



January 2014

Relational Maintenance Behaviors, Conflict Resolution Strategies, And Their Relation To Loneliness

Courtney O'brien

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RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS, CONFLICT RESOLUTION
STRATEGIES, AND THEIR RELATION TO LONELINESS.

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Manitoba, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

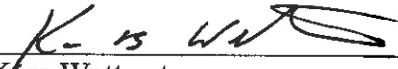
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Master of Arts

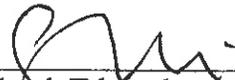
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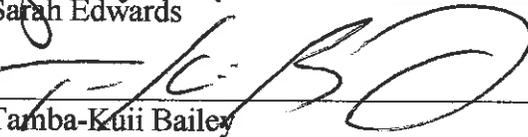
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Kara Wettersten

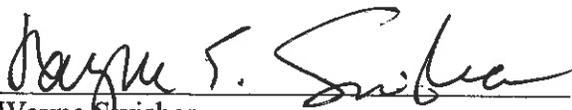


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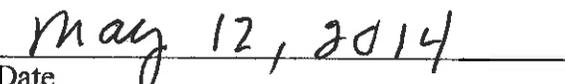


Tamba-Kuii Bailey

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Wayne Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



Date

PERMISSION

Title Relational Maintenance Behaviors, Conflict Resolution Strategies, and
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Department Counseling Psychology

Degree Masters of Arts

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Courtney R. O'Brien
April 28, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Loneliness.....	3
Relational Maintenance Behaviors.....	8
Ineffective Arguing.....	18
Summary.....	28
Purpose.....	30
II. METHODS.....	31
Participants.....	31
Measures.....	34
Demographics Form.....	34
Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure.....	34
Friendship Maintenance Behaviors.....	35
UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3).....	36
Ineffective Arguing Inventory.....	36

	Procedure	37
III.	RESULTS	39
	Preliminary Analysis.....	40
	Hypothesis 1	42
	Hypothesis 2	43
IV.	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	45
	Implications	50
	Clinical Implications.....	51
	Research Implications.....	53
	Limitations	56
	Conclusions.....	57
	REFERENCES	59

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1a. Qualitative Participant Demographics	32
1b. Quantitative Participant Demographics	34
2. Sample Size, Coefficient Alphas, Means, and Standard Deviations for All Scales by Romantic Partner Group (RPG) and Friendship Group (FG)	39
3. Correlations between Levels of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, Loneliness, and Ineffective Arguing.....	41
4. Correlations between Levels of Friendship Maintenance Behaviors, Loneliness, and Ineffective Arguing.....	42
5. Multiple Regression for Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, Ineffective Arguing, and Loneliness (N = 107).....	43
6. Multiple Regression for Friendship Maintenance Behaviors, Ineffective Arguing, and Loneliness (N = 75)	44

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank several individuals for their guidance and support that provided throughout my academic studies. I would like to thank Dr. Kara Wettersten, my Academic Advisor and Chair of my thesis committee. I would like to thank her for all her hard work and feedback that helped me complete my studies. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Sarah Edwards and Dr. Tamba-Kuii Bailey for their patience and guidance throughout the completion of my thesis.

I would also like to thank all my friends and family, especially my parents Angie and Michael O'Brien, who were tremendously supportive and helpful, not only throughout my academic studies, but also in the completion of this thesis. A special thanks to Darren Allers for all his patience and support throughout this whole process. And I final thanks to Joel Hamm and Andrea Pelletier for their hard work helping me find voluntary participants so I could complete my thesis.

To my mom Angie and my dad Michael.
The two best parents in the universe! If it were not for you two, I would not have
accomplished my academic goals!

ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between levels of ineffective arguing and loneliness above and beyond levels of relational maintenance behaviors in 182 male and female adults. Correlations did not support a large inverse relationship between loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors for both Romantic Partner Group (RPG) and Friendship Group (FG). This study has shown that there was a moderate relationship between levels of loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors for both groups. As hypothesized, but only for the RPG, regression analyses revealed that ineffective arguing did predict experiences of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors only, whereas this was not supported for the FG. No differences were found between males and females in levels of loneliness and levels of ineffective arguing. Significant differences were found in use of maintenance behaviors between males and females in the FG but not the RPG, with females using more friendship maintenance behaviors than males.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are generally engaged in some sort of relationship with others, may it be an acquaintanceship, a friendship, or a romantic relationships. The need to belong or to have interpersonal relationships is just as important as the fundamental human needs of food and shelter (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to the belongingness hypothesis, human beings have a universal need to engage in and maintain healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

