

BUILDING HEALTHY COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS: DO
COMMUNICATION SKILLS, GENDER, HOPE, AND
FAMILY TYPES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

by

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study evaluated an established, brief, communication skills training course for couples. Considerable research has addressed the ability of communication training to enhance marital quality, yet controversy exists regarding the merit of this approach. Little research of a quantitative nature has addressed programs in a naturalistic setting, partners' views about their skills, and the hope that training can inspire in relationships. Changes in perceived communication skills and hope for the relationship were measured to attain the effectiveness of this course and the maintenance of those perceptions. Trait Hope and family types were examined at follow-up. The goals of this study were to provide valuable clinical feedback to the course providers, to test long-standing gender assumptions, and to further explore the current debate in the family life and marital enrichment literature between communication skill providers and John Gottman's (1999) approach to strengthening marital relationships. Data was collected before and after taking the course, and then at follow-up (ranging 1-39 months). Results indicate that participants perceive improved communication skills for themselves and their partners, and those skills are maintained long-term for some couples. Perceived hope for the relationship also improved after taking the course. Men and women further support the assumption that women are better communicators. Balanced family types do not report significantly higher trait Hope than unbalanced family types, and there was no relationship detected between trait Hope and perceived hope for the relationship. Clinical recommendations include providing refresher courses, and a supplementary approach that further includes

Gottman's ideas. Overall findings of the study suggest that the controversy over the value of communication training is more semantic than substantive and that communication training continues to have an important place in relationship improvement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	.iv
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Brief BHR Course Description.....	1
Theoretical Framework: The Systems Perspective.....	2
Operational Definitions.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Communication in Marriage.....	8
Communication Skills.....	
Questioned.....	11
Gender and	
Communication.....	14
Models of Gender Differences in Communication.....	16
Hope.....	19
Snyder's Model of Hope.....	19
Alternative Theories of Hope.....	23
Averill's Theory of Hope.....	24

Stotland's Theory of Hope.....	27
Hope in Relationships.....	29
Hope and Communication.....	35
Marital Program Evaluation.....	36
Family Types.....	44
Circumplex Model and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale.....	44
Hypotheses and Rationale.....	46
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	49
Restatement of Purpose.....	49
Participants	51
Ethical Considerations.....	52
Measures.....	52
Procedure.....	52
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	53
Preliminary Analysis.....	53
Hypothesis 1.....	53
Hypothesis 1a.....	53
Hypothesis 1b.....	60
Hypothesis 2.....	60
Hypothesis 3.....	60
Hypothesis 4.....	61
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	62

Hypotheses and Related Post Hoc Analyses.....	62
Hypothesis 1.....	62
Hypothesis 1a.....	62
Hypothesis 1b.....	64
Hypothesis 2.....	65
Hypothesis 3.....	66
Hypothesis 4.....	67
Theoretical Implications.....	68
Systems Theory.....	68
Hope Theory.....	70
Circumplex Model.....	70
Gottman Debate.....	71
Implications for Future Research.....	72
Implications for Clinical Practice.....	74
Limitations.....	76
Conclusion.....	78
REFERENCES.....	80
APPENDIX A: BHR Course Description	93
APPENDIX B: Personal Consent	95
APPENDIX C: BHR Board Consent	96
APPENDIX D: Demographic Information	97
APPENDIX E: Program Questionnaire I: Pre-/Follow-up Evaluation.....	98
APPENDIX F: Program Questionnaire II: Post-Evaluation	100

APPENDIX G: Hope Scales 103

APPENDIX H: FACES III Measure 104

APPENDIX I: Intercorrelations and Standard Deviations Table 106

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1: Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Single Item

Measures 54

TABLE 2: Intercorrelations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for

The Hope Scale 55

TABLE 3: Intercorrelations, Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability for the

FACES Measure 56

FIGURE 1: The Two-Way interaction between Perspective and Time for

Single Item Communication Skill Ratings 58

FIGURE 2: The Three-Way Interaction between Time, Perspective, and Gender,

for Single Item Communication Skill Ratings 59

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Marriage preparation and enrichment programs are generally accessible and frequently utilized by the general public. As proponents of family life education, churches, workplaces, therapists and community centers are among many services and resources that have responded to an overwhelming need for stronger and more stable marriages. Over the last thirty years, several programs have been developed to assist couples in strengthening their marriage; skill building has been recognized as the standard approach. Recently, there has been a call to re-evaluate some of the long-standing assumptions that have shaped the practice of marriage enrichment (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

Brief BHR Course Description

Building Healthy Relationships (BHR) (Lees, Groenhof, & Klaassen, 1999) is a program currently being offered in the lower mainland of British Columbia. It has been adapted from the Couple Communication Program (Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1992), which was created within the Systems perspective. Its goal is to assist couples in developing effective communication and conflict resolution skills with the intention of offering a number of related benefits. Some expected benefits include increased awareness of personal and partner communication styles, clarified levels of hope for the relationship, and an understanding of the connections between communication and gender. (For a more detailed description of the BHR course, see Appendix A.)

Theoretical Framework: The Systems Perspective

The Systems perspective examines the group or pair as interacting parts of one complex whole. As Miller and colleagues (1992) explain, relationships can be understood as having a common set of properties including: being purposeful, individuated, interconnected, bounded, information-processing, synergistic, efficient, self-maintaining, self-directing, self-monitoring, self-correcting/repairing, interactive, and as operating in context. The communication within such a system can be seen as a process of actions, reactions, and interactions. By one person choosing to act, the other has a choice to react, leading to the possibility of an interaction. The way in which one acts, reacts, or interacts can change the course of the process.

As a Family Systems theorist, Murray Bowen (1966) developed a thorough framework from which to understand attachment and relationship patterns. His theoretical focus allowed him and his followers to hone in on the big picture of movement in family therapy, rather than on specific techniques. At the foundation of Bowen's version of Systems theory lies the ultimate goal of family therapy, to balance two main forces: individuality and togetherness. From that ultimate goal emerged terms such as differentiation and triangulation, two ways of understanding relational dynamics.

Differentiation is the term that Bowen (1966) used to describe what allows individuals to have their own opinions and beliefs, and gives the ability to separate thinking from feeling. It is important for avoiding reactive polarities such as distancer-pursuer patterns. Triangulation refers to situations where a third party enters the dynamics of a dyad to provide support for one member of the original pair. This third person allows for emotional venting but holds the conflict in place. For instance, if

parents are arguing about whose turn it is to take the children to school and the mother vents to the child about how her father is impossible and stubborn, this invites the child into the conflict for supportive reasons rather than dealing directly with the conflict at hand (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Fogarty (1976) described three systems in regard to connectedness between people. The first is the thinking system, based on facts, opinions, and judgements. The second system is the emotional system, “providing colour and vitality to relationships” (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998, p. 148), and the third is the operational system. This last system refers to the way in which “people communicate their thoughts and feelings” (p. 148). All three systems have ways of being functional and dysfunctional.

Two of Bowen’s colleagues, McGoldrick and Carter, focus on gender and ethnicity within the context of Family Systems Theory. Bowen created the term ‘societal emotional process’ to describe societal impact on family functioning. Gender norms and biases, for example, affect roles in the family (as cited in Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Bowen (1974) viewed normal family development on a continuum with two general descriptors or factors: being differentiated members while being connected with the family. According to Fogarty (1976), some characteristics of well-adjusted families include: being balanced and able to adapt to change; emotional problems belong to the family as a unit with each member playing a role; connected to the multigenerational family system; use minimum fusion and distance for problem-solving; each dyad deals with their own problems; tolerance and encouragement of differences; each member can deal with others on both an emotional and thinking level; and an awareness of what one gets from with (internal influence) and from others (external influence).

As mentioned earlier, Family Systems theory (Bowen, 1966) focuses on process rather than technique, thereby, compatible with a skill-building approach. While skill building can be seen as a technique, its objective is to educate couples on how to process in an effective way, thus preventing misunderstandings, assumptions, and emotionally reactive conflicts. It teaches how to separate emotions from thoughts and slows the process down so the couple can take time to identify the underlying issues rather than staying on the surface and allowing the dysfunctional patterns to continue.

Bowen (as cited in Nichols & Schwartz, 1998) believed that less was better in terms of therapeutic sessions. The BHR course format is one that educates without creating a dependence on the facilitator/therapist. It allows the couple to be coached rather than enter into a therapeutic relationship. Bowen's vision within family therapy was to facilitate independence on the part of the family. He wanted families to analyse their own difficulties and know how to move forward and change (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Miller and colleagues (1992) lay out the main principals of Systems theory in order to provide a context for their work. Such principles include: (1) Partners have choices; (2) It only takes one person to change a system; (3) The system remains unchanged if each partner is solely focused on changing the other partner; (4) Process leads to outcome; (5) Both partners contribute to the relationship; and (6) All relationships are governed by a set of rules (often unspoken). *The Couple Communication Program* (CCP) seeks to increase awareness, teach listening and speaking skills, broaden the options for enriching the relationship, and to increase satisfaction. These tools are seen as effective based on the aforementioned Systems principles.

Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle's (1983) Circumplex model and measures connect with Miller and colleagues' (1992) CCP upon the foundation of a Systems framework. They share primary assumptions and base their ideas on the fundamentals of human interaction within a system.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of clarity, there are five terms that require operational definitions.

Trait/Dispositional Hope: "The process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move toward (agency/willpower) and the ways to achieve (pathways/waypower) those goals" (Snyder, 1995, p. 355). For the purposes of this study, the term 'Hope' will be capitalised when referring to Snyder's definition of Hope as opposed to other theorists' versions and the term used in everyday language, which will be typed in lowercase.

Communication skills: Methods of communicating such as active listening, effective speaking, and conflict resolution. Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Building Healthy Relationships (BHR): Refers to the communication course for couples offered by a local board in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. (See Appendix A for a more detailed course description).

Balanced family type: Refers to Olson's grouping of families that, according to self-report scores on both continuums of cohesion and adaptability, are within the mid-range.

Unbalanced family type: Refers to Olson's grouping of families that, according to self-report scores on both continuums of cohesion and adaptability, are on either extreme end.

Adaptability: "The ability of a marital or family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985, p. 4).

Cohesion: "The emotional bonding that family (or couple) members have toward one another" (Olson et al., 1985).

Purpose of the Study

Although over 160 couples have taken the BHR, it has yet to be evaluated formally. Evaluative field research is essential because of the need to assist clinical practice and to maintain social accountability.

This study will examine the association between participation in the BHR and changes in perceptions of communication skills and hope for their relationship, as well as explore whether both men and women view women as more skilled in communication before taking the course. In addition, this research will seek to understand how levels of trait hope relate to family types as determined by FACES III (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989), as well as the relationship of one's trait hope to their hope for the relationship prior to taking the course.

It is the hope of the researcher that the information garnered from this project will facilitate accountability for an existing program, will build a bridge between research and clinical practice, and examine some assumptions behind communication skills

strategies for marriage enrichment. This applied research can help address some of the challenges currently facing marriage enrichment professionals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital relationships have been a main focus of family life education, whether it addresses marital satisfaction, parenting, or the promotion of marital stability, to name a few. In response to the divorce rates and negative effects of divorce on children, family life research was spurred on and educational and therapeutic programs were set into motion. As a result of years of research and practice in this area, a number of angles at promoting and strengthening families have emerged. One of the more common angles is that of strengthening communication in the marital relationship. Churches and other religious institutions played a significant role in the initiation and maintenance of such programs, as a way of investing in healthy family functioning (Johnson, 1995).

Communication in Marriage

Dismal statistics with regard to the quality and stability of marriages in North America and beyond have been troubling researchers, clinicians and couples themselves for generations. According to the *Vital Statistics Compendium* (1996) the divorce rate in Canada ranges from 24% in Prince Edward Island to 56% in the Yukon. The divorce rate for British Columbia is among the highest in Canada, at 45%. These troubling numbers have prompted a wide response in an attempt to better understand both pitfalls and strengths of marital relationships. One particular area that has attracted a great deal of attention is communication within the marital relationship (Burleson & Denton, 1997). As research and practice in this field has been refined, more precise questions are raised and the complex nature of communication within the marriage relationship is underscored.

So what does the research have to say about communication within marriage success or discord? The answer with regard to the ‘big picture’ would suggest that there is a clear link between the two (Holmes & Boon, 1989; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Generally speaking, research indicates that increased levels of communication are associated with greater marital satisfaction, while communication deficits are associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction. For example, communication was identified as a major contributing factor to marital satisfaction in a study that examined marital strengths in enduring marriages (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Positive communication processes have also been identified as premarital factors that predict later marital quality (Larson & Holman, 1994; Markman, 1979, 1981). Conversely, Hahlweg, Revenstorf, and Schindler (1984) indicate that communication problems are the most frequent complaint of couples entering therapy.

It appears that few researchers or clinicians who would dispute the merits of positive communication in a marital relationship; however, the terms “communication” and “marital quality” are broad constructs and open to interpretation. Consequently, researchers have sought to narrow these definitions, and look for more specific descriptions (Larson & Holman, 1994; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Sillars & Weisberg, 1990).

Communication Skills and Marital Satisfaction

A large percentage of the research on marital communication has been dedicated to the relationship between communication skills and marital satisfaction. Earlier studies in the 1970s and 1980s were based on theories of social learning and behaviour exchange, and were descriptive of the relationship between communication skills and

marital satisfaction (see Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, & Yoppi, 1976). Studies throughout the later 1980s moved away from pure description, and sought to uncover some of the mediating factors between communication skills and marital satisfaction (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Research throughout the 1990s has continued to identify factors mediating the relationship between these two variables and has also paid closer attention to matters such as gender-based differences (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1999) and individual cognitive and affective processes (Burleson & Denton, 1997).

While examining the ‘big picture’ is useful, it would be a vast oversimplification to ignore the significant amount of literature that addresses the complexity of the relationship between communication skills and marital satisfaction. For instance, Sillars and Weisberg (1990) note that the type of issue a couple is discussing has significant bearing on the communication process. In their article, they distinguish between “instrumental” and “companionate” topics, pointing out that conversations of an instrumental nature tend to be specific and concrete, while companionate discussions focus on relational issues and tend to be much more ambiguous. Sillars and Weisberg also suggest that episodic communication aids in the understanding of instrumental issues, while sheer quantity of conversation relates more to an understanding of companionate issues. Similar distinctions could be reflected in a couple’s experience in Building Healthy Relationships, depending on the nature of the issue the couple chooses to deal with.

Another complex variable within marital communication revolves around gender differences in the process of communication. In general terms, Levenson and Gottman

(1983) note that communication in distressed couples is marked by emotional involvement by the female and emotional withdrawal by the male. They describe females as the “caretakers” of the emotional relationship, communicating more negative and positive emotions, perhaps in an attempt to engage their husbands.

