.46, p = .001, \text{Wilks Lambda} = .92, \text{partial eta squared} = .09$ (See Table 6). A review of univariate analyses indicated that the avoidant conflict resolution style was used more by those with a low level of differentiation ($M = 20.63, SD = 6.87$) compared to those with a high level of differentiation ($M = 17.97, SD = 7.66$), $F(1, 178) = 7.57, p = .007, \text{partial eta squared} = .04$ (See Table 7). Additionally, univariate analyses indicated that the integrating conflict resolution style was used more often among those with a high level of differentiation ($M = 41.56, SD = 7.79$) as compared to those with a low level of differentiation ($M = 38.12, SD = 6.24$), $F(1, 178) = 12.98, p = .000, \text{partial eta squared} = .07$ (See table 7). A review of univariate analyses did not exhibit a significant effect of level of differentiation on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style, $F(1, 178) = .54, p = .47, \text{partial eta squared} = .003$. (See Table 7).

Interaction. A significant interaction effect of gender and level of differentiation on the combined dependent variable was not observed, $F(3, 176) = 1.92$, $p = .13$, Wilks Lambda = .97, partial eta squared = .03 (See Table 6).

Table 6

Multivariate Results for Gender X Differentiation on Combined Dependent Variables

Source	Wilk's Lambda	F	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	.89	7.56*	.11
Level of Differentiation	.92	5.46*	.09
Gender *Level of Differentiation	.97	1.92	.03

* $p < .05$; $df(3, 176)$

Table 7

Univariate Results for Gender X Differentiation on Conflict Resolution Style

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	Integrating	8.78*	.05
	Obliging	3.43	.02
	Avoidant	14.93*	.08
Level of Differentiation	Integrating	12.98*	.07
	Obliging	.54	.003
	Avoidant	7.57 *	.04
Gender * Level of Differentiation	Integrating	.03	.000
	Obliging	4.57	.03
	Avoidant	2.46	.01

* $p < .02$; $df(1, 178)$

Research Question 2: Does the type of conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships help explain why high levels of differentiation are associated with high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction?

A 2 (Utilization of the Integrating Conflict Resolution Style: High, Low) by 2 (Level of Differentiation: High, Low) between subjects Analysis of Variance was carried out in order to examine the effect of level of differentiation and the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style on romantic relationship satisfaction. Preliminary analyses using Levene's Test demonstrated that the stipulation of equality of error variances was violated, suggesting that there was an unequal variance of romantic relationship satisfaction across the groups. In order to address this violation, a more conservative alpha level of .01 was used in order to establish significance, as suggested by Pallant (2005).

A main effect of level of differentiation on romantic relationship satisfaction was observed, $F(1, 168) = 6.76$, $p = .01$, partial eta squared = .04, such that those exhibiting a high level of differentiation ($M = 42.24$, $SD = 6.56$) reported significantly greater romantic relationship satisfaction than did those exhibiting a low level of differentiation ($M = 38.60$, $SD = 6.40$) (See Table 8). A main effect of the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style on romantic relationship satisfaction was observed, $F(1, 168) = 26.22$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .14, such that those exhibiting high utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style ($M = 43.20$, $SD = 5.19$) reported significantly greater romantic relationship satisfaction than did those exhibiting low utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style ($M = 37.74$, $SD = 6.92$). (See Table 8). No interaction effect of level of differentiation and utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style on romantic relationship satisfaction was observed, $F(1, 168) = .82$, $p = .37$, partial eta squared = .005 (See Table 8).

Table 8

ANOVA for Differentiation X Utilization of the Integrating Conflict Resolution Style on Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

	F	Partial Eta Squared
Level of Differentiation	6.76*	.04
Integrating Style	26.22*	.14
Level of Differentiation* Integrating Style	.82	.005

* $p < .01$; $df(1, 168)$

A One-Way (Level of Differentiation: High, Low) between subjects Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was carried out in order to examine whether the utilization of the integration conflict resolutions style accounts for the relationship between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. The following ANCOVA assumptions were met: reliability of covariates, absence of outliers, moderate correlations among covariates, linear relationship between dependent variable and covariate, homogeneity of error variances, and homogeneity of regression slopes. As part of this ANCOVA, level of differentiation acted as the independent variable, romantic relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, and the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style as the covariate variable. An alpha level of .05 was used for these analyses. Findings demonstrated that after controlling for the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, a significant effect of level of differentiation on romantic relationship satisfaction remained, $F(1, 170) = 6.67$, $p = .01$, partial eta squared = .04, with those exhibiting a high level of differentiation ($M = 41.55$, $SD = .61$) reporting significantly higher

romantic relationship satisfaction than did those exhibiting a low level of differentiation ($M = 39.31$, $SD = .60$). (See Table 9).