It can be assumed that without healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships, one may experience loneliness. Loneliness can emerge itself when “belongingness needs are being insufficiently met” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The experience of loneliness can be described as a worldwide phenomenon and is prevalent among the general population (Henson, Dybvig-Pawelko, & Canary, 2004). Hensen and colleagues reported that the experience of loneliness is associated with social and personal issues and it can negatively influence interpersonal relationships with others. Loneliness has been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction (Flora & Segrin, 2000), communication quality (Duck, Pond, & Keatham, 1994), relational maintenance behaviors (Hensen et al., 2004), deficits in social skills (Jones, Hobbs, &

Hockenberry, 1982) as well as physical illness (Caspi, Harrington, Moffitt, Milne, & Poulton, 2006), and depression (Weeks, Michela, Peplau, & Bragg, 1980).

To mitigate loneliness, individuals engage in certain behaviors and actions to satisfy interpersonal needs (Edenfield, Adams, & Briihl, 2012). For years, many researchers have studied the behaviors and strategies that are important in maintaining friendships and romantic relationships (Hays, 1984; Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004; Canary & Stafford, 1992; and Dainton, 2000). Engaging in relational maintenance behaviors contributes to individual well-being (Edenfield et al., 2012) and relationship satisfaction (Baker, McNulty, Overall, Lambert, & Fincham, 2012). Individuals who are more satisfied with their relationships tend to engage in and use more relational maintenance strategies than do those who are less satisfied (Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Individuals who are in close, interpersonal relationships are nonetheless bound to disagree and be angry with one another and to experience distress in their relationship (Baker et al., 2012). How these individuals handle the anger, distress, and disagreements has important implications for the relationship, as it is associated with relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman, 1994). Some studies have shown that individuals who use less positive problem solving skills and engage in more conflict and conflict resolution styles will have a higher chance of ending their relationship, compared to individuals who do not (e.g. Kurdek, 1994).

The purpose of the following study is to measure how the use of relational maintenance strategies and conflict management strategies influence self-perceptions of loneliness. Specifically, the current study addresses the impact of ineffective arguing, above and beyond relational maintenance strategies, on loneliness. In essence, the

question being asked is: Does ineffective arguing impact individuals' perceptions of loneliness above and beyond (the lack of) relational maintenance behaviors? Based on research found in the literature, the following are Hypothesized; 1) there will be a large inverse correlation between experiences of loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors, and 2) ineffective arguing will moderate the relationship between loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors.

Literature Review

In light of the purpose of this study, the following literature review is divided into 3 sections: loneliness, relational maintenance behaviors (with sub-sections of relationship maintenance behaviors, friendship maintenance behaviors, and loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors), and ineffective arguing (with sub-section of conflict resolution strategies and loneliness).

Loneliness

As mentioned earlier, consistent and stable interpersonal relationships play an important role in an individual's physical and psychological well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, individuals who experience distress or difficulties in engaging and maintaining these relationships may feel deprived of their needs and this may show itself as loneliness. Other researchers, such as Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, and Early (1996), found that a lower sense of belongingness was related to "loneliness, depression, and anxiety" (p.243). According to Weiss (1979), forming new intimate relationships can have an alleviating effect on one's experience of loneliness.

Many different definitions of loneliness that are used in the literature include the general consensus that loneliness is experienced when individuals lack quality or

quantity of interpersonal relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Perlman & Peplau, 1982; Segrin, Powell, Gertz, & Brackin, 2003). Loneliness is often conceptualized as a social skill deficit and requires the perception that one's relationships are not meeting set standards and expectations (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Negative affective experiences and distress are a result of the differences between desired interpersonal relationships and the relationships a person believes he or she has (Segrin et al., 2003). According to Segrin and colleagues, experiencing a moderate feeling of loneliness, even while in a relationship, can be both bothersome and alarming. Paloutzian & Ellison (1982), for example, found that loneliness was positively and significantly related to experiences of feeling undesirable, despised, insignificant, excluded, and unhappy. Experiencing feelings of loneliness, from a lack of interpersonal relationships, can have adverse effects on people.

Theoretical perspectives on the cause of loneliness are based on Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1980). Individuals form important bonds to significant attachment figures during childhood (e.g. primary caregiver). These attachments continue on throughout adulthood, but are eventually replaced by other individuals outside the family (Ainsworth, 1989). Individuals experience loneliness when significant attachments have been destroyed, such as divorce from a significant other (Weiss, 1973). Attachments can be provided by spouses and romantic/dating partners, from co-workers, friends, and close family members (Weiss, 1974). Inadequate attachments are linked to emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1974).