An additional factor that complicates the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction relates to individual perceptions of communication within the marriage. A 1994 study by Houck and Daniel found that wives tended to report less communication or to rate the communication lower than did their husbands. As early as 1964, Virginia Satir commented on the importance of perceptions in marital communication by claiming that the wider the discrepancy between husbands' and wives' perceptions of communication within the relationship, the greater the likelihood that the marriage would be an unsatisfactory one. Sillars and Weisberg (1990) also speak to the impact of perceptions when stating that “Individual level perceptions are shaped and modified by interaction at the relationship level but some individual perceptions are stubbornly autonomous” (p. 501).

The preceding variables are among some of the many that have been explored in an effort to better understand the intricacies of marital communication. The breadth of the research serves to illustrate the complexities of the exchange between individuals in an intimate relationship. Much like a puzzle, the larger picture of the communication process is represented by a complex pattern of intertwined factors.

Communication Skills Questioned

For the past decade, the process of communication within marriage had been viewed from a skills building or deficit approach. In other words, couples that possess

skills associated with communication such as empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution are generally assumed to have greater marital stability and satisfaction (Kurdek, 2002; Larson & Holman, 1994). Conversely, couples with deficits in the same areas are generally assumed to experience greater instability and less satisfaction in their relationships. This has been the dominant conceptual framework echoed in the most common interventions of the last decade. O'Donahue and Crouch (1996) write that communication training "as an attempt to remediate problematic communication, has become an important component in many approaches to marital therapy" (p. 87).

In recent years, there has been a growing trend toward questioning the relationship between communication skills and marital satisfaction, as well as the emphasis on skills training. Burleson and Denton (1997) illustrate some common areas of confusion. First, they indicate that studies of communication skills and marital satisfaction tend to focus on distressed couples. They point out that in these troubled relationships couples may be motivated by frustrated desires, which may or may not reflect an actual deficit of communication skills (see also Gottman, 1979; Sullivan, Pasch, Eldridge, & Bradbury, 1998). Secondly, they suggest that distressed couples may actually be choosing to communicate in a negative manner, which speaks more to intention than level of skill. Burleson and Denton have also noted that an emphasis on a skills-deficit approach tends not to distinguish between motivations, skills, and actual behavior in the process of communication. Therefore, assuming that an assessment of communication skills can be based solely on observed behaviors is problematic.

Perhaps some of the most vocal criticisms against communication skills training have been based in the extensive research of John Gottman (see Gottman et al., 1998). In

this well publicized 1998 article, Gottman and his associates called for the abandonment of interventions based on active listening, which is descriptive of many of the marriage preparation and enrichment interventions currently available, including the BHR course. Gottman and his colleagues write “The active listening model, which is the most common component of current models of marital therapy, occurred infrequently in the resolution of marital conflict and was not predictive of differential marital outcomes” (p. 17). This was a surprising statement coming from Gottman, because he had previously been a proponent of the active listening model (Gottman, 1979; Gottman, 1994). Rather than interventions based on communication skills building, Gottman suggests an alternative focused on gentleness, soothing, and de-escalation of negativity. His suggestions emerged from his Seattle “Love Lab” research (see Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Gottman, 1999).

Not surprisingly, there has been a quick response to Gottman’s (1994) call to abandon active listening-based interventions. Among the first to respond have been Stanley, Bradbury, and Markman (2000). They offer criticism of Gottman’s research both on methodological and conceptual levels. With regard to methodological concerns, the authors mention non-random selection, failure to control for other factors, and ambiguity about statistical procedures, among others. Conceptually, Stanley, Bradbury, and Markman take issue with the meaning Gottman attaches to labels given to different phenomena, suggesting that he may be taking some liberties in this regard. For example, his term “soft start-ups” may easily be understood as active listening, a concept frequently used in communications literature.

Researchers tend to agree that communication is an important component of marriage, but often differ sharply as to what actually represents the practice of good communication (Gottman, 1994; Stanley, 2001). As research in marital communication has evolved, longstanding conceptual frameworks have come into question, as have the interventions based upon them. The BHR course is an example of such an intervention, driven by a skills-building perspective. An ethical response to the questions and criticisms raised will require an examination of the effectiveness of the BHR course, starting with a review of current related research on communication in marriage, gender, and skills acquisition.

Gender and Communication

Gender and communication tend to have a broad appeal with regard to research. Several branches of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and communications have devoted attention to better understanding the complexities of cross-gender discourse. Two of the main tasks of these areas of study have been as follows: first, to describe the process of communication between men and women and to assess how it differs from same-sex communication; and second, to postulate as to the explanations for these differences. In simpler terms, researchers want to know how things work, and why they work the way they do.

Whether through variables such as word choice, conversational style, or even the use of silence, it has been well established that men and women go about this process of communicating with one another in different ways. One fundamental difference is that of the content of men and women's speech. For instance, Goldschmidt and Weller (2000) analyzed the content of conversations in 11 different settings and found that in each

setting, the emotional content of speech was significantly higher for women than for men. Gottman and Levenson (1992) also note that the speech of wives tends to have more emotional content than that of husbands. Researchers have also found sex differences in conversational content between mothers and their children. For example, Fivush (1989) found that with daughters, mothers tend to focus on emotions, while with sons the conversational content is geared toward behaviors associated with emotions.

Another significant difference in communication between men and women relates to varying purposes for the conversations themselves. Research has indicated that the very framework upon which communication is built is often driven by different goals associated with each gender (Tannen, 1982). Typically, the function of women's communication is to connect with others in building relationships, foster intimacy, and offer support. Conversely, functions of communication for men are more closely related to carrying out tasks, and tend to focus on status as an individual, rather than as a part of a social network (Woodward, Rosenfeld, & May, 1996). Deborah Tannen, a key author in the area of gender and communication notes that men are more likely to view relationships as hierarchical, and as such, use conversation in a largely factual way to assert their position in the hierarchy. Women, who view relationships in a more egalitarian manner, tend toward using conversation to build connections and identify themselves as part of a larger group.

Convention of speech (or conversational style) is an additional area where men and women demonstrate considerable differences in communication. For instance, Mulac and colleagues (1998) have found that women tend to use more conversational backchannels (such as 'uh-huh' and 'yeah') than men. Additionally, women more

frequently make use of questions during the course of conversation. Hannah and Murachver (1999) concur with the majority of the research in noting that in general, women tend to be more considerate listeners than men in that they interrupt less often and offer more compliments and encouragement to continue, than do their male counterparts.

An additional communication pattern that appears to be related to gender is what Christiansen and Heavey (1993) refer to as “demand–withdrawal” interaction. In this pattern, one member of the couple attempts to initiate conversation regarding a specific topic, while the other takes action to avoid the conversation by changing the subject, withdrawing, or even leaving the room. Christiansen and Heavey indicate that in approximately 60% of couples, wives tend to demand, while husbands withdraw, while in 30% of couples the opposite is true. The remaining 10% tend to demand and withdraw equally. Perhaps these figures are not overly surprising when one takes into account that women are frequently described as the “caretakers” of the relationship, and whose conversation is characterized by efforts to elicit and encourage further discussion (Goldschmidt & Weller, 2000; Heaton & Blake, 1999; Klinetob & Smith, 1996).

Models of Gender Differences in Communication

With a topic as complex as gender differences in communication, it is understandable that there are several explanations for these observed differences. Perhaps the two most hotly debated explanations for gender-based communication differences are the two cultures theory (Maltz & Borker, 1982) and the dominance theory (Lakof, 1975).

The two cultures theory (Maltz & Borker, 1982) posits that children and youth grow in male and female subcultures. Between the ages of 5 and 15, boys and girls are for the most part socially isolated from one another, and that it is in these peer gender groups that communication norms are learned. Consequently, males and females speak the same words, but the language takes on different meanings and communication often transforms into miscommunication. To illustrate, Maltz and Borker note that females learn that the use of questions implies interest, whereas males learn that questions are used to control the conversation. By the time that gender isolated settings is no longer the norm, communication patterns and attachment of meaning to conventions of speech have become quite entrenched.

In contrast to the two cultures theory (Maltz & Borker, 1982), the dominance theory (Lakof, 1975) holds that there is a fundamental difference in power between men and women. According to this feminist perspective, men's use of language serves to keep women in a subordinate position. For instance, where a man might say, "Let's go out for dinner," a woman would be more likely to ask, "Should we go out for dinner tonight?" Lakof states that women's non-assertive style of speech further goes to supporting male dominance. Henley and Kramarae (1991) expand on Lakof's writings by suggesting that because of the power differential between the genders, women are required to learn both of the "male and female languages," while men have no reason to alter the status quo by familiarizing themselves with a female perspective of communication.

A criticism of both of these explanations of gender-based communication differences is that while both are well developed conceptually, claims are sometimes

made without the support of significant empirical research (Hannah & Murachver, 1999; Mulac et al., 1998). This criticism is more often directed at the two-cultures theory. While Mulac and colleagues offer some empirical support, more research is needed in this area. Others have suggested that placing the two cultures and dominance theories in direct opposition to each other serves to create an artificial dichotomy (Franzwa & Lockhart, 1998; Hannah & Murachver, 1999). Researchers such as Tannen (1994) and Crawford (1995) appear hesitant to associate themselves with one theory at the exclusion of the other, as singular explanations tend to be overly simplistic when it comes to an issue as complex as gender and communication.

The prevalence of gender differences is well represented in both popular culture and scholarly research. To ignore the impact of these differences on marital communication would render an analysis incomplete. Conversely, researchers, practitioners, and couples themselves would benefit from an awareness of stereotypes generated by an over-emphasis on gender-based differences. Maintaining a mindfulness of the multi-faceted nature of communication in marriage should contribute to a balanced perspective.

While the literature largely supports the gender differences in communication, it appears that our culture is moving in a direction that attempts to erase such stereotypical gender distinctions. As a result, researchers continually need to test this assumption when studying related topics to insure that their results are understood in an appropriately up to date framework.

Hope

Hope. It seems like a simple word, does it not? This concept is referred to so often and yet it is not so easily defined. Comments are made like, "I hope my presentation goes well; I hope I make it home in time for dinner; I hope I get the job." However, what would one say if asked, "What is hope?"

While hope is a relatively familiar concept in everyday life, in counselling, and in existential psychology, researchers' fine-tuned-definitions and models of hope are a more recent development. Writers such as Sophocles and Nietzsche have been quoted by hope theorists as representing the stance that hope is an illusion, that is has no basis in reality (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990; Snyder et al., 1991). Others acknowledge the existence of hope but view it as dangerous, a set up for disappointment. A few researchers in the area of social science have been paying attention to the apparent importance of hope in our lives, taking into account historically developed perspectives (Snyder, 1994). They have sought to understand the development of hope, its purpose, its relationship to other facets of life, and its measurement. One such researcher is Snyder (1995) who has developed a model of Hope.

Snyder's Model of Hope

Snyder (1995) has developed a theory, definition, and measure of hope. He defines Hope as "the process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move toward, (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals" (p. 355). In simpler terms, he views Hope as being comprised of two main components: willpower and "waypower." These two components of Hope are "reciprocal, additive, and positively related, although they are not synonymous" (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 575). Levels of Hope

and its development are influenced by a variety of factors, including attachment and social learning; in other words, Hope can be nurtured. Even in adulthood, strategies can be employed to increase willpower and waypower, and to develop stronger goals. Such strategies include prioritizing, taking care of distractions, and authoring one's own decisions (Snyder, 1994). To Snyder, the idea that hope is an illusion pertains only to when it is not connected to a concrete goal.

In order to clarify the notion of Hope, Snyder (1994) distinguishes it from related concepts. The first construct he sets apart from Hope is the Type A behavior pattern, which he describes as "hard-charging, time-urgent, and goal-oriented" (p. 18). He claims that people with the A Type pattern have goals that are often ill-defined because they are so busy doing it fast that they never feel they reach the goal, or if they do, they are not satisfied. In comparison, high-Hope people tend to have concrete goals, better social skills, to be less hostile and less urgent, and to enjoy the process itself.

Secondly, Snyder (1994) examines self-esteem and emotion, arguing that they are only by-products of how effective we are at pursuing goals. He states that self-esteem is an overrated concept, too vague to capture, and too difficult to attain when we don't really know what it is. Instead of being interchangeable with Hope, low self-esteem, for example, emerges when one is unable to attain his/her goals. Snyder finds it more useful to focus on thoughts as the driving force rather than emotion. To sum up this distinction, Hope is the underlying cognitive process and self-esteem is the result of hopeful cognitions.

Research shows that "Higher hope people have better outcomes in their lives" compared to those with lower hope (Snyder, 1995, p. 358). What about the idea that

better life outcomes are simply a result of higher intelligence? When reading between the lines of Snyder's (1994) theory, one can tell it has a cognitive ring to it. He assures us that hope is learned; we are not born with it. Empirically, hope is not correlated with native intelligence (Snyder et al., 1991). In other words, cognitions are fundamental to Snyder's Hope theory but native intelligence is not synonymous with trait Hope.

Lastly, hope is not vague as many of the previously mentioned constructs are. Snyder is not saying that it has always been a clearly defined subject, but rather, that hope has been re-defined, researched, exists within a workable framework, and is measurable.

Based on his theory, Snyder (1994) developed a tool to measure one's willpower and waypower, together equaling one's overall, dispositional (also termed trait) Hope. To further illustrate the differentiation between willpower and waypower, he states that the common saying, "Where there's a will there's a way," is not necessarily true. The will appears to operate independently of one's ability to make things happen. In other words, one's will score does not necessarily predict or influence one's way score, and the two components are, therefore, measured separately. He works on the assumption that inherent within all of us is Hope and that in order to have high hope, both components of the hope measure must also have a high score. If high hope only required the willpower score to be high, we would be measuring something closer to optimism. Likewise, if high hope only required having high waypower, we would be looking at a concept closer to mental flexibility. According to Snyder's definition of Hope, neither would be complete. Recognizing, however, that one's perception of hope may be

represented differently, given their present state, or if measuring another's Hope, Snyder created domain-specific measures to target these more accurately.

A benefit of using Snyder's Hope Scale (see Snyder et al., 1991) is that it has been utilized in previous research, yielding valuable results. Westburg and Boyer (1999) used Snyder's model to research clients' experience of change in the counseling process and the elevation of hope levels. Although the study sample was small ($n = 22$), they found that individual counseling "elevated their Hope level, thereby increasing their sense of goal-directed planning (pathways) and determination (agency)" (p. 25). There was a "significant increase from pretest to posttest means for the total level of Hope, the agency component, and the pathways component" (p. 28). According to Snyder (1994), the enhancement of hope does not depend on the type of treatment, the theoretical orientation of the therapist, or on the problems they present. Westburg and Boyer (1999) noted that their rationale for using the Hope Scale included the benefits of it being minimally intrusive, user-friendly, and the existence of a body of literature supporting its efficacy.