Table 9

ANCOVA for Level of Differentiation, the Integrating Conflict Resolution Style, and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Source	F	Partial eta Squared
Utilization of The Integrating Style	59.23*	.26
Level of Differentiation	6.67*	.04

* $p < .05$; $df(1, 170)$

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Currently, half of marriages in the United States are expected to end in divorce (Bradbury, 2000; Payne, 2014), with research showing that divorce is associated with negative outcomes for children, adults, and parents, such as lower self concept, lower levels of psychological well-being, more health problems, etc. (See literature review by Amato, 2000). With romantic relationship dissatisfaction being a predictor of divorce and romantic relationship/marital dissolution, examining romantic relationship satisfaction and the factors which enhance such satisfaction levels has significant implications. Research has demonstrated that unresolved conflict in romantic relationships acts as a predictor for relationship satisfaction, and that improving conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships can have positive outcomes for romantic relationship satisfaction levels (Cramer & Duncan, 2000). It follows that examining conflict resolution dynamics within romantic relationships, in particular the factors which effect conflict resolution styles utilized, likely has strong utility for enhancing romantic relationship satisfaction. Past research has determined factors that affect conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships, such as personality characteristic and attachment style. The current study examined the effect of level of differentiation, a family systems construct, on the conflict resolution styles self reported in romantic relationships, and the possible implications for romantic relationship satisfaction.

Current Study

The overall aim of the current study was to investigate the self reported conflict resolution styles of men and women across dimensions of differentiation. A total number of 89 men and 100 women recruited from a mid-western university participated in completing a questionnaire and 6 hypotheses were investigated. Overall, the findings of this study

demonstrated a positive association between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction as well as between the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style and romantic relationship satisfaction, associations that have been previously established in research. This study expanded on the current literature on Bowen's theory of differentiation by demonstrating that the level of differentiation does have an effect on the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships.

Research Question 1

The first aim of this study was to investigate whether level of differentiation influences the type of conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships. Results exhibited partial support for the proposed hypotheses, and these results are discussed below.

Integrating Style. Results demonstrated that level of differentiation does effect the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style. As predicted, those exhibiting a high level of differentiation reported utilizing the conflict resolution style significantly more so than did those exhibiting a low level of differentiation. The low levels of emotional reactivity inherent in high differentiation likely helps one to approach conflict rationally and to problem solve effectively, likely useful skills when attempting to integrate partners' needs. Low levels of emotional fusion likely assist in discerning those needs of the self versus those of one's partner, which is a crucial pre-requisite skill in order to integrate partners' different needs effectively. A strong "I" position, another characteristic of high differentiation, likely effects one's assertiveness and pursuit of one's own needs when experiencing conflict, with the integrating conflict resolution style encompassing a high concern for the self. Low levels of emotional cutoff likely limit one's inclination to avoid conflict in their romantic relationships, with the integrating conflict resolution style encompassing the engagement and resolution of conflict rather than the

avoidance of it. The characteristics of a high level of differentiation fit and compliment the dynamics inherent in the integrating conflict resolution style, and likely provide one with the tools necessary to utilize this style successfully.

As predicted, findings demonstrated that females reported a significantly greater use of the integrating conflict resolution style than did males. This finding replicates previous research demonstrating that females utilize more cooperative, integrating, and compromising conflict resolution styles compared to males, being better able to integrate their own needs with those of their partners' in order to maximize the outcomes experienced by both partners (Haferkamp, 1992; Rahim, 1983).

Avoidant Style. Results indicated that level of differentiation effects the utilization of the avoidant conflict resolution style. Predictions were upheld, with those reporting a low level of differentiation exhibiting a significantly greater use of the avoidant conflict resolutions style in their romantic relationships than did those reporting a high level of differentiation. The high levels of emotional reactivity inherent in low differentiation likely make it challenging to approach conflict rationally and to problem solve effectively, making avoidance of the conflict a more salient solution. High levels of emotional fusion, another characteristic of a low level of differentiation, may make it challenging to adequately separate the needs of the self versus those of one's partner, with avoidance then being used as an easier alternative. A weak "I" position likely limits one's ability to be assertive and to pursue their own needs during conflict, with the avoidant conflict resolution style encompassing a low concern for the self. The high levels of emotional cutoff and associated fear of emotional intimacy inherent in low differentiation likely is a central motivator for the avoidance of conflict, with romantic relationship conflict being a highly intimate and emotional process. The characteristics of a low level of differentiation fit and

compliment the dynamics inherent in the avoidant conflict resolution style, likely motivating the use of avoidance when faced with conflict within romantic relationships.

According to predictions, results indicated that males reported a significantly greater use of the avoidant conflict resolution style than did females. Past research has also established this pattern. Haferkamp (1992) determined that males are more prone to use denial-avoidant strategies, being less prone to acknowledge conflict and more likely to change the subject or put off discussing the conflict. Shi (2003) also determined that males tend to utilize more avoidant conflict resolution strategies as compared to females.