Two types of loneliness have been studied extensively over the years (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007; de Jong Gierveld, Broese van Groenou, Hoogendoorn, & Smit,

2009; Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984; Weiss, 1973). Based on the work of Bowlby (1977) regarding attachment theory, Weiss (1973) identified two types of loneliness: emotional and social (the two are not separated in the present study). Emotional loneliness occurs when a person experiences “the subjective response to the absence...of a generalized attachment figure” (p. 89). In other words, individuals, such as divorcees or those who have recently experienced a break-up, are more likely to experience emotional loneliness because they no longer have an intimate other with whom they associate as an attachment figure. Social isolation is experienced when there is “any severe disruption of a social role... anything that leads to loss of contact with those who share one’s concerns” (Weiss, 1973, p. 144). In other words, this type of loneliness occurs when a person experiences a loss of social connections with which he or she shares similar interests, such as moving away for college, moving to a new city, job loss and beginning a new career (Russell et al., 1984). Much of the research that has been conducted to date demonstrates that social loneliness can be attributed to inadequate or a loss of friendships, and emotional loneliness can be attributed to inadequate or a loss of romantic/dating relationships (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007; Russell et al., 1984).

Loneliness can have profound effects on mental processes, affect, and health (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Loneliness has been found to have a positive relationship with physical illness (see Caspi et al., 2006; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) as well as psychological illness and mental health (see Hagerty et al., 1996; Russell et al., 1984; Weeks et al., 1980; Wilson et al., 2007). Loneliness has also been negatively

associated with relationship quality (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2009; Flora & Segrin, 2000).

Caspi et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal design assessing levels of loneliness at different time periods, namely childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, and also assessed adult health at 26 years of age. Caspi and colleagues found that lack of interpersonal relationships in childhood were positively correlated to poor health in adulthood, while controlling for other variables such as childhood socioeconomic status, childhood obesity, and childhood intelligence. Lack of interpersonal relationships in childhood were positively related to poor health factors such as being overweight, having high blood pressure, and having high cholesterol (Caspi et al., 2006). As demonstrated, loneliness appears to negatively affect a person's physical health and have detrimental consequences over the lifespan.

Wilson et al. (2007) also conducted a longitudinal study (baseline and four years later) to see if there was a relationship between levels of loneliness experienced over the four years and development of dementia and/or Alzheimer's disease. They found that those participants who developed Alzheimer's disease experienced more loneliness and less social contact over the four years (Wilson et al., 2007). Their results revealed that those participants who had experienced high levels of loneliness were 2.1 times more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease over the four years compared to those participants who did not. Loneliness was also found to have a significant inverse relationship with "global cognition, semantic memory, perceptual speed, and visuospatial ability" (Wilson et al., 2007, p. 237). To summarize, loneliness not only affects a person's physical health over time but also affects a person's mental health.

Loneliness can also affect a person's psychological health. Russell et al. (1984) looked at how social and emotional loneliness are related to participants' psychological health. Results revealed significant relationships between psychological health and types of loneliness.

More specifically, Russell and colleagues determined that social loneliness is associated with anxiety and emotional loneliness is associated with depression. Weeks et al. (1980) looked at how loneliness and depression either differed from each other as distinct constructs or were related in some way. Weeks and colleagues found that correlations between loneliness and depression were not large enough to determine that these two constructs were a single factor. Correlations were also not small enough to determine that loneliness and depression were completely separate constructs either. In conclusion, Wilson et al. (1980) found that loneliness and depression are different yet related to each other and these two constructs have some contributing factors in common. Empirical evidence therefore demonstrates that loneliness is significantly and positively related to psychological health, such as depression.

Poor relationship quality can have negative consequences for peoples' lives and can lead to the breakdown of peoples' friendships, dating/romantic relationships, and marriages (Segrin et al., 2003). According to Segrin and colleagues, loneliness can be disturbing to romantic relationships and marriage because it goes against peoples' beliefs about the relationship. Flora and Segrin (2000) conducted an analysis of participants' levels of loneliness and their levels of satisfaction in present or past romantic/dating relationships. They found that levels of relationship satisfaction were negatively correlated with loneliness. More specifically, as levels of relational

satisfaction decreased, levels of loneliness increased, although Flora and Segrin (2000) did not specify whether the inverse was true.