In reviewing the empirical research and support for the Hope Scale, a number of findings appear relevant. Snyder and colleagues (1991) found this measure to have "acceptable internal consistency and test-retest reliability" (p. 570). Construct validity is also supported and factor structure identifies agency and pathways components of the Hope scale.

Hope is related to competitive performance and to one's perceived ability to solve problems. It is also correlated with perceptions of control, and positive affective mental

state. It is negatively correlated with loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Snyder et al., 1991).

Snyder and colleagues (1991) found that higher Hope people tend to create goals in many arenas of life, and set more difficult goals. They also embrace their goals. Higher-Hope teens tend to have higher self-esteem. Hope was not correlated with native intelligence. Unless implementing methods to raise Hope, Hope scores tend to stay fairly consistent over time. Although societal norms might lead us to assume that men would report higher Hope given their greater opportunities, no differences were found between genders on overall Hope scores, nor willpower or waypower sub-scores.

The literature on hope is scattered, and according to Snyder's (1995) review, only two other theories of hope have received attention in the literature in the last 30 years. While his review fails to cover all related literature, he has provided an adequate starting point. Once summarized, the present review will be expanded to include other selected theories and empirical evidence on hope and related constructs pertaining to this study.

Alternative Theories of Hope

Snyder's review (1995) includes only two alternative theories of hope: Averill, et al.'s (1990) theory, which proposes that hope is an emotion with cognitions governing it; and Stotland's (1969) model, which suggests that hope is cognitive, and exists when there is any level of expectation of achieving a goal. Snyder considers Averill's theory as less conceptually complex than his hope theory, but recognizes its ecological validity. He also notes that it does not lend itself to measurement as easily as his own theory. As mentioned earlier, there is a convenience about Snyder's self-report measures. The

measurements taken within Stotland's framework are done via behavioral observations rather than through a psychometrically sound and valid scale.

The literature search for theories of hope yielded similar results as Snyder's review, as Averill's and Stotland's contributions were the only models directly relevant to this study's examination of hope. This left the impression that published work on the subject of hope as a defined concept is minimal. That being said, it is important to look beyond Snyder's impressions of these two alternative models of hope and summarize these theories from their original sources.

Averill's theory of hope. As a social constructionist, Averill and colleagues (1990) developed the theory that hope is an emotion. They have explored hope in the context of philosophy, theology, and sociology, finding its significance in all three. For example, they wrote, "For the more radical advocates of enlightenment, man became God; science became religion; and hope became secularized" (p. 5). They also wrote that, "Hope is, in fact, one of the three theological virtues recognized by Christianity, the others being faith, and charity or love" (p. 3). From his broad exploration, the significance of hope seems clear.

Averill and colleagues' (1990) rationale for studying hope and creating their theory was that they were aware of global views and detailed views but there appeared to be a lack of "intuitive and implicit theories of hope in the context of daily lives" (p. 7).

In their first of four studies, Averill et al. (1990) identified rules of hope in terms of social norms of Americans. Their theoretical assumptions were that social norms produce "regularities in behavior" and "sanctions ensue if norms are violated" (p. 9). One hundred and fifty subjects filled out detailed written questionnaires.

The findings suggested that the object of hope falls in the middle probability range. In other words, the object of hope was either “less realistic or more realistic” (Averill et al., 1990, p. 13) than the object that was wanted or desired. The first finding then, was hope was distinguished from want or desire by the probability of attainment. The second distinction found was by its level of importance. Participants reserved hope for their more vital interests. The third distinction was the object of hope was less materialistic, more socially acceptable, more enduring and/or in the future, or as more abstract and/or intangible.

To sum up the results of their first study, Averill et al. (1990) noted three general rules of hope: (1) Hope involves uncertainty but not too much; (2) People should not hope for trivial events; and (3) People should not hope for objects that are socially unacceptable. Other results of this study indicated that 41% of subjects described hoped-for events as achievement-related goals and 25% reported that hoped-for events pertained to interpersonal relationship. While hope is not dependent upon an action taken, there is an association between hope and the type of behaviour that follows. Subjects reported working harder because of their hope as compared to a situation of want/desire without hope.

Averill et al.’s (1990) second study looked at the emotional nature of hope by comparing hope to other prototypical emotions such as anger and love. Questionnaires asked subjects to think about what anger and love have in common as emotions, and to compare hope with anger and love. They were to describe two similarities and two differences.

The results showed that among the similarities, 8% said that all three are emotions and another 8% said all three are feelings. Also, 6% said all three were difficult to control, 5% said all three affect the way you perceive a situation, and 5% said all three affect behaviour.

Among the differences listed, 9% said hope is less demonstrable than anger and love, 4.5% said hope is less real and that one can hope for a greater variety of things (not limited to specific people and their actions), and 4% said hope is not an emotion. Four percent also reported that hope is more of an individual matter; that other people are not needed for it to exist, whereas anger and love require another person be involved (Averill et al., 1990, p. 41-42).

From this second study, Averill et al. (1990) concluded that the majority of people describe hope as falling within the paradigm of emotion because of several descriptors including: difficult to control, affects the way you think, leads you to act in uncharacteristic ways, motivates behaviour, and is a universal experience.

The third study (Averill et al., 1990) examined the “implicit theories of hope as reflected in maxims, folk sayings, and colloquialisms” (p. 51). Because this study is not directly relevant to the current research study, it will not be elaborated on here. Let it suffice to say that the themes that emerged match closely with the rules of hope established in the first study.

In the last study conducted (Averill et al., 1990), cross-cultural variations between Americans and Koreans on the construct of hope were explored. The findings suggested that Americans had higher ratings of hope as a way of coping and as a feeling, whereas Koreans gave higher ratings of hope as a personality characteristic, a voluntary process,

a socially acquired motive, and an intellectual process. The same amount of Americans and Koreans rated hope as an emotion.

Stotland's theory of hope. The second alternative theory of hope worth summarizing is that of Stotland's (1969). His cognitive frame defines hope as the expectancy of successfully attaining goals. His theory is based on a set of propositions extracted from a broad range of research. Stotland's professed aim was to reinstate the importance of hope as a psychological subject, not to provide all the answers for human motivation and behaviour.

Stotland's (1969) seven propositions basically state that: one's motivation to achieve a goal is partly a result of one's perceived probability of attaining the goal and how important the goal is to that person, the higher the perceived probability and importance of the goals, the more positive affect will be experienced once attained, and the lower probability and importance, the more anxiety will be experienced. Also, the more anxiety experienced, the more motivated the person is to act. Schemas are constructed either because of a number of related experiences which provide the person with examples of similar events, or because of messages communicated by other people, and the greater the similarity between events or the "greater the importance of the person directing him, the more likely the schema to be aroused" (p. 11-12). Stotland's last proposition states that schemas are invoked partly by how many times it has previously been invoked and/or the number of events that have previously been consistent with the schema and again, the importance of the person directing him.

Stotland's (1969) contribution to the current understanding of hope is significant. He analyzed a broad spectrum of empirical research to provide an initial theory of hope.

His motivation appeared to be largely driven by the lack of importance attributed to the construct of hope. Stotland admits that his theory is not the most thorough, but aspired to focus on reclaiming hope as indispensable. While Stotland did not create a valid and reliable measure of hope in the context of his theory, he notes “improvement in techniques of measurement, rather than rejection of the concept, should be the answer” (p. 5).

As Stotland (1969) demonstrated by developing his theory to a large degree on research outside the confines of the field of psychology, hope is more broadly understood than simply by the definitions of mainstream psychology. Nesse (1999), for example, examines the evolution of hope and despair. He indicates the biological nature and social significance of hope and suggests that hope and despair function to arouse our efforts to change when change is needed to live better. Within this scientific framework, depression is seen as extreme despair, and mania, as extreme hope. Hope correlates negatively with female depression (Irving, Crenshaw, Snyder, Francis, & Gentry, 1990), and female depression is linked with marital distress (Beach, Arius, & O’Leary, 1986; Waring, Patton, Neron, & Linker, 1986). Nesse claims that much depression is caused by the inability to give up a useless hope. In other words, one might become depressed if one refuses to accept that there is no hope in a particular domain. Perhaps this kind of situation is what the ancient philosophers were referring to when they wrote of hope as being illusory or a set up for disappointment.

Returning to the realm of psychological literature, there are theories based on optimism and self-efficacy that are cognitive in nature, which are seemingly too similar to hope to disregard. These theories do, however, appear less complete than Snyder’s

(1994) model of Hope. Efficacy and outcome expectancies research together parallel the two components of hope in that they address one's confidence and one's own abilities to behave in a way that will lead to a desired outcome. Specifically in contrast to self-efficacy, Snyder's version of hope refers to a broader cognitive set, and theories of optimism for instance, look at positive outcome expectancy but do not focus on the cognitive pathways that are needed to reach one's goals. The Hope Scale's overall scores correlated with a measure of optimism, with the strongest relationship with the willpower sub-score (Snyder, 1995). As Snyder summarizes, "Although hope theory obviously has much in common with other recent cognitive and motivational theories, it has defining properties that distinguish it from its relatives" (p. 357).

While the concept of hope may be more closely related to optimism and self-efficacy, the literature on marital satisfaction, marital commitment, forgiveness, and marital distress is also worth mentioning. Because many of these related constructs revolve around interpersonal relationships, they can be explored in the context of Snyder's link between hope and intimate relationships.

Hope in Relationships

The literature provides support for the idea that shared goals in an intimate relationship is an important factor in holding that relationship together (Huston, 2000). Furthermore, without the hope that these shared goals might be accomplished, it would follow that the relationship is not likely to stay in tact, or at the least one would expect the marital satisfaction levels to decrease. As Snyder (1994) illustrates, when two people begin to date they are looking for differences and similarities, hoping to find a connection that might last, seeking to understand the other's goals and how they might

merge with their own. If those two people decide to commit long-term, there is likely the belief that the goals are compatible and that both members are going to actively pursue these goals. This does not always turn out to be the case, as Snyder writes, “Whether a couple has moved to differing goals, or realizes they never had the same goals, the key is that common goals are lacking” (p. 262).

The relationship between one’s dispositional hope and their hope for the relationship is mirrored by Veroff, Douvan, Orbach, & Acitelli (1998) who state that “spouses that take a zestful, positive attitude toward life are more likely to maintain satisfying marriages” (as cited in Huston et al., 2001, p. 245). Although this positive attitude may more specifically reflect the willpower component of hope, the argument could also be made for waypower. Conceivably, one’s abilities to create and follow pathways could lead to a higher likelihood of being satisfied with the marital journey. Perhaps couples with less hope for their relationship will remain in the marriage, but view the marriage as a backdrop rather than a focal point in their lives. More time and energy is then distributed to friendships, work, children, and outside activities. Is being married the same as having an active marital relationship? It is difficult to imagine actively working on the relationship without hope that it might last or improve.

Having high Hope is not about experiencing the process as easy, but to have the ability to overcome hurdles and obstacles. Presumably, increasing one’s abilities to overcome obstacles should contribute to a higher hope score. As noted earlier, high-hope people find satisfaction in the journey. It would follow that people with high dispositional hope would relate more easily to the concept of marital satisfaction as a process rather than an unchanging state established in the first year of marriage. It is

expected that people who report high dispositional hope will also rate their hope for their relationship as high.

In some cases of research and clinical intervention, the relationship of hope and marital satisfaction is in fact greater than the reader would first suspect. For instance, Vaughan (2001) found that those who participated in the HOPE program (*Hope-Focused Marital Enrichment*) showed an “increase in marital satisfaction over time, whereas the control group remained roughly constant” (p. 1124). It cannot, however, be concluded from this that marital satisfaction and hope are the same construct, but rather that they are related in some way.

Snyder (1994) describes willpower as the mental energy that moves us from one point to the next, “a reservoir of determination and commitment” (p. 6). Commitment is frequently mentioned in the literature as being an important factor in marital success. The scope of the commitment literature is too broad to review here, but one particular article in this area of research can give us an idea of its relevance to our present focus. Clements and Swensen (2000) studied couples over the age of 50 and discovered that of the five variables studied, commitment to one’s spouse was the most consistent predictor of the quality of their marital relationships. They also found that commitment was negatively correlated to marriage problem variables such as problem-solving, a scale of marital problems, among others. Commitment was positively related to expression of love, including moral support and verbal expression. Like most researchers in the area of marriage and communication, they did not look at hope.

Forgiveness is becoming an increasingly popular research subject as it moves from a theological framework to a psychological one. Walrond-Skinner (1998) writes,

Since forgiveness must be as much an interpersonal as an intrapersonal phenomenon, this long silence seems quite extraordinary. It seems even stranger when one considers that there has been a growing literature on conflict resolution over the last decade and also a more urgent recognition that couples and families often sustain long-term damaging consequences as a result of chronic, unresolved conflict, whether or not these situations lead to the breakdown of relationships. (p. 4)

This author also notes that therapists are more comfortable with terms such as mediation and conciliation, commonly used in the field of conflict resolution. Gottman & Silver (1999) refers to this process as “repair.” While forgiveness is important, Walrond-Skinner warns that premature forgiveness is a potential problem. Apparently authentic forgiveness consists of a realistic assessment of the situation, corresponding emotions, and a confirming behavior, such as an apology. The communication skills encouraged by therapists could help slow-down the conflict resolution process, thereby creating more of an opportunity for effective forgiveness.

The present literature review on hope will continue to broaden Snyder’s (1995) review to include views of marital distress. The goal is not to expand so far as to lose the definition of hope, but rather to have a more complete understanding of how related literature fits with Snyder’s model of hope in the context of conjugal relationships.

Huston and colleagues (2001) outline three models of marital distress based on a social learning theory. The Disillusionment model rests on the implications of western ideas of courtships. The western image of lovers includes the expectation that they be blissful, optimistic, and forever romantic. In order to impress your new partner under

these expectations, one must highlight the virtues and negate the shortcomings. This sets up the need to maintain a favourable impression on one's mate, and in turn sets the couple up for disillusionment. In other words, one's hopes are set unrealistically high, making a sense of disappointment and hopelessness later on in the relationship more likely.

The Emergent Distress model (Huston et al., 2001) does not emphasize the loss of the honeymoon stage, but rather, focuses on how the increase in conflict and negativity corrode the marital relationship. The key to marital success then, depends on the couple's ability to handle their differences. This model fits well with the philosophy of enrichment and with courses emphasizing skill-building. It suggests that the pathways or waypower component of hope is important in preventing marital decay. In other words, finding effective alternative pathways when feeling stuck in the relationship is both reflective of high waypower and a form of preventing the breakdown of the marriage. These skills are the primary focus of prevention and enrichment programs. One way to measure this mental flexibility is to look at one's sub-scores of the FACES III (Olson et al., 1989) tool. This will be elaborated upon in the next section.