Obliging Style. Contrary to predictions, results did not demonstrate an effect of level of differentiation on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style. It was hypothesized that those reporting a low level of differentiation would report utilizing the obliging conflict resolution style more so than would those reporting a high level of differentiation. The high levels of emotional reactivity inherent in low differentiation logically fit the obliging resolution style, such that difficulties problems solving and thinking rationally would lend themselves well to the solution of giving in to one's romantic partner. High levels of fusion, and the over involvement with one's partner, likely compliment the concern for one's partner observed as part of the obliging conflict resolution style. In addition, the weak "I" position associated with low differentiation compliments the low concern for self inherent in the obliging conflict resolution style. It is believed that no effect of differentiation on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style was likely observed due to the conflicting dynamics between emotional cutoff and the obliging style. Specifically, emotional cutoff entails the fear of emotional intimacy and the subsequent use of avoidance to cope. In contrast, when confronted with romantic relationship conflict, an emotional and intimate process, the use of the obliging style implies some level of

engagement, concern, and interaction rather than avoidance. It is believed that if the four factors of differentiation were examined separately in terms of their effect on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style, significant effects would likely be observed for the level of fusion, emotional reactivity, and “I” position.

No effect of gender was demonstrated on the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution styles. This is contrary to the hypothesis that males would report utilizing the obliging conflict resolution style more so than would females. This finding does reflect the mixed research findings regarding the effect of gender on the use of the obliging conflict resolution style. According to findings established by Rahim (1983), males tend to utilize the obliging conflict resolution style more so than do females. In contrast, Shi (2003) found no gender differences in regards to the utilization of the obliging conflict resolution style.

Interaction Effects. No interaction effect of gender and level of differentiation was observed on the utilization of the integration, avoidant, or obliging conflict resolution styles, in contradiction to predictions. It is possible that this finding is due to gender differences amongst the four factors of differentiation, previously demonstrated by research. Kosek (1998) found that women tend to exhibit a weaker “I” Position and more emotional reactivity, while males tend to exhibit more emotional disengagement and cutoff. Peleg and Yitzhak (2010) also found that women tend to demonstrate greater levels of fusion than do males. It appears that each gender demonstrates tendencies to exhibit factors underlying both high and low differentiation (e.g. females lower emotional cutoff and males greater “I” Position = characteristics of high differentiation; females greater fusion and males greater emotional cutoff = characteristics of low differentiation). These gender differences amongst the underlying differentiation factors may counter the effects of each factor, subsequently preventing the observation of significant

interaction effects of overall level of differentiation and gender on the utilization of conflict resolution styles. Associated with this point, it should be reiterated that this study's findings suggest that the integrating and avoidant conflict resolution styles fit logically well with all four characteristics inherent to high and low levels of differentiation respectively.

Research Question 2

The second aim of this study was to investigate whether the type of conflict resolution style utilized in a romantic relationship explains the previously determined association between differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. Results exhibited partial support for the proposed hypotheses, and these results are discussed below.

Differentiation and Satisfaction. As predicted, those who exhibited high levels of differentiation reported significantly greater romantic relationship satisfaction than did those who exhibited low levels of differentiation. This finding replicated previous research findings, which found a positive association between levels of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction (Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000). Peleg (2008) asserted that this association could be due to the fact that those who experience high levels of differentiation can experience a full range of emotional intimacy in their relationships, and are able to maintain their autonomy within their relationships. Skowron (2000) asserted that being emotional present and available, a characteristic inherent to a high level of differentiation, has significant implications for the relationship satisfaction experienced in romantic relationships.

Integrating Style and Satisfaction. Findings suggested that predictions were upheld, with those reporting high utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style exhibiting significantly greater romantic relationship satisfaction than did those reporting low utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style. This finding replicates those findings established in

previous research. Pistole (1989) determined that those experiencing medium to high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction or more likely to utilize the integrating conflict resolution style in their romantic relationships. It is possible that one is more likely to experience romantic relationship satisfaction when they feel that their needs are being met. Further, when one's partner feels that their needs are being met as well, it is likely that this enhances positive feedback and interactions experienced in romantic relationships. Cramer and Duncan (2000) found that unresolved conflict is negatively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction. As the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style entails the resolution of conflict, this may also account for the increased romantic relationship satisfaction experienced in relationships in which this style is utilized.

Controlling for the Integrating Style. This study aimed to examine whether the integrating conflict resolution style may explain the positive association between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. In order to answer this research question, it was expected that, when controlling for the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, there would be no observed relationship between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction. Findings did not uphold this predication, with the positive relationship between these two variables having remained after controlling of the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style. This finding likely reflects the strong positive association between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction, with the various facets and characteristics of a high level of differentiation (an autonomous self, limited emotional reactivity, comfort with intimacy, etc.) likely directly influencing enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction levels. Additionally, this finding may suggest that a variety of factors, in addition to the conflict resolution style utilized, contribute to and explain this positive relationship, including

the fact that those experiencing a high level of differentiation possess stronger stress coping skills (Murdock 2004), exhibit lower anxiety levels (Peleg-Popko, 2002), possess a secure attachment style (Skowron, 2004), and experience increased confidence and a more stable identity (Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz, & Johnson, 2005).