Enduring Dynamics is the third model outlined by Huston and colleagues (2001). It assumes that patterns are developed during courtship and then maintained throughout the course of marriage. The success of one's marriage, according to this model, could then be largely determined by examining the patterns developed in the early stages of the relationship. This model joins Gottman and colleagues' (1998) approach to predicting marital success by observing early couple interactions. This model would support the idea that one's perception of hope for the relationship may be fairly stable over time

once it's developed in the first stage of the relationship. If this were in fact the case, we'd expect to find little change in ratings of hope for the relationship over time. This conflicts with Snyder et al.'s (1996) findings that domain-specific hope changes over time.

The three models just described are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Kurdek (2002) found that overall, both the "initial level and change were needed to account for variability in each marital outcome" (p. 163). Huston (2001) explains that disillusioned couples are less happy in their marriages (long-term) than couples who viewed less affection and more ambivalence as a natural consequence of transition in marital relationships. These models can also be related to Snyder's (1994) concept of hope. The "initial level" Kurdek refers to could theoretically be compared with one's willpower, and the ability to change in the relationship could be compared with one's waypower. This further supports the possibility of a researchable connection between marital relationships and hope as defined by Snyder.

One of the strengths of Snyder's (1994) Hope measure is its ability to bridge research with clinical practice. One bridge it creates is supported by the literature on marital assessment, which encourages assessment to be used as an intervention. For example, Fowers (1990) demonstrates the use of marital assessment tools in the nurturance of hope for couples by offering them a clearer understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. The author explains the renewed hope and sense of relief a couple can experience when their issues are presented in an organized and comprehensive way. It allows the couples to see the areas in need of improvement rather than feeling overwhelmed by the entire troubled relationship. After conducting research

using the Hope Scale, Westerburg and Boyer (1999) suggested that clinicians focus on the enhancement of hope rather than on the reduction of pathology in clinical practice. Prevention and enrichment programs serve as an avenue towards enhancing hope. The next section specifically examines the link between hope and communication.

Hope and Communication

Communication is key to developing shared goals (Snyder, 1994). Snyder urges couples to maintain a willingness to talk about these shared goals, whether it brings the awareness that the shared goals do not exist, or to open up the discussion to finding ways to pursue the shared goals that are discovered. This communicating usually begins during the dating phase, but sadly often fades over time if not maintained or fine-tuned. Both listening and speaking are important, and if the process of communication is not feeling successful, Snyder suggests that couples might benefit from seeking professional guidance, either to receive education or mediation.

How would prevention and enrichment programs in particular aid in the enhancement of hope? Based on the objectives of such programs, couples' ability to resolve conflicts should increase if they are able to find more ways than one to resolve it. This is reflected in waypower, having the ability to find alternative routes to the goal when roadblocks occur. Communication skills can help individuals clarify relationship goals throughout their marital journey. After all, it is much easier to plan effectively if the destination is clear and well defined. Communication skills aid couples in identifying the core issues. Once things are concrete and better understood by the couple, the identified conflict should theoretically be easier to resolve and be experienced as less overwhelming. For example, it may be difficult to know specifically how to 'improve'

'couple relationships' but easier to 'spend more one on one time with your spouse in the evenings, which could theoretically facilitate improved couple relations. Prevention and enrichment programs usually provide opportunities for couples to practice their skills with a facilitator, and according to Williams (1992), practicing the art of planning, helps. As Perry and Hutson (1996) put it, "hope must be made practical, pulled out of the realm of wishes and feelings into the world of experience and action" (p. 8).

Without speculating too broadly, there appear to be several connections between hope and communication. Given what is already known about these connections, the development of communication and conflict resolution skills should contribute to the enhancement of hope.

Although the empirical literature on hope in relationships is sparse, Snyder (1994) offers a well-established framework in which to examine and measure the subject. Hope is in no way a simple concept, but with attempts to understand complex ideas comes the process of refining definitions of constructs, validating theories and related measures, and evaluating clinical practice. Snyder has provided a solid base from which to begin this process.

Marital Program Evaluation

The functions of program evaluation research depend on the developmental stage of the program (Leber, St. Peters, & Markman, 1996). When programs are in the earlier stages of development, evaluative research focuses on its conceptualization, design, and implementation. In their later stages, the purpose of research is to determine whether or not the programs meet the goals and objectives in terms of cost effectiveness and desired impact. Outcome evaluations are among the most common, examining intervention

impact. It is not only designed to determine the successes and failures of the existing programs, but also to investigate the impact of unrelated processes. Program evaluation research serves as a guide for improving programs and practices.

Marriage prevention and enrichment literature expose a variety of findings in regard to the evaluation of related programs. The foci of preparation and enrichment materials have followed the evolution of the research. Some of the more recent programs are more theoretically based and geared toward sound evaluation (Stanley, 2001). The research has become more specific over the years, addressing previous findings, refining research designs, and looking at what we understand from different angles. An important division of evaluative research has focused on communication skills programming for couples. It is worth briefly reviewing these programs to examine their similarities, differences, and reported effectiveness to provide a backdrop for the present study.

According to Boisvert and colleagues (1992), communication is perceived as the most frequent problem for couples. Some of the reported themes of interest in terms of premarital counseling topics include expression of feelings, effective listening, and helping their partner solve personal problems. Williams (1992) used an open-ended interest questionnaire and found that 60% of couples wanted to work on communication skills, and 28% expressed interest in conflict resolution skills.

Local research was conducted by Lees (1986) at the University of British Columbia. He compared three marriage preparation programs: Anglican, Roman Catholic, and the Couples' Workshop. A pre-post design with 96 subjects in each of three courses was used. Results indicated that the subjects who took the Couples' Workshop showed a significant change on Willingness to Seek Help with Marriage, and

Relationship Beliefs Inventories. Those changes were not found in the Roman Catholic or Anglican samples. On these two measures, however, there was a significant difference between those who participated in the Couples' Workshop and the other two courses. Thirty qualitative reports were done after participants had completed the course. The qualitative results indicated the importance of experiential and skill-training methods in explaining the difference between courses.

The goal of the courses Lees (1986) studied, was to increase the likelihood of seeking further assistance if needed. It could open up lifelong learning if attitude changes about marriage myths and needing help later. The courses were meant to disrupt myths that conflict is destructive, skills are not needed, partners cannot change, and that understanding partners' thoughts without speaking is important in love relationship. This last one can lead to misunderstanding in marriage. Communication skills are helpful and one step towards awareness in a marriage, but studies show that these gains do not last (Sullivan et al., 1998; Giblin, 1986).

Guerney's (1977) *Relationship Enhancement Program* was evaluated by comparing its outcome with a lecture/discussion control group. Both groups were involved in 24 hours of training, and couples were randomly assigned. Twenty-seven couples were in the experimental group, and 30 couples in the control group. None of the demographic differences were significant. The researchers examined changes in need for inclusion, control, and affection. The results showed an increase in "wanted control" for the control group and an increase in "expressed affection" from pretest to posttest in the experimental group. Further research was recommended to determine which programs

are most effective, for whom, when, and why (Ridley & Sladeczek, 1992). This study did not include follow-up research, important for establishing long-term benefits.

Hawley (1991) compared three enrichment programs involving 99 newlywed couples, some of whom were assigned to a treatment group, and others to the control group. The interventions included *Growing Together*, TIME, and *Learning to Live Together*. The ENRICH instrument was used as a pretest-posttest measure. On individual measures, significant differences were found between the experimental groups and the control group. Gains in marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and family and friends were among them.

Durana (1997) evaluated the PAIRS program, a group designed to enhance and help maintain intimacy with married couples via a psycho educational approach. A total of 137 subjects participated. Measures of intimacy and marital adjustments as well as an open-ended questionnaire were used. Of the participants, 76% perceived significant gains in intimacy through the follow-up period, gender differences were reduced, and intimacy appeared to be a learnable skill. Included in the measure of intimacy are the skills of conflict resolution and expressiveness. He points out that the research is lacking on the common themes of listening, self-expression, conflict resolution, and gender issues. This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, and Groth (1998) investigated a cognitive-behavioral psycho-educational weekend group. Four couples participate in each group. A randomly assigned, wait-list control group was used. The intervention addressed communication and problem-solving skills, provided opportunities to discuss relationship expectations, and exercises were included to enhance their sexual

relationship. The results showed that the intervention couples used more positive verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors than the control group. The control group reported significantly more relationship problem areas and more negative communication behaviors than the intervention group. From pre-assessment to a one-year follow-up, the intervention couples reported fewer problem areas at follow-up.

Based on the humanistic perspective, the *Relationship Enhancement* (RE) program teaches disclosure and empathy skills. According to Silliman and Schumm (2000), evaluations of this model found short-term improvement in empathy, problem solving, self-disclosure, and overall communication skills. Participants at the high school level who attended an 8-hour training program showed “improved listening, expression, and problem solving abilities relative to control group peers” (p. 136).

Among the more empirically examined programs is the *Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program* (PREP) (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992). It has undergone numerous revisions and is currently available in two formats. In the first version, 4-8 couples attend 6 weekly 2.5 hr. sessions where mini-lectures are presented on communication skills and relationship issues; a coach is able to guide the couples in practicing those skills. In the second version, 20-40 couples attend a weekend workshop where the same lectures and practice opportunities are offered in a more intensive and focused way. The areas covered include effective listening and speaking skills, increasing awareness of relationship issues, the role of fun in maintaining and stabilizing a relationship, problem solving, ways to increase intimacy and commitment in their relationship, exploring spiritual beliefs, and ways to improve physical communication (Silliman & Schumm, 2000).

In longitudinal studies on the PREP (Renick et al., 1992), short-term effects (pre-posttest) are shown on communication skills, and long-term effects (1.5 year follow-up) include maintained or improved relationship satisfaction and impact of communication skills. After three years, differences between control group couples and couples who attended the PREP increased, and negative communication was used less by intervention couples than by control couples. In addition, intervention couples showed a decrease in problem intensity and control couples showed an increase. When compared to the *Engaged Encounter* (EE) program, PREP showed greater increases in overall communication, problems solving, and support-validation (Renick et al., 1992). According to Markman and colleagues (1993), a five-year follow-up of the PREP showed the intervention group as having increased levels of positive communication and lower levels of negative communication and lower levels of violence.

Russell and Lyster (1992) examined factors associated with consumer satisfaction in terms of a marriage preparation course, similar to PREP. The course focuses on communication skill development and relational issues. Ratings from 196 couples that attended *The Marriage Project*, demonstrated high overall satisfaction with the training. Older couples reported significantly higher rates of improved communication than did younger couples after the course. In addition, there was evidence of an increase in the understanding and utilization of communication and conflict resolution. There was no control group in this study.

Miller (see Nunnally, Miller, & Wackman, 1975) developed the popular *Minnesota Couple Communication Program* based on 10 years of research supporting the idea that couple communication is vital to effective marital interaction. Initial

informal evaluations by Nunnally et al. (1975) showed the program was generally favorable, but these researchers failed to look at the program's long-term effects.

Miller's (1975) course was later developed into the *Couple Communication Program* (CCP), a 12-hour program that provides awareness and skill training. When evaluated, it has shown enhanced positive interaction and short-term gains in communication quality in treatment group couples (Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980). Before its 1991 revision, Wampler (1990) reviewed the research to date on this systems-based program, including 70 different groups, totaling 500 participants. She found that most studies were well designed and used control groups and follow-up procedures.

According to a design evaluation scoring (Gurman & Kniskern, 1978), Wampler reports that several studies on the CCP rated 'Very Good', including Russell, Bagarozzi, Atilano, & Morris (1984), Brock and Joanning (1983), Davis (1980), Joanning (1982), Miller (1971), Nunnally (1971), Russell, Wampler and Sprenkle (1980), Schaffer (1981), and Schwartz (1981) as cited in Wampler, 1990. Noted as the most sophisticated investigation by 1990, Burnham (1984) used random assignment in his study, a rare design quality in this area of research.

Wampler's (1990) review revealed several trends. In terms of self-reported impact of CCP, there were mixed results, some showing positive effects, some no effects, but no negative effects. The ratio of studies finding positive to no effect was 42:29 at short-term effects, and 15:20 at long-term. A study that used the FACES (Olson et al., 1985) measure reported positive effects only, although limited to the cohesion dimension and did not do follow-up (Biderman, 1983). The behaviorally measured studies showed a

greater ratio of positive to no effect than the self-report research, at 14:2 studies for short-term effect and 2:6 for long-term.

More recently, Butler and Wampler (1999) did a meta-analysis of 16 studies of the CCP. They found positive outcomes on all the measures, an increase in communication skills with moderate couple-perceived changes, and an overall effect of the course between pretest and posttest with a slow deterioration over time as seen at follow-up. Oliver and Miller (1994) uphold that, “Caring and skilled communication processes are prerequisites to effective problem-solving, conflict resolution, and the ability to communicate affection effectively” (p. 151).

Despite the failure to use control groups, randomly assign subjects, and control for a plethora of potential confounds, the cumulative picture has helped clinicians and researchers advance understanding of couple courses. Dependent variables in related research tend to include intimacy, positive and negative communication behaviors, conflict resolution skills, marital adjustment, and gender differences. Among the most common research recommendations are the employment of follow-up measures, examining other related factors to communication in marriage, and doing sound evaluation (Wampler, 1990). In Wampler’s thorough literature review, only one study on Miller’s CCP used the FACES (Olson et al., 1989) measure; in addition, hope was not examined directly. In response to Gottman’s (1994) challenges regarding skill-based programs not being the answer to maintaining healthy relationships, there are a number of variables that have not yet been considered psychometrically. Hope is a variable that may contribute significantly to the success of relationships, and may be nurtured or further developed by skill-based programs.

Although there are a variety of other widely used programs, few of them have reported effects in research journals. It is expected that once a program is developed, its effectiveness be evaluated. Supportive evidence of a course's effectiveness provides a context of accountability, productivity, and an opportunity to move one step forward in the research of communication programming.

From varying methods to measuring different factors and variables, program evaluation literature has had endless possibilities in terms of studying the effectiveness of relationship prevention and enrichment programs. Recognizing and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of previous research encourage replication, search for new and related ideas, and specify current understandings, through program evaluation.

Family Types

This study examines the relationship of family types with trait Hope. Balanced and unbalanced family type categories can be attained through Olson and colleagues' (1985) FACES measure. Balanced family types represent families that report a mid-range score on both the adaptability and cohesion continuums. Unbalanced family types represent families that score at either extreme of those same continuums. Presumably, families that are more balanced function better as a unit than those families that present as more chaotic, enmeshed, disconnected, or rigid. This categorization of families is based on Olson's Circumplex model (see Olson et al., 1985).