Implications

This study demonstrated that a high level of differentiation is positively related to the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style. This finding, in conjunction with the consistently demonstrated positive association between the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style and romantic relationship satisfaction, has several significant implications. First, these findings suggest that there is likely significant utility to working to establish a high level of differentiation when carrying out couples' therapy with dissatisfied couples. Such a focus would have a positive influence on couples' romantic relationship satisfaction, with previous research exhibiting a positive association between level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction (Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000). As shown in this study, such a focus would also likely have a positive influence on couples' utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, with such a style enhancing romantic relationship satisfaction as well. This study's findings suggest that there is significant utility in working in therapy to establish a sense of autonomy within relationships, limit emotional reactivity, enhance a sense of a well defined self, enhance comfort with intimacy, and limit enmeshment, all of which are characteristics of a high level of differentiation and all of which compliment and facilitates the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that level of differentiation and conflict resolution styles should be examined conjointly in therapy in order to enhance couples' romantic relationship satisfaction.

Additionally, the findings of this study demonstrate yet another positive outcome associated with a high level of differentiation. Previous research has outlined positive outcomes/correlates of high differentiation such as an increase in stress tolerance (Murdock, 2004), lower levels of anxiety (Peleg-Popko, 2002), the possession of a secure attachment style, etc. The findings of this study suggest that the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style can be added to the aforementioned list of positive outcomes/correlates of a high level of differentiation, and solidifies the utility of establishing a focus of therapy as being the enhancement of a high level of differentiation. The aforementioned positive outcomes/correlates of a high level of differentiation, including the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, may also help explain and contribute to the positive association between a high level of differentiation and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Finally, the findings of this study point to the fact that a high level of differentiation, the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, and enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction are positively related. Establishing factors associated with enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction has significant implications as enhanced romantic relationship satisfaction limits the likelihood that a marriage will end in a divorce. The significance of this stems from the fact that divorce has been shown through research to be associated with negative outcomes such as lower achievement levels observed in children, lower self concept, increased social isolation, increased health problems, increased mortality rate, etc. (Amato, 2000). Consequently, the results of this study suggest that by focusing in marital therapy on establishing a high level of differentiation and the utilization of the integrating conflict resolution style, romantic relationship satisfaction levels can be enhanced, which likely decreases the likelihood that a divorce will be pursued and the subsequent negative outcomes of divorced experienced.

Limitations and Future Research

This study encompassed various limitations which necessitate discussion. First, the results of this study were based on the use of self report surveys, with the integrity of the data collected from these surveys being subject to the level of insight and honesty of the study's participants. It is possible that participants' answers to the survey questions may have been weighted towards answering according to what was clearly desirable versus what truly reflected their conflict resolution styles and differentiation characteristics. For example, participants likely understood that compromising versus avoidance tendencies are likely more desirable and beneficial methods to resolve conflict, and consequently they may have answered questions such that they established a more positive reflection on themselves, rather than answering such that their true characteristics and tendencies were reflected. Another limitation to utilization of surveys, with no manipulation of independent variables being carried out, is that no causal conclusions can be established regarding the relationship between differentiation, conflict resolution style, and romantic relationship satisfaction. Additionally, the sample size of this study can be construed as a possible limitation, with a larger sample size likely having translated into a larger effect size being established. Finally, it should be noted that the results of this study may only be generalized to those fitting the demographic characteristics of this study's sample. For example, a large portion of this study's sample was composed of participants holding a Caucasian non-minority status and engaging in either undergraduate or graduate education, suggesting that the results may be most pertinent and reflective of the characteristics and tendencies of these individuals, and may not generalize, for example, to those of a minority ethnicity and those holding a sub-college education level.

The results of this study are suggestive of the utility of several future research endeavors. In order to counter this study's limitation of self report data, there would likely be utility in carrying out a study which incorporates both self and partner report data regarding one's perception of their own and their partners' level of differentiation and utilization of conflict resolution styles. This set up could be used in order to assess participant's insight and perception into their level of differentiation and utilization of conflict resolution styles, using partner scores in order to carry out this assessment. Future research should also examine the four factors of differentiation separately in terms of each factor's effect on conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships. Such research would have significant implications for further concentrated therapy focus and emphasis. Finally, the principle researcher has made various conjectures regarding why level of differentiation effects the utilization of conflict resolution styles. Future research should test such conjectures via mediation analyses in order to establish a research based understanding of the association between level of differentiation and the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships.

APPENDIX A

HIC Approval

WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY

IRB Administration Office
87 East Canfield, Second Floor
Detroit, Michigan 48201
Phone: (313) 577-1628
FAX: (313) 993-7122
<http://irb.wayne.edu>

NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Amanda Kerbawy
Theoretical & Behavior Foundations
From: Dr. Deborah Ellis or designee C. Trentacosta / 2.2
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)
Date: July 22, 2015
RE: IRB #: 064715B3E
Protocol Title: Examining Level of Differentiation and Conflict Resolution Styles Used in Romantic Relationships and Implications for Romantic Relationship Satisfaction
Funding Source:
Protocol #: 1506014100
Expiration Date: July 21, 2016
Risk Level / Category: Research not involving greater than minimal risk

The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review Category (#7)** by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 07/22/2015 through 07/21/2016. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- Revised Protocol Summary Form (revision received in the IRB office 07/21/15)
- Dissertation (received in the IRB office 07/21/15)
- Research Informed Consent (revision dated 07/17/15)
- Recruitment Script
- Support Resources Sheet
- Study Flyer
- Data Collection Tools (4): i) Demographics, ii) Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised, iii) Conflict Resolution Scale, and iv) Relationship Assessment Scale

- Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval **before** the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can never be reported or published as research data.
- All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the IRB **BEFORE** implementation.
- Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the IRB Administration Office Policy (<http://www.irb.wayne.edu/policies-human-research.php>).

NOTE:

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification, and/or external audit the IRB Administration Office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the IRB website at each use.

*Based on the Expedited Review List, revised November 1998

**WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY**

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NOTICE OF EXPEDITED AMENDMENT APPROVAL

To: Amanda Kerbawy
Theoretical & Behavior Foundations

From: Dr. Deborah Ellis or designee C. Zolondek, PhD
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: October 28, 2015

RE: IRB #: 064715B3E

Protocol Title: Examining Level of Differentiation and Conflict Resolution Styles Used in Romantic Relationships and Implications for Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Funding Source:

Protocol #: 1506014100

Expiration Date: July 21, 2016

Risk Level / Category: Research not involving greater than minimal risk

The above-referenced protocol amendment, as itemized below, was reviewed by the Chairperson/designee of the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) and is APPROVED effective immediately.

- Protocol: Addition of a research site, "Kinesiology, Health, and Sports Studies (KHS)" students. Letter of Support received from the Assistant Dean, KHS. Receipt of revised pages of the Protocol and Protocol Summary Form reflecting the additional research site for recruitment.

APPENDIX B

Letters of Support

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

**Division of Academic Affairs
Dean of Students Office**

Date: June 30, 2015

To: WSU IRB

From: David J. Strauss, Ph.D., Dean of Students ~

Re: Research Approval for Amanda Kerbawy

I give my approval for Amanda Kerbawy, doctoral student in the Wayne State University Educational Psychology program, to recruit participants for her study, titled "Examining Level of Differentiation and Conflict Resolution Styles Used in Romantic Relationships and Implications for Romantic Relationship Satisfaction" through:

Recruiting individuals through a table and/or personal approach in the Student Center.

Recruiting individuals through a table and/or personal approach in the David Adamany Undergraduate Library.

Recruiting individuals through a table and/or personal approach at the Oakland Extension Center.

While this is my approval, it is up to the management of each building to permit this activity to take place.

I support this research project and its involvement of students.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

351 Student Center. Detroit, MI 48202

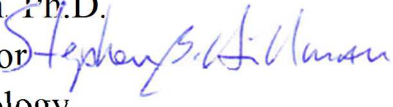
Phone: (313) 577-1010 • Fax: (313) 577-8061 • E-mail: doso@wayne.edu • Web: www.doso.wayne.edu



Educational Psychology
Division of Theoretical and
Behavioral Foundations
College of Education
Detroit, MI 48202
Phone: (313) 577-1614
Fax: (313) 577-5235

Memorandum

TO: Educational Psychology Faculty and Adjunct Faculty

FROM: Stephen B. Hillman, Ph.D. **EXT:** 7-1614
Program Coordinator 
Educational Psychology

SUBJECT: Human Subjects – Amanda Kerbawy

DATE: July 1, 2015

The above student has my permission to contact you in regard to the obtaining of human subjects from your Educational Psychology classes. This student is conducting research for a Master's Thesis Project in the Counseling Psychology Program. This research requires that the student give psychological tests to human subjects. Please allow the student a few minutes to approach students in your class and to collect data if time permits.

Thank you for your assistance.

SH:sm



KINESIOLOGY, HEALTH AND SPORT STUDIES
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

October 21, 2015

Amanda Kerbawy
Educational Psychology Department

RE: Dissertation

Amanda,

I approve of you speaking to our Lifestyle Fitness Activities classes at the end of class sessions to describe your project and invite them to stay after class for several short minutes to complete your survey. You must make it very clear that your survey has nothing to do with the course or its grading, and that their participation is completely voluntary. These LFA classes are a set of 2-credit exercise classes that we offer to all students on campus. Hence, potential survey completers would be consistent with the normal student body at Wayne. I'm copying Judy Anderson, the program coordinator. She can give you more context for the courses, show you the courses and when/where they meet, and inform her LFA instructors' if/when you plan to visit their courses. It is important that she is fully aware of which classes you want to visit, especially so that she can contact the instructors in advance to explain the purpose of your visit.

Best of luck!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate McCaughtry".

Nate McCaughtry
Assistant Dean, KHS

656 W. KIRBY • DETROIT, MI 48202 • 313-577-4249 • FAX 313-577-5999
www.kinesiology.wayne.edu

Jessica Ann Beesley

Reply all

7/27/2015

Amanda M. Kerbawy

Good morning,

It sounds like you have quite an interesting dissertation planned! For these types of requests, we usually work with a professor or someone in the department of your major of study. Is there a professor that you are working with on this dissertation? If they could make the reservation for you, through the department, it would be allowed and free of cost.

Please let me know if you have any other questions.

Thank you!