Circumplex Model and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale

In response to the evolution of research and clinical practice, new models and measures were established in the field of marriage and family therapy. One such model, created by Olson and colleagues (1985), attempts not only to respond to both the

research and the clinical movement, but also to bridge the two. According to the Circumplex model, there are 16 types of marital and family systems based on a combination of degrees of cohesion (degree of connectedness or emotional bonding) and adaptability (degree of flexibility). The cohesion dimension is divided into four categories: disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed. The adaptability continuum includes: rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic categories. The third dimension is communication, which is believed to allow movement on the other two dimensions. The model is open to both experimental and clinical use.

The measure used within the Circumplex model is called the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES). Designed and revised by Olson, Portner, and Lavee (1985), FACES III has been used to assess how family members perceive their family at present, and how they would ideally like the family to be. The person's level of satisfaction with the family is measured by the perceived-ideal discrepancy. Conceivably, the more balanced the overall family/couple scores on the FACES measure, the better the communication.

Tutty (1995) addresses the use of measurements in assessing family functioning. Specifically in regard to FACES, she writes, "for each dimension, balanced or moderate levels of communication are hypothesized to be most viable for healthy functioning" (p. 85). Tutty expresses concern that communication is not measured directly by FACES. While she has reason to be concerned, the third dimension is based on a conceptual notion and the overall FACES scores appear to reflect the level of communication.

The Circumplex model (Olson et al, 1983), in addition to the FACES measure (Olson & Killorin, 1984), has been found to be generally reliable and valid (Barnes &

Olson, 1982; Bonk, 1984; Clark, 1984; Garbarino, Sebes, & Schellenbach, 1985; Olson & Killorin, 1984; Rodick, Henggeler, & Hanson, 1986). A concern voiced by Tutty (1995) regarding the validity of FACES III is based on more recent findings that suggest significant discrepancies between scores on the Adaptability subscale (Green, Harris, Forte, & Robinson, 1991; Hampson, Beavers, & Hulgus, 1988). Because overall scores are being utilized for this proposed study, the validity concerns are minimal.

Hypotheses and Rationale

The four hypotheses and their rationale are as follows:

1. Is participation in the BHR course associated with changes in: (a) Perceptions of skills; and (b) Perceptions of hope for the relationship? An ethical response to the questions and criticisms raised regarding the impact of skills acquisition on the strength of couple relationships will require an examination of the effectiveness of the BHR course. It is anticipated, based on goals and objectives of the course, that both perceived skills and hope for the relationship will be affected by participation in the BHR. Increasing one's abilities to overcome obstacles by communicating better with his/her partner is expected to contribute to a perception of increased hope for the relationship.
2. Do both men and women perceive women as more skilled in communicating before participation in the BHR course? This prediction is based on: (a) The influence of common stereotypes that women are better at communicating; and (b) Research showing that women frequently show more empathy, emotional content, and reciprocity in relationships. While the literature largely supports the gender differences in communication, our culture is moving in a direction that attempts to erase such stereotypical gender distinctions (Swann, Langlois, & Gilbert, 1999). As a result,

researchers should continually test this assumption when studying related topics to insure that their results are understood in an appropriately up to date framework.

3. Men who report balanced family types will report higher average levels of trait Hope than men who report unbalanced family types. Women who report balanced family types will report higher average levels of trait Hope than women who report unbalanced family types. Olson and colleagues' (1989) Circumplex model allows for the expectation that balanced family types may report higher levels of Hope.

4. Men and women's trait Hope will be positively related to their hope for the relationship before participation in the BHR course. This expectation is based on Snyder's (1994) explanation of the link between trait Hope and hope within relationships. As noted earlier, high-hope people find satisfaction in the journey. It would follow that people with high dispositional Hope would relate more easily to the concept of marital satisfaction as a process rather than an unchanging state established in the first year of marriage. It is expected that people who report high dispositional Hope will also rate their hope for their relationship as high. If relationship goals can be more readily identified and accomplished after participating in the BHR course, we would expect their hope for the relationship to increase or remain stable and strong. The development of Hope appears to play an important role in the prevention of disengaging from intimate relationships, which can too frequently lead to separation and divorce.

Because Snyder's (1994) definition of Hope implies that, although changeable, Hope is more a way of internal appraisal than externally influenced, it is logical then to conclude that one's rating of their overall trait Hope would positively relate to their levels of hope in more specific ways, such as hope for the relationship. In other words, a

high-Hope person would have a tendency to rate their hope for the relationship more positively than if they had a low dispositional Hope score.

It is expected that once a program is developed, its effectiveness be evaluated. Supportive evidence of a course's effectiveness provides a context of accountability, productivity, and an opportunity to move one step forward in the research of communication programming.

In evaluating the BHR, there is an overall expectation that the findings will help in understanding what is effective, and thereby promote awareness and skills that aid in healthy couple relationships. Based on the literature, it is expected that this course would show similar effects as the research on the CCP (Miller et al., 1992). Because the BHR has been adapted and condensed, it is worthwhile measuring certain expected outcomes for this particular course. According to previous studies on similar programs, follow-up of enrichment programs, systemic exploration across the life cycle, hope, gender, and family forms/types are among the related factors that have been recommended for future research (Fowers, 1990; Giblin, 1996; Giblin et al., 1985; Markman et al., 1993; Wampler, 1990; Worthington et al., 1997). Qualitative research is being conducted in association with this study (Landra Mason, personal communication). The first hypothesis of the present study is outcome based, whereas hypotheses two through four are process oriented. As previously noted, Wampler's (1990) review of the literature on the CCP (Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1976), reveals that only one study used the FACES measure, and none of the studies directly examined hope using Snyder's theory.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study is designed primarily to evaluate the *Building Healthy Relationships* (BHR) course, adapted from Miller and colleagues' (1992) CCP. There is an abundance of literature on the general topic of communication and yet there are many unanswered questions that this study hopes to address. The overall purpose of this study is to test some of the longstanding assumptions, to move forward with the existing findings, adding to what is already known about communication, gender, hope, and family types.

Participants

Similar to participant rates from other program evaluation studies, 75% of the pooled population chose to participate (Durana, 1997). Given the varied lengths of follow-up time, it was anticipated that a large percentage would not be contactable due to changes in phone numbers. The couples were not recruited to take the course for research purposes, but rather, registered voluntarily and were approached after taking the BHR for permission to be contacted for follow-up purposes. Because the Couples version of the FACES measure requires the context of a relationship, couples that were not married or cohabiting for a minimum of three months at the time of follow-up only participated in the Program Questionnaire and the Hope Scales. Couples that were not together at follow-up were excluded from participating in the follow-up portion of the study. Once all criteria were met and those that could not be contacted were removed from the pooled sample, it was anticipated that 60 couples would choose to participate at follow-up. All 344 participants of the course were included for the use of archival data before and directly after taking the BHR course, unless participants did not complete the Program Questionnaires.

Of the 344 individual course participants, 223 participants agreed to be contacted at follow-up (65%). Of the 162 participants successfully reached by phone, 136 agreed to participate in this study (84%). Of the contacted participants that were willing to be subjects, 74 individuals completed and returned their follow-up measures and an additional 21 individuals answered the three single item follow-up ratings. As a result, 46% of the pooled population returned useable data, roughly two-thirds of what was expected.

Of the 68 couples that were successfully contacted, 10 couples were no longer together and 4 couples were not interested in participating in the study. Couples that took longer than four weeks to return their data received a reminder phone call, and 8 of the 36 reminded subjects requested that the questionnaire be resent to them because they had lost it.

In terms of course participants' willingness to be contacted, it is worthwhile noting that for some instructors, they responded more positively as a group to a follow-up call than with other instructors.

Study participants ranged in age from 23 to 73, with a mean of 38.08. Of these, 71% were married, 18% were common law, 6% were engaged, 4% were dating, and 1% were separated or divorced at the time they participated in the BHR course. The number of European subjects was 73%, 1% were African-American, 2% were Asian, and 24% marked other. Those having completed high school composed 42%, 38% had completed technical school, a diploma, or an associate degree, 16% had a Bachelor's degree, and 4% had attained a Master's degree or Ph.D. Of the 71 subjects that completed the

FACES measure, 48% fit the unbalanced family type category, and 52% fit the balanced family type category.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was established at two levels. Personal consent (see Appendix B) was acquired from individual participants and Agency consent was acquired from the BHR Board (see Appendix C). The recruitment of subjects, subject confidentiality, incentives for participation, and subjects' right to withdraw from the study without penalty were all met. Data is retained for five years in a secure location, only available to the primary researchers and the BHR Board.

Measures

Demographic Information (see Appendix D) was collected either at the time of the pretest or at follow-up if not previously asked. Demographic variables included: age, gender, marital status, level of education, number of children, length of relationship, and ethnicity. Couples were also asked if they have participated in a similar course before and/or if they have been in counseling for their relationship.

The Program Questionnaire (see Appendix E) includes 3 Likert scale questions at pretest and follow-up, and at posttest the PQ was accompanied by program feedback questions (see Appendix F).

The Hope Scale (see Appendix G) is comprised of eight questions, four referring to willpower, and the other four to waypower. Together, they measure one's overall hope. To minimize the length of participation time, the four additional distracter items were not included. Two of Snyder's domain-specific scales, one of which is a rating one's own hope, and the other a rating of hope in others, were used. These scales were

re-titled as Personal Goals and Partner's Goals in order to minimize response bias. Studies have demonstrated acceptable construct validity, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity (Snyder et al., 1991).

The couple's version of the FACES-III (see Appendix H) measure was administered at follow-up. It was designed to examine three relationship dimensions according to the Circumplex model, including scores for adaptability, cohesiveness, and communication. As the third dimension, communication is believed to be the factor that allows for movement on the other dimensions. In addition to internal consistency, both general reliability and test-retest reliability have been rated as generally good in regards to these scales (Olson et al, 1985). Although the couple version is designed for young couples without children, there is no specific direction given for the use of this version for couple ratings with couples who have children. This version was, therefore, used for couples regardless of whether or not they had children. The criterion for meeting the unbalanced classification was determined by extreme scores for Cohesion and/or Adaptability. Adaptability norms were adjusted from the original 1983 Minnesota norms, according to the study sample's mean and standard deviation.

Procedure

All the pre and post measures were administered and/or collected by those in charge of running the course. Course participants were asked on the posttest PQ if they were willing to receive a follow-up call. The researchers administered the remaining measures by phone interviews and/or mail-outs to those that expressed willingness to be contacted.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

As noted earlier, 95 of the 136 individuals that were contacted agreed to participate in this study. Because some participants answered part of the questionnaire over the phone and then did not return the rest by mail, there is usable but incomplete data for an additional 21 individuals. Couples that took longer than four weeks to return their data received a reminder call, and eight subjects requested that the questionnaire be resent to them because they had lost it. The two-week test-retest reliability for single-item ratings were: hope for the relationship ($r = .839, p < .001, N = 19$), one's own skills ($r = .633, p = .003, N = 20$), and one's partner's skills ($r = .792, p < .001, N = 20$).

Descriptive statistics for the single item ratings are presented in Table 1. Item means were used to replace missing data for the FACES III measure and Hope Scales. The number of months of follow-up ranged from one to thirty-nine. Reliability was adequate (see Tables 2 & 3). (For remaining intercorrelations, see Appendix I). Of the 88 participants who agreed to participate in the follow-up observations, 66% reported stable or improved levels in ratings of communication skills for his or her partner. (Stability is defined as the follow-up rating being at most one rating point, on the 10-point scale, lower than the rating at the post-evaluation workshop questionnaire.) Another 73% reported stable or improved levels in ratings of one's own communication skills.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1a

Is participation in the BHR course associated with changes in perceptions of skills? A 3 (Time) by 2 (Perspective) within-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the

Table 1

Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Single Item Measures

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
1. Skill rating of self ^a	--							
2. Skill rating of partner ^a	.59**	--						
3. Hope for relationship ^a	.44**	.38**	--					
4. Skill rating of self ^b	.57**	.36**	.42**	--				
5. Skill rating of partner ^b	.38**	.56**	.31**	.73**	--			
6. Hope for relationship ^b	.26**	.21**	.74**	.43**	.44**	--		
7. Skill rating of self ^c	.49**	.37**	.39**	.44**	.45**	.44**	--	
8. Skill rating of partner ^c	.30**	.53**	.34**	.29**	.53**	.38**	.70**	--
9. Hope for relationship ^c	.28**	.48**	.54**	.30**	.30**	.63**	.44**	.44**
Mean	5.87	5.86	8.48	7.49	7.56	8.99	6.93	6.72
Standard Deviation	1.99	2.07	2.01	1.39	1.42	1.37	1.31	1.54

Note. The number of observations for pre- and post-workshop ratings vary from 270 to 303. The number of observations for follow-up ratings vary from 94 to 95. Follow-up hope mean is 8.78, with a standard deviation of 1.79.

^aRatings obtained at the beginning of the BHR course.

^bRatings obtained at the end of the BHR course.

^cRatings obtained at BHR course follow-up.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Hope Measures

	10	11	12	13	14	15
10. Willpower	--					
11. Waypower	.89**	--				
12. Willpower of partner	.33**	0.2	--			
13. Waypower of partner	0.16	0.16	.71**	--		
14. Total Hope	.97**	.94**	.27*	0.16	--	
15. Total Hope of partner	.26*	0.19	.92**	.39**	.23*	--
Mean	3.15	3.14	3.19	3.04	3.14	3.11
Standard Deviation	0.39	0.39	0.56	0.62	.38	.54
N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Coefficient Alpha	0.56	0.8	0.81	0.87	0.82	0.9

Note. The significance levels are indicated for correlation coefficients in this and subsequent tables as descriptive information. No hypotheses are being tested.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Intercorrelations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for FACES Measure

Measures	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
16. Adaptability	--							
17. Cohesion	.56**	--						
18. Ideal adaptability	.27*	-.09	--					
19. Ideal cohesion	.28*	.22	.34**	--				
20. Total FACES	.88**	.89**	0.1	.28*	--			
21. Total ideal	.33**	.05	.87**	.76**	.22	--		
22. Code for cohesion	.55**	.89**	.02	.29*	.82**	.17	--	
23. Code for adaptability	.92**	.48**	.32**	.25*	.79**	.35**	.57**	--
Mean	31.73	40.35	36.62	45.64	36.04	41.13	4.94	4.63
Standard Deviation	5.7	5.89	4.13	3.15	5.12	2.99	1.81	1.54
Coefficient alpha	0.76	0.90	0.35	0.76	.86	.63	-	-

Note. The number of observations for each measure is 71.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

BHR participants' single-item ratings of communication skills (from 1 to 10). The observed Times were at the beginning of the course (pretest), at the conclusion of the course (posttest), and at follow-up. The Perspectives reflect ratings of one's own skills (self) and partner's skill levels (other). A strong main effect for Time was found, reflecting an increase from pretest ($M = 6.02$) to posttest ($M = 7.47$) and a subsequent decrease at follow-up ($M = 6.96$), $F(2,166) = 40.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .327$. Those who reported decreases in the levels of their own and their partner's communication skills, were equally likely to have reported the perception of decreased skill levels when the BHR course was recently completed or when it was completed years later. This suggests that there was a sudden drop in perceived skills after taking the course for some participants. It is important to recall, however, that the majority of BHR participants reported stable levels of perceived skill as noted in the preliminary analysis above.