Jessica

Jessica Beesley
 Student Center Reservations Manager
 Wayne State University
 Student Center Administration
 470 Student Center
 5221 Gullen Mall
 Detroit, MI 48202

(313) 577-7652 Office

(313) 577-3520 Fax

-----Original Message-----

From: Amanda M. Kerbawy [<mailto:amandakerbawy@wayne.edu>]

Sent: Friday, July 24, 2015 3:13 PM

To: Jessica Ann Beesley <ag4027@wayne.edu>

Subject: using student center for dissertation?

Director Beesley-

I received your contact info from Dean Strauss. My name is Amanda Moar Kerbawy. I am a PhD student in the Educational Psychology program, and I am currently working on my dissertation.

For my data collection, I was hoping to use the WSU student center- setting

myself up at a table and recruiting participants. My dissertation examines conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships. Participation entails completing a survey that takes 10 to 20 minutes,

I was wondering if you would be willing to provide me with permission to do my recruitment in the WSU student center.

I would love to hear your thoughts. If you would like, I can also send you my dissertation proposal to review.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amanda Moar Kerbawy

Re: using Oakland Center for dissertation?

DW

Diane Wisnewski <diane.wisnewski@wayne.edu>

Reply all

9/17/2015

Amanda M. Kerbawy

You replied on 9/21/2015 1:59 AM.

Hi Amanda,

We should be able to reserve a room for you. Can you give me the time frame and also what kind of setup do you need. A desk and chair, conference room, etc.?

Diane

Diane Wisnewski
 Director, Extension Centers & Programs
 Wayne State University
 248-553-3545
 diane.wisnewski@wayne.edu

From: Amanda M. Kerbawy <amandakerbawy@wayne.edu>
 Sent: Thursday, September 17, 2015 8:22 AM
 To: Diane Wisnewski
 Subject: Re: using Oakland Center for dissertation?

Hello Diane-

I am following up with regarding our previous correspondence regarding whether you would be willing to allow me to utilize the Oakland Center for my dissertation data collection. I am conducting my data collection on Thursdays. If you would be willing to let me utilize the Oakland Center, I would love to shoot for Thursdays September 24th and October 8th, if possible.

I would love to hear your thoughts. Thank you.

Also, I can send you my proposal to review, if you would like.

Amanda Moar Kerbawy

From: Amanda M. Kerbawy
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2015 3:22 AM
To: Diane Wisnewski
Subject: Re: using Oakland Center for dissertation?

Thank you for your quick response.

I do not have dates and times currently determined. My data collection is scheduled to start in the Fall. My thinking is that I would be at the Oakland Center for a couple full days in the Fall semester. I can let you know specifics when I work them out.

Also, I am pretty flexible, so I can schedule myself to be there on dates and times of your preference. I am shooting for 200 participants, but have other subject pools that I am hoping to use as well (student center, ed. psych students, etc.). So, I will not be getting all of my 200 participants from the Oakland Center.

I just received IRB approval last week, and I have approval from my department. I have also received approval from Dean Strauss, and have a letter with his signature I could forward you if you would like. I could also send you a copy of my dissertation proposal, if you would find that to be helpful.

Thank you for your consideration and help.

Amanda

----- Original Message -----

From: "Diane Wisnewski" <diane.wisnewski@wayne.edu>
To: "Amanda M. Kerbawy" <amandakerbawy@wayne.edu>
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2015 11:16:05 AM
Subject: Re: using Oakland Center for dissertation?

Hello Amanda,

I have a few questions about your survey collection. When were you hoping to be at the Oakland Center recruiting students (dates, time). Do you have a certain number in mind as far as receiving completed surveys? I assume all of the proper paperwork/forms have been completed in order to conduct your survey.

Thank you,

Diane

--

Diane Wisnewski

Wayne State University
Director, Extension Centers & Programs
Main: 248-553-3545

Fax: 248-553-7733
diane.wisnewski@wayne.edu

----- Original Message -----

From: "Amanda M. Kerbawy" <amandakerbawy@wayne.edu>
To: "Diane Wisnewski" <diane.wisnewski@wayne.edu>
Sent: Friday, July 24, 2015 3:14:43 PM
Subject: using Oakland Center for dissertation?

Director Wisnewski-

I received your contact info from Dean Strauss. My name is Amanda Moar Kerbawy. I am a PhD student in the Educational Psychology program, and I am currently working on my dissertation.

For my data collection, I was hoping to use the WSU Oakland center- setting myself up at a table and recruiting participants. My dissertation examines conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships. Participation entails completing a survey that takes 10 to 20 minutes.

I was wondering if you would be willing to provide me with permission to do my recruitment in the WSU Oakland center.

I would love to hear your thoughts. If you would like, I can also send you my dissertation proposal to review.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amanda Moar Kerbawy

APPENDIX C

Instruments

Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised

These are questions concerning your thoughts and feelings about yourself and relationships with others. Please read each statement carefully and decide how much the statement is generally true of you on a 1 (not at all) 6 (very) scale. Be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses.