The Time by Perspective interaction suggests a weak trend for the perceived improvements in one's partner's skills to be less successfully maintained at follow-up than the improvements of one's own skills were maintained at the follow-up assessment, $F(2,166) = 3.25, p = .049, \eta^2 = .038$ (see Figure 1). There was no main effect found for Perspective, $F(1,83) = .036, p = .85, \eta^2 < .001$.

To clarify further details of skills ratings, the impact of gender on the skills ratings was explored with a couple-level analysis. A 2 (Time) x 2 (Perspective) x 2 (Gender) within-subjects ANOVA was conducted. The follow-up time period was dropped from this analysis due to excessive missing data. The three-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 91) = 8.43, p = .005, \eta^2 = .09$ (see Figure 2). This result showed that both men and women agreed that women were more skilled overall and that men improved more than

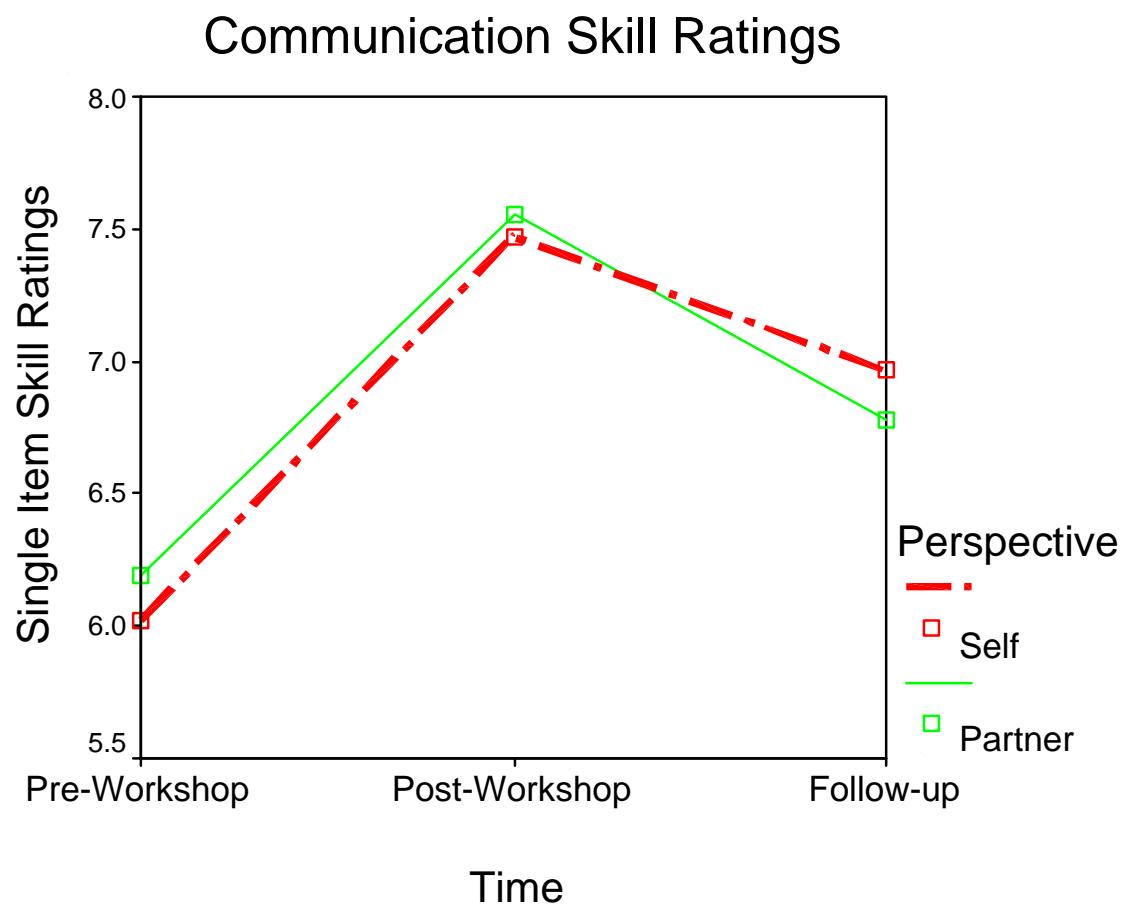


Figure 1. The two-way interaction between Perspective and Time for single item Communication Skill Ratings.

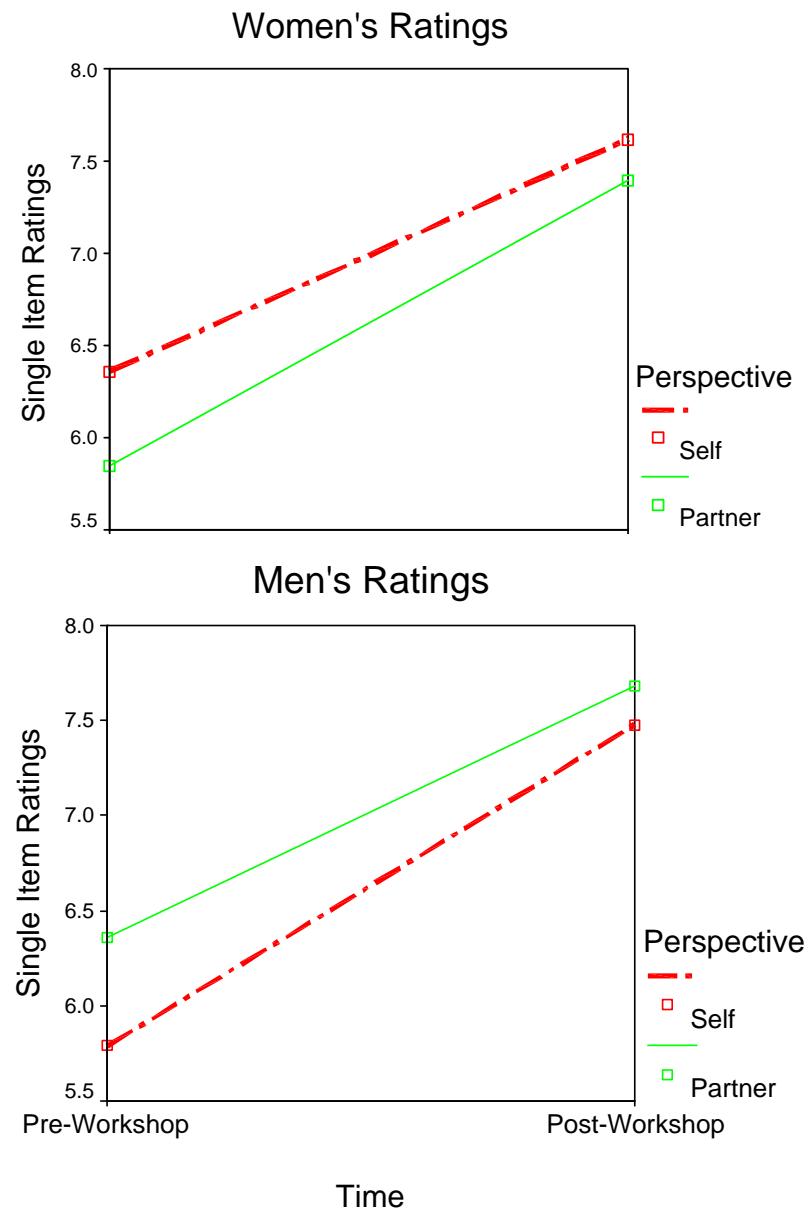


Figure 2. The three-way interaction between Time, Perspective, and Gender, for single item Communication Skill Ratings.

women during the workshop. That is, there is no evidence of a gender bias in skill perception in these ratings.

Hypothesis 1b

Is participation in the BHR course associated with perceptions of hope for the relationship? Within-subjects ANOVA for Time (pre, post, follow-up) on single-item hope ratings (from 1 to 10) was conducted (Greenhouse-Geisser approximations are reported here because the sphericity assumption might not hold in this data set). There was a small but significant main effect for Time, $F(1.8, 143.9) = 3.33, p = .042, \eta^2 = .041$, which suggests that participation in the course impacts perceptions of hope for the relationship ($M_{pre} = 8.93, M_{post} = 9.2, M_{follow-up} = 8.91$).

Hypothesis 2

Do both men and women perceive women as more skilled in communicating before participation in the course? Paired-samples *t*-tests (self vs. other) at pretest for men and women were conducted. Both men, $t(144) = -3.43, p < .001, M = -0.52$ and women, $t(146) = 3.74, p < .001, M = 0.52$ rated women as better communicators before taking the course. These findings are consistent with the previous literature supporting the expectation that women are assumed to be better communicators. As shown in the detailed analyses for hypothesis 1a, the perception of women's higher skill levels held for the other times these rating were obtained as well.

Hypothesis 3

It was anticipated that men and women who report balanced family types will report higher average levels of trait Hope than do men and women who report unbalanced family types. Independent sample *t*-tests for men and for women showed no

significant differences. There was no difference in reported trait Hope scores between men with balanced family types and men with unbalanced family types, $t(14.7) = -.063$, $p = .951$, two-tailed, $M_{balanced} = 3.24$, $M_{unbalanced} = 3.23$, with adjustments for heteroscedasticity. Similarly, there was no difference in trait Hope between women who reported balanced and unbalanced family types, $t(34) = .384$, $p = .704$, two-tailed, $M_{balanced} = 3.01$, $M_{unbalanced} = 3.06$, heteroscedasticity assumed.

Hypothesis 4

Men and women's trait Hope will be positively related to their hope for the relationship before participation in the course. Correlations of trait Hope and hope for the relationship for each gender were calculated for hypothesis 4. Men's report of trait Hope and hope for the relationship are not correlated, $r(32) = .103$, $p = .281$, one-tailed. Similarly, women's ratings of their own trait Hope and hope for the relationship are not correlated, $r(31) = -.070$, $p = .350$, one-tailed. These results suggest that before taking the BHR course, both men's and women's trait Hope is independent of their hope for the relationship, disconfirming the hypothesis. There was a ceiling effect visible in the graphs but the skewness of measures was not significantly different from zero. It is therefore unlikely that the lack of correlation is due to restriction of range.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study is designed primarily to evaluate the *Building Healthy Relationships* (BHR) course, adapted from Miller and colleagues' (1992) CCP. There is an abundance of literature on the general topic of marital communication and yet there are many unanswered questions, some of which this study addresses. This study provides an opportunity to test some of the longstanding stereotypes and assumptions, and to move forward with the existing findings, adding to what is already known about communication, gender, hope, and family types.

Archival data from the BHR program is supplemented with follow-up ratings and measures of hope and family type. This combination of process indicators and complementary follow-up information supports the workshop emphasis on hope in marital enrichment. This data also suggests important connections between skills and relationship process, building a bridge between skills acquisition and Gottman's (see Gottman & Levenson, 1999) process-oriented approach.

Hypotheses and Related Post Hoc Analyses

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1a. This hypothesis examines the impact of the BHR course on perceptions of one's own and one's partner's communication skills. Results indicate that there is a substantial improvement overall in the perceptions of one's own communication skills and one's partner's communication skills after taking the BHR course. In addition, the results show a lack of long-term effectiveness of the course in maintaining those acquired skills. So, in a short and concentrated period of time, skills can be learned effectively, but in the months following, course participants lose those

skills. Because this study uses self-reports of their perceptions, it cannot be decided whether the participants actually lose their acquired communication skills or if they simply perceive that loss. Another possible explanation is that the acquired skills are still known but not being practiced. Heidegger and Krell (1993) address this differentiation by defining two separate types of knowing, one referring to retained knowledge, and the second referring to the availability or use of that knowledge.

Further, the increase in perceived skills can be interpreted in the context of the level of commitment for this sample. It is likely that course participants are, on average, highly motivated and committed in their relationship and that for the most part, our sample can be considered as non-clinical. As Huston and colleagues (2001) outline, there are several models of commitment, all of which can shed light on this result in terms of relationship patterns over time.

Participants rate their partners as decreasing more at follow-up than they themselves did. In other words, participants view their partners as losing more ability to communicate skillfully than self. The fundamental attribution error could play a role in this finding by influencing participants to rate their own actions as more dependent on the situation, and their partner's actions to intention. In this case the attribution error can be more specifically termed as an actor-observer bias (Sabini, Siepmann, & Stein, 2001).

Post hoc analyses strengthened the above claims. Gender factors do not appear to support a gender-associated bias, ruling out one alternative explanation for the larger improvement for men and the larger drop in ratings of partner skills. Also, the only notable difference between partners on the main variables in this study is for hope for the relationship after taking the course, and for adaptability. Consequently, gender and status

are not adequate explanations for differences between men and women on their perceived hope for the relationship after taking the BHR course.

As a way of bridging the gap between the results of hypotheses 1a and 1b, it is a plausible conclusion that one's perception of hope for their relationship is influenced by the initial perceived improvement in their own and their partner's skills, regardless of their perceived decrease of those skills at follow-up. In other words, the initial acquisition of communication skills may contribute to their hope for the relationship.

Hypothesis 1b. This hypothesis addresses the impact of the BHR course on perceptions of hope for the relationship. The results indicate that participation in BHR course positively impacted individuals' perceptions of hope for their relationship. It also suggests that this positive impact is not effectively maintained at follow-up. As mentioned earlier, both perceptions of skills and hope for the relationship increase after taking the course but subsequently decrease at follow-up. As an initial observation of these two variables, there appears to be support for the association between skills acquisition and increasing hope for the relationship.

The ceiling effect reported is not surprising for two reasons. First, ceiling effects are a common problem in family enrichment literature. Second, it confirms that the BHR course reached its target group because it is not designed as therapy, but rather, as an opportunity for hopeful couples seeking relationship improvement and education, and to increase the couples' openness to seek further help if needed. The assumption is that course couples have lower hope than average but higher hope than those that go for therapy.

A small but adequate sample of course participants answered the three single-item questions at follow-up, first on the phone and a second time by mail-out within two weeks of that follow-up phone call. It provides evidence of strong test-retest reliability on all three questions. This allows the researchers to assume an increased reliability that these particular ratings were relatively stable over a short period of time. Further, it also suggests that there is some consistency of perceptions of hope for the relationship.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis tests the assumption that men and women perceive women as better communicators. The assumptions that both men and women perceive women as better communicators are confirmed by the results of this study. This is not a surprising result considering local cultural views and their impact on family roles. In addition, literature exploring gender differences in communication supports the basis of this assumption. For example, research shows differences in genders for communication styles, content, and intentions of communication, and that women are more empathic and accurate when communicating (Tannen, 1982). This result may have effected the expectations of the course participants in terms of the possibility of improvement in men's ability to communicate.

As discussed with regard to hypothesis 1, the participants' perceived men as improving more than women in terms of communication skills. Two of the possible explanations include that the result is due to the style of the course being geared more toward the men's style of learning than the women's, and because there is more room for the men to improve.

Hypothesis 3

The relationship between family types and trait Hope was explored. Trait Hope does not appear to be related to family types as being balanced or unbalanced. Although this study does not directly measure communication with the FACES measure or the Trait Hope Scale, the researcher's initial assumption is that balanced families and those with higher levels of trait Hope, would communicate better than unbalanced family types and those with lower levels of trait Hope. This assumption is based on the third dimension of FACES being labeled as communication, and the notion that the waypower component of trait Hope is connected to better problem-solving abilities. It appears that this assumption is not empirically grounded enough to hold true in the results of this study, either because it is not the case, or because the measures used are not a valid way of tapping into this connection.

In addition, locally defined norms were important to establish for the Adaptability subscale because of the observed difference between this sample and that of the Minnesota norms (Olson et al., 1985). Given cultural differences, whether due to time or cohort, among other possible factors, balanced and unbalanced categories appear to be oversimplifications of functional versus dysfunctional. Updated and culturally appropriate norms would have assisted in stronger claims based on the results of this study. In other words, it is not known what balanced and unbalanced means for this sample because the 1983 Minnesota norms do not appear to be accurately representative and because there is uncertainty about today's constitution of functional and dysfunctional.

As post hoc analyses indicate, there is no apparent connection between family types and hope for the relationship. This finding is interesting because one might expect there to be more hope for the relationship if there is balanced cohesion and adaptability experienced by the couple. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that even unbalanced families become accustomed to how their relationships function and that is enough to be hopeful that the relationship will last.

Upon further analysis, results show a significant difference between men and women's waypower scores. It indicates that within couples, the male partners have more ability to achieve their goals than their female counterparts. While there is no notable difference between the genders on willpower, the difference between men and women's overall trait Hope is significant. There are several reasons for these results, one being that the sample size is small. Another possible conclusion is that our culture still provides more opportunities for men to succeed at their personal goals. It could also be explained by gender differences supported in the literature around communication, problem-solving, and logical thinking (Gray, 1992; Tannen, 1982).

Hypothesis 4

Lastly, the relationship between trait Hope and hope for relationship was explored. There is no correlation found between trait Hope and hope for relationship. There are a few important ideas to consider in regards to this finding. First, there is a ceiling effect for ratings of hope for the relationship and a more even distribution for trait Hope. The strong ceiling effect does not appear to simply be a response bias because hope for a specific domain (in this case, hope for the relationship), transcends trait Hope. Snyder and colleagues (1996) clearly support the independence of domain Hope from

trait Hope, providing a logical context for this finding. Trait Hope is theoretically and empirically stable over time whereas domain Hope (hope for the relationship) varies more depending on the present situation. This is a promising distinction to make because it suggests that those with lower trait Hope can still have high hope for their relationship. In other words, hope for the relationship can be targeted therapeutically without requiring the clients to have high trait Hope (a construct that is presumably more difficult to change).

As discussed earlier, this ceiling effect further supports the success of the BHR course reaching its intended target group because it is meant for hopeful couples wanting to improve their relationship, not to repair extensive damage as couples might do in therapy. Third, there is an issue of construct validity because the ratings of hope for the relationship in this study, are not measured within the same theoretical framework as Snyder's Hope Scale. It appears that any or all of these are possible reasons for why the results indicate no relationship between these two variables.

Theoretical Implications

Systems Theory

The results that indicate the increase of communication skills after taking the BHR course support that the course is grounded appropriately in Systems theory. One concept of Systems theory is the operational system as people's way of communicating in a relationship. Another concept reflected in the course is triangulation. The course effectively encourages and teaches couples to resolve conflicts within the dyad that the conflict occurs without pulling in a third party to delay the resolution. Differentiation is also encouraged in the course by educating participants how to distinguish thoughts from

feelings and understand each person's right to their own opinions and beliefs. Because the course clearly increases couples' ability to communicate with one another and resolve conflict effectively, all the Systems principals mentioned above are supported.

Furthermore, Systems theory expects family roles to be affected by gender, a concept known as a societal emotional process. This too is supported by the results of this study, that indicates that there are gender differences in the waypower component of trait Hope, although it does not likely provide a complete explanation for this difference. There is also supportive evidence for differences in men and women in communication, making it plausible that their family roles are somewhat defined by their gender-related strengths.

There is one noticeable inconsistency between the theoretical basis of the BHR course and its results in the lack of long-terms effects. Systems theory supports the education of couples in analyzing their own problems of relating and to be able to move forward and change. The results of follow-up ratings indicate that couples lose these skills after a short time. Upon further examination, however, there is evidence that this overall pattern of losing communication skills is not accurately representative. In fact, a large percentage of participants even show improvement at follow-up from their ratings directly after taking the course. This was not initially detected because of the number of participants who reported skills decrease at follow-up. This finding reveals that there are a number of participants that either maintain their communication skills acquired at the course, or keep improving.

Hope Theory

Theoretically, high trait Hope relies on both motivation and ability to achieve goals. It appears that these attributes are not found any more in balanced (able to adapt and still cohesive) family types than in unbalanced family types. So, trait Hope appears to exist independently of the way the family functions. It could be that external factors such as family dynamics, does not relate to trait Hope, further supporting Snyder's understanding of Hope as being more of an internal appraisal than something externally influenced.

This study supports the connection between hope and enrichment. This combination is relatively new in terms of being grounded theoretically and offered in a way that is empirically supported. Only one other relationship enrichment approach has been studied with regard to hope (Worthington et al., 1997). This study adds to the foundation for the need for further research in this area. As Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) claim, building hope within the context of couple relationships is crucial. The recent increased use of Snyder's Hope-focused strategies further attests to the promotion of enrichment through hope (Worthington et al.).

Circumplex Model

The Circumplex model assumes that balanced couples would have better communication. Even though this theory suggests that there is a relationship between the two, couples' ability to communicate is not directly measured by FACES. As discussed previously, the hypothesis 3 results indicate the independence of family types from trait Hope. The initial assumption of the researchers was that good communication would be present in those with high Hope and those with balanced family types. Because neither is

confirmed in this study, limited claims can be made in the context of the Circumplex model. Because family types are not a primary focus of this study, it is suffice to say that more research is needed to investigate the role of family types in hopeful couples.

Gottman Debate

The results suggest that communication skills acquisition is related to an increase in hope for the relationship. Within the context of the Gottman debate (Groom, 2001), (i.e., skill building vs. process oriented approaches to strengthening couple relationships) is not fully supported by this finding. In other words, it appears that some of the concepts that Gottman now advocates for can be achieved through the acquisition of communication skills, even if the skills themselves are not maintained. This furthers the argument that Gottman may be using different terms and angles on the same concepts or goals that skill-building courses are founded upon. Simply put, skills acquisition may serve as a mediating factor of hope for the relationship. In addition to secondary effects, common skill building concepts are incorporated into Gottman's (see Gottman & Silver, 1999) current approach to helping couples. For instance, process of "repair" and "finding a common ground" can be paired with conflict resolution, "soft start-ups" can be compared with active listening, and "personal goals" and "shared meaning" can be translated into nurturing awareness and Hope.

Gottman (see Gottman & Silver, 1999) himself seems to have softened his claim by stating that there is nothing wrong with skill building, but it remains to be a plan of action that is too difficult for couples to initiate in an emotionally charged situation. This study provides some support for Gottman's softer approach to the debate, although still differs in the sense that other relationship qualities, such as hope, can be achieved

through the acquisition of skills. Gottman's (see Gottman & Silver) latest perspective of the inadequacy of skill based interventions rests on the assumption that his approach to resolving conflicts is somehow easier for couples to initiate. While communication skills by themselves may not be the answer to a successful marriage, Gottman's approach may still not complete the picture. If described as a pendulum, approaches have swung fully in each direction, making claims that skill building, on one extreme, and Gottman's process-oriented approach, on the other, is the answer. The literature appears to be in a current state of finding the middle ground, accepting the merits and integration of both approaches rather than viewing them as in opposition.

Implications for Future Research

There are implications of this study that can be identified as important topics for future research. One such topic could look at perceptions of communication skills in the three sections of the course (i.e., listening, speaking, and conflict resolution). Specifically, empirically validated instruments could be implemented to measure participants' perspectives of their own and their partners' communication skills, rather than relying on a single item rating. In addition, it might be important to conduct research further exploring specific components of communication, as spelled out by the three sections of the BHR course. An observational format of communication skills assessment could enhance our understanding of communication skills acquisition by compensating for limitations of self-reported measures utilized in this study. It could also be interesting to examine follow-up in terms of testing participants' ability to recall the skills they learned at the course rather than looking at their perceptions. In other words,

using more objective measures at follow-up might give us a more adequate picture of the maintenance of communication skills.

Because the results of this study expose a clear distinction between participants' ratings of their hope for the relationship and their trait Hope, it would be valuable to further explore this distinction by testing the relationship between domain and trait Hope within the context of Snyder's Hope theory. Participants' understanding of the term hope when rating their hope for the relationship, may not have been compatible with Snyder's assessment of Hope via the Hope scale. It would be valuable to see if the distinctions found in this study remain if both the domain and trait Hope are grounded in the same theory. In other words, are domain and trait Hope really that different when measured by Snyder's scales, or is there a third factor, resulting in the distinction between perceptions of hope for the relationship and one's trait Hope?

The results of this study will provide direction to the BHR Board as they develop refresher or maintenance courses. It would be interesting to find out whether or not these courses will positively impact the participants' perceptions of communication skills at follow-up as compared to participants who did not enroll for a refresher course. In general, there is a lack of understanding of what happens between the time of acquiring the skills and the time of follow-up. All we know is that participants' perceptions of their own skills and their partners' skills decrease significantly over time despite the successful acquisition of those skills at the time of the course. In the same vein, it would be useful to detect the differences between those participants that maintain or improve their skills during the following months after the course, and those that report a decrease in their acquired skills.

The follow-up segment of this study included a variety of follow-up times but treated them as one given the nature of the data. In the future, it would be helpful to know what the impact of time is on the perceived loss of communication skills. Researchers could examine the patterns of perceived skills more closely after taking the BHR course. At this point, it is known that there is a perceived decrease in skills, but the rate of decrease, as well as when the decrease begins to occur, is not known.

In the big picture, the place of hope in the field of family life education, and more specifically in relationship enrichment, is in need of further investigation. In terms of the positive impact of communication skill building on various aspects of couple relationship, the amount of research is substantially more than in the area of hope, but nevertheless requires more. There are still a number of questions that have yet to be answered before the debate between Gottman and communication skill providers will end.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Although both genders perceive successful acquisition of the communication skills taught at the BRH course, perhaps these skills would be maintained longer if the course was taught differently to each gender. The literature suggests there is a difference in the intentions of genders' communication. For instance, the course could emphasize that men need to understand the benefits and merits of communicating more and/or differently with their spouse. Likewise, both women and men may underestimate males' ability to communicate because they communicate for different reasons, as spelled out by Tannen's (1982) research. Communicating more with their spouse might seem

useless to men because it does not appear to directly meet their needs, risking the assumption that it would not benefit their partners either.

Also, the larger perceived improvement for men in terms of communication skills may further the appeal for participation in the BHR course. Although it is not known who of the couple initiated the attendance of this course, the registration list indicates that the majority of registrants were female. Therefore, this course may attract women who are hoping for improvements of their partner's skills. Likewise, this course may attract men because it is successful in addressing the male's stereotypical way of communicating. It is not surprising that the educational workshop is well attended by men because it fits their typical learning style (Gray, 1992).

There is an obvious perceived loss of communication skills over time after taking the BHR course. One possible remedy for this decrease would be to offer a refresher course that focuses on the basics of listening, speaking, and conflict resolution skills. Another suggestion would be to balance the skills-building approach with a course based on Gottman's ideas because many of them are compatible theoretically. Because the results indicate that, for many couples, their perceived loss of skills occurs within a few months after taking the course, refresher courses should be offered soon after the initial BHR workshop.

There are a number of clinical recommendations that can be made based on the results of this study. Primarily, the goal of this study is to use the perceptions of the BHR course participants to enhance the course for future participants. Social accountability is an ongoing process. Suggestions made should be followed up with further research.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Methodologically, the time-series design seems pragmatically most appropriate for the questions being asked and the nature of archival data. Unfortunately, pragmatics do not allow for a true experimental research design, limiting control over some threats of internal validity, such as other possible variables between posttest and follow-up observations. However, given that this is applied field research, external validity is just as important to consider, if not more (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992). Of the remaining choices of research designs, an interrupted time-series design was selected as the most appropriate. Although there are a number of strengths to this method, the inability to obtain more than one observation before the intervention does not allow the researchers to detect maturational differences. A factorial design was used in this study, increasing its efficiency and obtained information. This design gives the researcher more opportunities to reduce unexplained variances, such as gender.

As is common to program evaluation research, there is an ambiguity of results due to a wide range of differing numbers of respondents. Consequently, there is varied confidence in the results. Some questions in this study relied on as few as 35 subjects when separated for gender, while others included over 300 participants. This is a practical limitation because of the defined population of BHR course participants and the number of participants that were contactable at follow-up. Having said that, the majority of contacted participants were willing to take part in this study, and an attempt was made to contact all course participants since its first offering, in February of 1999.

Also common to program research, there is a ceiling effect for hope for the relationship, limiting the latitude of claims based on results of trait Hope and hope for the relationship comparisons. Again, because marital enrichment courses are designed for relatively hopeful couples, this ceiling effect is somewhat expected. While subjects were not randomly selected to participate in the BHR course, they voluntarily registered, implying that the selection bias is not as much of a weakness as it would have been if had been chosen by the course providers. The remaining concern is that course participants comprised of actively help-seeking couples. The courses are offered at local college campuses, which are likely only to reach a particular population, presumably open to being educated. In addition, this sample is not homogeneous, however, this allows for greater generalizability. Although one might be concerned about participants' apprehension of being evaluated, measures were taken to promote confidentiality and anonymity in order to minimize the chances of this occurring.

A confound that was not able to be controlled for, was the differences in instructors and facilitators. While the course manual is detailed to improve consistency in the deliverance of the workshop, those instructing the course added their own influence. Groups of couples with different instructors were not compared in terms of their self-reported ratings.