1
2
3
4
5
6

Not at all True of me
Very True of Me

1. People have remarked that I am overly emotional. ____ ER rc
2. I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for. ____ EC rc
3. I often feel inhibited around my family. ____ EC rc
4. I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress. ____ I
5. I usually need a lot of encouragement from others when starting a big job or task. ____ F rc
6. When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him/her for a time. ____ ER rc
7. No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am. ____ I
8. I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me. ____ EC rc
9. I want to live up to my parents' expectations of me. ____ F
10. I wish that I weren't so emotional. ____ ER rc
11. I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person. ____ I
12. My spouse/partner could not tolerate it if I were to express to him/her my true feelings about some things. ____ EC rc
13. When my spouse/partner criticizes me, it bothers me for days. ____ F rc
14. At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly. ____ ER rc
15. When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person. ____ I

1
2
3
4
5
6

Not at all True of me
Very True of Me

16. I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me. ____ EC rc
17. I feel a need for approval from virtually everyone in my life. ____ F rc
18. At times I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller-coaster. ____ ER rc
19. There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change. ____ I
20. I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships. ____ EC rc
21. I'm overly sensitive to criticism. ____ ER rc
22. I try to live up to my parents' expectations. ____ F rc
23. I'm fairly self-accepting. ____ I
24. I often feel that my spouse/partner wants too much from me. ____ EC rc
25. I often agree with others just to appease them. ____ F rc
26. If I have had an argument with my spouse/partner, I tend to think about it all day. ____ ER rc
27. I am able to say "no" to others even when I feel pressured by them. ____ I
28. When one of my relationships becomes very intense, I feel the urge to run away from it. ____ ECrc
29. Arguments with my parent(s) or sibling(s) can still make me feel awful. ____ F rc
30. If someone is upset with me, I can't seem to let it go easily. ____ ER rc
31. I'm less concerned that others approve of me than I am in doing what I think is right. ____ I
32. I would never consider turning to any of my family members of emotional support. ____ ECrc
33. I often feel unsure when others are not around to help me make a decision. ____ F rc
34. I'm very sensitive to being hurt by others. ____ ER rc
35. My self-esteem really depends on how others think of me. ____ I rc

1
2
3
4
5
6

Not at all True of me
Very True of Me

36. When I'm with my spouse/partner, I often feel smothered. ____ EC rc
37. When making decisions, I seldom worry about what others will think. ____ F
38. I often wonder about the kind of impression I create. ____ ER rc
39. When things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse. ____ EC rc
40. I feel things more intensely than others do. ____ ER rc
41. I usually do what I believe is right regardless of what others say. ____ I
42. Our relationship might be better if my spouse/partner would give me the space I need. ____ EC rc
43. I tend to feel pretty stable under stress. ____ I
44. Sometimes I feel sick after arguing with my spouse/partner. ____ F rc
45. I feel it's important to hear my parents' opinions before making decisions. ____ F rc
46. I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset. ____ F rc

Conflict Resolution Scale

Please use the following scale to answer these questions about the strategies you use when dealing with conflict in your current romantic relationship.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Strongly Disagree
Neutral
Strongly Agree

In my current romantic relationship, I try to:

1. Investigate an issue with my significant other to find a solution that is acceptable to us. ____ IN
2. Satisfy the needs of my significant other. ____ OB
3. Attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep my conflict with my significant other to myself. ____ AV

4. Integrate my ideas with those of my significant other to come up with a decision jointly. ____ IN
5. Work with my significant other to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations. ____ IN
6. Usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my significant other. ____ AV
7. Usually accommodate the wishes of my significant other. ____ OB
8. Give in to the wishes of my significant other. ____ OB
9. Exchange accurate information with my significant other to solve a problem together. ____ IN
10. Usually allow concessions to my significant other. ____ OB
11. Stay away from disagreement with my significant other. ____ AV
12. Avoid an encounter with my significant other. ____ AV
13. Often go along with the suggestions of my significant other. ____ OB
14. Bring all of our concerns out in the open so our issues can be resolved in the best possible way. ____ IN
15. Collaborate with my significant other to come up with decisions acceptable to us. ____ IN
16. Satisfy the expectations of my significant other. ____ OB
17. Keep my disagreement with my significant other to myself in order to avoid hard feelings. ____ AV
18. Avoid unpleasant exchanges with my significant other. ____ AV
19. Work with my significant other for the proper understanding of a problem. ____ IN

Relationship Assessment Scale

Please use the following scales to answer these questions about your satisfaction with your romantic relationship.

How well does your partner meet your needs? _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All			Somewhat			Extremely Well

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship? _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Low Satisfaction			Neutral			High Satisfaction

How good is your relationship compared to most? _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Below Average			Average			Extremely Above Average

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship? _____ rc

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never			Sometimes			All the Time

To what extent has your relationships met your original expectations? _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All			Somewhat			Extremely Well

How much do you love your partner? _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All			Somewhat			Very Much

How many problems are there in your relationship? _____ rc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
None Some A Lot

Demographics

Please answer the following demographic questions.

1. What is your sex?

Female _____ Male _____ Intersex _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. What ethnic/racial group do you most identify with?

Caucasian/White _____
African American/Black _____
Hispanic/Latino _____
Asian American/Pacific Islander _____
Native American _____
Arab-American/Pakistan _____

4. What is your current class year/highest education level?

K-12, Please specify grade level: _____
High School Graduate _____
GED _____
Freshman _____
Sophomore _____
Junior _____
Senior _____
Master's Student _____
PhD Student _____

5. What is your parents' marital status?

Never Married _____
Married _____
Separated _____
Divorced _____

***If your parents are divorced or separated, what was your age at which your parents divorced/separated? _____**

6. What are your current living arrangements?

Living Alone _____
 Living with a Roommate _____
 Cohabiting with your Romantic Partner _____
 Living with your parents _____

7. What is your current employment status?

Employed Full Time _____
 Employed Part Time _____
 Unemployed _____

8. Do you affiliate with a specific religion/spirituality?

Yes _____
 No _____

***If Yes, please indicate the religion/spirituality that you affiliate with: _____**

9. How many children do you have? _____

10. Do you currently take any medications for psychiatric or physical health reasons?

Yes _____
 No _____

11. Have you ever been in counseling/therapy?

Yes _____
 No _____

If "Yes", how recently? _____

12. How many committed relationships have you been in (using the definition outlined below)? _____

13. What is the longest time you have spent in a romantic relationship? _____

14. What is your current relationship status?

Single _____
 Casually Dating _____
 In a relationship and using the boyfriend/girlfriend titles _____
 Married _____

15. As of today's date, please indicate how long you have been in your current romantic relationship. _____**16. How often do you see your romantic partner?**

Every day _____
 2-3 days per week _____
 4-6 days per week _____
 Twice a month _____
 Once a month _____
 Other, Please Specify _____

17. Are you and your current romantic partner sexually active?

Yes _____
 No _____

18. Are you currently involved in a same sex relationship?

Yes _____
 No _____

If you are currently engaged in a committed relationship (defined as a relationship in which the boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse labels are used), and this relationship has lasted for at least three months, please continue with the following three surveys.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Research Informed Consent

Examining Level of Differentiation and Conflict Resolution Styles Used in Romantic Relationships and Implications for Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Principal Investigator (PI): Amanda Moar Kerbawy
Educational Psychology, School Concentration
651-334-4473

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study examining the effects of level of differentiation on the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships, and how such effects influence romantic relationship satisfaction levels. You are being asked to participate in this study because your experience with romantic relationships will help us understand important romantic relationship dynamics pertinent to romantic relationship satisfaction. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University. The estimated number of study participants to be enrolled at Wayne State University is about 200 participants. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether one's level of differentiation influences 1) the type of conflict resolution style that they employ in their romantic relationship, and 2) their romantic relationship satisfaction levels. Differentiation entails the extent to which one can achieve independence within their romantic relationships, while still maintaining a close connection with their romantic partner. Conflict resolution styles entail how one responds to their romantic partner while experiencing an incident of conflict within their relationship.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill out the following four surveys.

1. **Demographic Survey:** This survey will examine demographic information such as gender, age, relationship status, etc.
2. **Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised:** This survey will examine one's level of differentiation. One is asked to indicate the extent to which they feel statements are true of them. An example statement includes: "I tend to remain pretty calm under stress".
3. **Conflict Resolution Scale:** This survey will assess the conflict resolution style(s) that one employs in their current romantic relationship. As part of this survey, one indicates the extent to which they agree with statements such as, "in my current romantic relationship, I try to stay away from a disagreement with my significant other".

4. **Relationship Assessment Scale:** This survey will investigate one's general satisfaction with their current romantic relationship. Participants will be asked to respond to questions such as "how well does your partner meet your needs?"

If you do not wish to answer any of the questions included in the surveys, you may skip them and move on to the next question. Your participation in this study would entail one session, during which it should take about fifteen to twenty minutes to complete this study's surveys. Your identity will be protected, with surveys being labeled using an identification number rather than your name.

Benefits

As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:

- **Psychological:** You may experience some emotional discomfort or stress as a result of answering the questionnaire items. However, this stress/discomfort will likely not be any greater than what you experience during everyday life. A list of pertinent support resources will be provided in order to help you cope with any stress/discomfort that you may experience as a result of your participation in this study.
- **Social:** As surveys will be completed in public, there is a slight risk of a breach of confidentiality. In order to limit this risk, privacy folders will be provided for participants to use while completing their surveys, and participants will submit their completed surveys in a large manila envelope.

Study Costs

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The PI may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Amanda Moar Kerbawy at the following phone number 651-334-4473. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant / Legally authorized representative *

Date

Printed name of participant / Legally authorized representative*

Time

Signature of witness**

Date

Printed of witness**

Time

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Time

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ABSTRACT**EXAMINING LEVEL OF DIFFERENTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES
USED IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

by

AMANDA MOAR KERBAWY**August 2016****Advisor:** Dr. Francesca Pernice-Duca**Major:** Educational Psychology**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This study examined the effect of level of differentiation on the conflict resolution styles utilized in romantic relationships, and implications for romantic relationship satisfaction. This study's sample was composed of 189 participants, with 100 females and 89 males. The average participant age was 30.29. The setting for this study was a large Midwestern urban University. Findings suggested that there is an effect of level of differentiation on the conflict resolution styles used in romantic relationships, with a high level of differentiation being associated with the utilization of the integrating style. Implications for therapy are outlined.

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