There are several measures used in this study. The only measures of perceived communication skills and hope for the relationship are single item ratings, limiting their validity. In addition, self-report measures rather than observational methods are used, limiting our understanding of communication skills, hope, and family types, to perceptions. As a result, the measures used are more subjective than if observational

measured had been implemented. Claims about the actual level of communication skills used and the level of hope for the relationship could not be made based on such subjective, single-rating, responses.

On the other hand, this limitation allows for other methodological strengths. For example, self-report measures allow the researchers to tap into the participants' perceptions, thereby accessing something that more objective observations cannot. Because couples are the ones to decide the fate of their relationship, it seems that their perceptions of how the relationship functions, and the hope for their relationship is important to obtain when trying to improve the quality of couple relationships. In addition, it allows for a more natural assessment of communication skills and hope for the relationship because intrusive measures and/or artificial environments are not used. This further supports the proper conduct of field research, minimizing the interruption of the subjects.

Conclusion

Couples participating in a two-day, skill-based, communication training workshop (the Building Healthy Relationships course), show strong initial improvement in perceptions of their own ability, as well as their partner's ability to communicate. The results show that both genders thought men improve more than women during the workshop, although both genders think that women begin with stronger skills. The perception of the ability to communicate is linked to the couples' hope for the relationship. Unfortunately, and as expected, there is a distinct decline in perceptions of one's own skills, one's partner's skills, and one's hope for the relationship at follow-up.

This suggests the importance of refresher courses, the need for couples to have “booster” sessions, or a commitment to further training to maintain gains.

The hypothesis that family type would be related to the trait of Hope is not supported. As well, the hopeful nature of individual subjects, as a personality trait prior to taking the couples course, does not correspond to their hope or lack of hope for the relationship. This suggests that programs of this kind can be beneficial for couples coming with varying levels of Hope and from a variety of family types.

Some family relation educators emphasize skill building as the key to better family functioning. In contrast, John Gottman, a leading marital interaction researcher has challenged the value of communication skill building. It appears that neither perspective is supported as solitary truth by the evidence of this study. The results support that value of educating couples in communication skills, but as one component of healthy family functioning. There may be more convergence between Gottman’s insights and other theorists than their semantics allow.

As a tool to bridge scientific evidence and clinical practice, this field study adds to the existing program evaluation literature by exploring longstanding assumptions related to gender and communication, and the uncharted territory of hope within relationship enrichment.

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APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF THE BHR COURSE

The *Building Healthy Relationships* (BHR) Course was adapted by Lees, Groenhof, and Klassen (1999) from Miller and colleagues' *Couple Communication Program* (CCP) (1992). BHR is provided by a Board of representatives from a variety of community resources and educational institutions including a transition society, the University College of the Fraser Valley, Trinity Western University, the Ministry for Children and Family Development, local churches, life skills providers, and private therapists.

The BHR is two hours shorter than the CCP and is offered in two days rather than in multiple sessions with days in between. BHR is simplified in its content and offers a slightly different format in terms of practice opportunities. The CCP has each couple practice their newly learned skills in front of the larger group, whereas the BHR course has sets of couples practice in private with their facilitator. This is intended to save time, keep the couples focused, and give couples the opportunity to witness the process of their partnering couple without feeling overwhelmed by several observers.

The training is divided into three sections: short lectures, role-playing, and skill practicing. The section topics, in order, include: listening, speaking, and conflict resolution skills. Two trained instructors teach the skills for each section and model each of the three skills to the entire group. After each section, sets of two couples and their facilitator move to a secluded setting to practice the skills taught in the previous lecture. The facilitator attempts to keep the couple focused on the skills and the communication process. After the first couple has practiced their skills for 15 minutes, they observe the

other couple practicing those same skills. Couples then return to the larger forum for the next instructional section.

The BHR is a psycho educational course designed to enhance communication and conflict resolution skills within the couple relationship. It is not group therapy and couples are asked to choose seemingly simple or surface issues to use during the practice sections of the training. In other words, the focus is on the skills acquisition rather than the content of the issues brought up. Review or refresher courses are not yet available, but couples are able to register for the course more than once.

Each 10-hour course takes place on a weekend at a college campus in the Fraser Valley or Upper Fraser Valley region. The standard cost is \$30.00 per couple. A maximum of 10 couples can register per group.

APPENDIX B: PERSONAL CONSENT**Building Healthy Relationships through Couples Communication Skills**

Dr. Marvin McDonald (604) 888-7511
Karen Westerop (604) 807-6034

In order to learn more about how couples communicate with one another, we are contacting couples who participated, or will participate, in the Building Healthy Relationships course. This information gathered from this study will be used to improve the Building Healthy Relationships course and to help us understand what these courses mean to couples.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will fill our several questionnaires mailed to your home. It will take about 20-30 minutes to complete to questionnaires. To ensure confidentiality your names will not be used and all questionnaires will be kept in a secure location. When this study is over only anonymous forms of responses will be retained for future program planning and research.

To thank you for your time, we would like to enter your name in a draw for a gift certificate of \$30.00 for a restaurant of your choice. Please provide your telephone number below if you are willing to enter the draw so that we can notify you if you win.

You are free to not participate in this study or to withdraw from this study at any time without consequence.

**I have read and understand the description of the
study and I willingly consent to participation in this study.**

Signature

I do not consent to participate in this study.

Signature

APPENDIX C: BHR BOARD CONSENT

Building Healthy Relationships through Couples Communication Skills

Dr. Marvin McDonald (604) 888-7511

Karen Westerop (604) 807-6034

Landra Mason (604) 807-8092

These studies take a look at factors such as gender, hope, family types, and communication styles, which may contribute to health communication within the couple relationship. With your help, we are hoping to find out how effective the Building Healthy Relationships course is in enhancing communication skills and hope for the relationship. From the results, we hope to identify what is working and make recommendations for possible course changes and for creating a follow-up course.

In the first study, participants will be asked to take approximately 20-30 minutes to answer questions about relationships, family, hope, gender, and communication. These questions can be answered over the phone or by mail, both being confidential. The second study involves the use of focus groups and couple interviews, where couples are asked to engage in a face-to-face interview. Couples may choose to participate in one study without participating in the other. Only the researchers and the course's governing board members will have access to the data collected for these studies.

Couples that choose to participate in the first study will be entered into a draw for 2 chances to win a \$30.00 gift certificate to a restaurant of their choice. One book per couple will be given to those who participate in the second study. As a board, if you choose not to participate, or withdraw at any time, we will understand and there will be no consequence.

The BHR Board has read and understands the description of the studies and is willing to consent to participation in both these studies.

Signature

We do not consent to participate in these studies.

Signature

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please assist us by taking a few minutes to complete the following:

Name _____

Partner's name _____

Date _____

- Male
 Female Age _____

How long have you and your partner been together as a couple? _____

Are you and your partner presently:

- Single
 Dating
 Engaged
 Married
 Separated/Divorced
 Common-law

For how long? _____
Number of children _____

Education level completed:

- High School
 Technical School/Diploma/Associate Degree
 Bachelor's Degree
 Graduate Degree (MA; Ph.D)

Ethnicity:

- First Nations descent
 Asian descent
 African decent
 European descent
 Other _____

Have you taken a course like this before? Yes/No

Have you been in counseling for this relationship? Yes/No

APPENDIX E: PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE I

**Building Healthy Relationships:
A Couples Communication Course
PREVALUATION and FOLLOW-UP**

The following questions are intended to help us gain a better understanding of how best to help couples like yourself enhance your relationship through learning better communication skills. Please note that the answers you provide will be kept confidential.

Optional

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not able to communicate at all” and 10 being “highly effective in communication,” how would you rate ***your*** current communication abilities with your partner?

On the same scale, how would you rate your partner’s abilities?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “No hope whatsoever” and 10 being “Tremendous hope,” how much hope do you currently have for your relationship?

Course	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Quality of the course content					
Suitability of text and/or printed materials					
Social climate of class					
General quality of classroom facilities					
Overall level of satisfaction with course					

Course	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Knowledge in subject area					
Ability to present information effectively					
Planning and organization of materials					
Interaction with class					
Overall satisfaction with instructor's ability					

Now that you have finished the course, where would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not able to communicate at all” and 10 being “highly effective in communication,” in relation to your communication abilities with your partner?

On the same scale, how would you rate your partner’s abilities now? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “No hope whatsoever” and 10 being “Tremendous hope,” how much hope do you have for your relationship, having learned some communication and conflict resolution skills?

← → It is common for people to overestimate (or sometimes underestimate) their ability to communicate prior to taking such a course as this one. Please look at your pre-evaluation form and make any necessary adjustments to the original numbers you put in response to the first two rating questions.

← → In order to make this course most beneficial both short term and long term, we would like to do a *brief* follow-up phone call in approximately 6 months and again one year from now to determine the effectiveness of the skills you have learned this weekend. Questions will be the same as the above 3 rating scale questions. Please circle the appropriate response:

Yes, I am willing to receive a follow-up phone call.

No, I do not wish to be phoned.

APPENDIX F: PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE II

**Building Healthy Relationships:
A Couples Communication Course
POSTEVALUATION**

This questionnaire gives you the opportunity to express your opinions on the quality of the course and the effectiveness of the instructors and facilitators.

Your constructive comments and criticisms will be valuable to us in our program planning and to our instructors when they evaluate their own course materials and teaching methods.

Optional

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

What is your current marital status?

Dating/Married/Engaged/Common Law

What is the length of your relationship? _____

How did you find out about this course? _____

Assume that on your way home from this workshop you meet friends who asked you where you were. You tell them about what you did and they ask what it was about and what you did. What would you say?

If you were the type to complain, what would you say should be changed about the workshop?

What was most helpful about the workshop?

On a scale of 1 - 10, how would you rate the use of your time? _____

1	3	5	7	10
Write off	OK, but rather not	Useful	Quite worthwhile	Great

How likely is it that you would attend future courses if they were offered?
 (Circle one) Definitely Very likely Likely Not likely Not at all

What topics or areas would you be interested in learning more about if they were offered in a weekend course format such as this course?

Course	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Quality of the course content					
Suitability of text and/or printed materials					
Social climate of class					
General quality of classroom facilities					
Overall level of satisfaction with course					

Instructor/facilitator	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Knowledge in subject area					
Ability to present information effectively					
Planning and organization of materials					
Interaction with class					
Overall satisfaction with instructor's ability					

Now that you have finished the course, where would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not able to communicate at all” and 10 being “highly effective in communication,” in relation to your communication abilities with your partner?

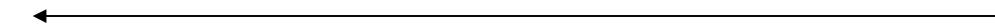
On the same scale, how would you rate your partner’s abilities now?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “No hope whatsoever” and 10 being “Tremendous hope,” how much hope do you have for your relationship, having learned some communication and conflict resolution skills?

← →

It is common for people to overestimate (or sometimes underestimate) their ability to communicate prior to taking such a course as this one. Please look at

your pre-evaluation form and make any necessary adjustments to the original numbers you put in response to the first two rating questions.



In order to make this course most beneficial both short term and long term, we would like to do a *brief* follow-up phone call in approximately 6 months and again one year from now to determine the effectiveness of the skills you have learned this weekend. Questions will be the same as the above 3 rating scale questions. Please circle the appropriate response:

Yes, I am willing to receive a follow-up phone call.

No, I do not wish to be phoned.

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Signature _____

APPENDIX G: HOPE SCALES

Personal Goals

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes you and put that number in the blank provided.

1 = Definitely false 2 = Mostly false 3 = Mostly true 4 = Definitely true

- 1. I energetically pursue my goals.
- 2. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- 3. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
- 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
- 5. I've been pretty successful in life.
- 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
- 7. I meet the goals that I set for myself.
- 8. Even what others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.

Partner's Goals

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes the person whom you are (in relationship) with, and put that number in the blank provided. Don't try to think about how the person would respond to each item, but rather make your judgment about what you perceive about the person based on your observations.

1 = Definitely false 2 = Mostly false 3 = Mostly true 4 = Definitely true

- 1. This person energetically pursues personal goals.
- 2. This person can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- 3. Past experiences have prepared this person well for the future.
- 4. This person believes that there are lots of ways around any problem.
- 5. This person has been pretty successful in life.
- 6. This person can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important.
- 7. This person meets personal goals.
- 8. Even when others get discouraged, this person has no doubts about finding a way to solve the problem.

APPENDIX H: FACES III MEASURE

FACES III: Couple Version**David H. Olson, Joyce Portner, and Yoav Lavee**

1 ALMOST NEVER	2 ONCE IN A WHILE	3 SOMETIMES	4 FREQUENTLY	5 ALMOST ALWAYS
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Describe your family now:

- 1. We ask each other for help.
- 2. When problems arise, we compromise.
- 3. We approve of each other's friends.
- 4. We are flexible in how we handle our differences.
- 5. We like to do things with each other.
- 6. Different persons act as leaders in our marriage.
- 7. We feel closer to each other than to people outside our family.
- 8. We change our way of handling tasks.
- 9. We like to spend free time with each other.
- 10. We try new ways of dealing with problems.
- 11. We feel very close to each other.
- 12. We jointly make decisions in our marriage.
- 13. We share hobbies and interests together.
- 14. Rules change in our marriage.
- 15. We can easily think of things to do together as a couple.
- 16. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.
- 17. We consult each other on our decisions.
- 18. It is hard to identify who the leader is in our marriage.
- 19. Togetherness is a top priority.
- 20. It is hard to tell who does which household chores.

Scoring Key: Odd items are summed for Cohesion; Even items are summed for Adaptability. The Total score is the sum of all items.

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FACES III: Couple Ideal Version**David H. Olson, Joyce Portner, and Yoav Lavee**

1 ALMOST NEVER	2 ONCE IN A WHILE	3 SOMETIMES	4 FREQUENTLY	5 ALMOST ALWAYS
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Ideally, how would you like your family to be:

- 21. We would ask each other for help.
- 22. When problems arise, I wish we would compromise.
- 23. We would approve of each other's friends.
- 24. We would be flexible in how we handle our differences.
- 25. We would like to do things with each other.
- 26. Different persons would act as leaders in our marriage.
- 27. We would feel closer to each other than to people outside our family.
- 28. We would change our ways of dealing with problems.
- 29. We would like to spend free time with each other.
- 30. We would jointly make decisions in our marriage.
- 31. We would share hobbies and interests together.
- 32. Rules would change in our marriage.
- 33. We could easily think of things to do together as a couple.
- 34. We would shift household responsibilities from person to person.
- 35. We would consult each other on our decisions.
- 36. We would know who the leader is in our marriage.
- 37. Togetherness would be top priority.
- 38. We could tell who does which household chores.

Scoring Key: Odd items are summed for Ideal Cohesion; Even items are summed for Ideal Adaptability. The Total Ideal score is the sum of all items.

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