De Jong Geirveld et al., (2009) looked at quality of older adults' marriages and social and emotional loneliness. They found that emotional loneliness was negatively correlated with support. Namely, participants who gave more support to and received more support from their spouse reported lower levels of emotional loneliness. Other markers of relational satisfaction, such as more disagreements about finances and poor sexual intimacy, were also related to levels of emotional loneliness (de Jong Geirveld et al., 2009). More precisely, higher ratings of these markers were related to greater levels of emotional loneliness. Levels of loneliness are directly associated with relationship satisfaction and factors related to relationship satisfaction.

To alleviate and avoid feelings of loneliness, individuals must engage in certain behaviors and strategies to help develop and sustain their interpersonal relationships (Edenfield et al., 2012). These behaviors in the literature are called relational maintenance behaviors (Canary & Stafford, 1992).

Relational Maintenance Behaviors

Within the beginning of and throughout a relationship, whether it is a friendship or a romantic relationship, individuals must use particular strategies that help to maintain these relationships (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004). These strategies can be thought of as communicative behavior between two people in an interpersonal relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Strategies include factors such as being optimistic about the relationship, self-disclosure, providing love and support (Canary & Stafford, 1992), as well as behaviors that make the relationship worthwhile and shared

activities (Oswald et al., 2004). These particular strategies have been defined as ‘relational maintenance behaviors’ in research (see, Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary 1991). Researchers have been able to identify relational maintenance behaviors for both romantic relationships and friendships, although there are very similar (e.g. Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dindia & Canary, 1993; Oswald et al., 2004). Engaging in relational maintenance behaviors keeps interpersonal relationships at satisfactory levels (Oswald et al., 2004).

Engaging in relational maintenance behaviors with others is associated with relationship satisfaction (Oswald et al., 2004; Stafford & Canary, 1991) as well as personal well-being (Baker, et al., 2012). More specifically, people who are more satisfied with their interpersonal relationships engage in more relational maintenance behaviors (Stafford & Canary, 1991) and those who use more relational maintenance behaviors in their relationships report greater levels of satisfaction (Bippus and Rollin, 2003). Baker et al. (2012) found that the use of relational maintenance strategies and well-being were mediated by relationship satisfaction, meaning that engaging in relational maintenance strategies was negatively correlated with sadness and depression when levels of satisfaction were relatively high.

Relational maintenance strategies have also been linked to experiences of loneliness (Hensen et al., 2004). Hensen and colleagues found that increased use of relational maintenance strategies decreased experiences of loneliness. These strategies help to maintain close interpersonal relationships, which affect personal well-being, making people less prone to loneliness (Baker et al., 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Experiencing loneliness can have profound effects on an individual's health and way of life.

Relationship maintenance behaviors. There is a premise in the literature that there are certain kinds of interpersonal communication patterns and behaviors that individuals can engage in to help sustain and maintain their romantic relationships and their marriages (Canary & Stafford, 1992). These communication strategies have multiple definitions (e.g. Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dindia & Canary, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). The four most common definitions of romantic relationship maintenance behaviors used in research are, "to keep a relationship in existence, to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition, to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition, and to keep a relationship in repair" (Dindia & Canary, 1993, p.163). For the purpose of this study, the former definitions of maintenance behaviors will be used.

Several theories and models have been used in the research to help explain the use of relational maintenance behaviors (Stafford, 2010). One of the most widely used theories is the equity theory (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). According to this theory, individuals appraise the level of equity in their relationship by assessing the ratio of their contributions and results to the ratio of the contributions and results of their partner (Walster et al., 1973). A relationship is judged as equal for both partners when the ratios are judged to be equal. Equity theory predicts that the use of relationship maintenance strategies acts as a reward to the individuals in the relationship and can increase relationship satisfaction (Dainton, 2000), which may perpetuate the use of maintenance strategies.

Canary and Stafford (1992) used the notion of equity theory (Walster et al., 1973) to determine levels of relationship maintenance use when the marriage was judged as equal by both husbands and wives in a sample of heterosexual married couples. Canary and Stafford (1992) posited that individuals who feel they are in a fair and equal relationship engage in more maintenance strategies and are more driven to maintain their marriage compared to their counterparts (i.e. those who do not perceive equality and fairness). They found that when wives perceived the marriage to be equal, both husbands and wives reported higher use of positivity, openness, assurances, sharing tasks, and social networks than did their counterparts (Canary & Stafford, 1992). In particular, husbands who perceived their marriage as equal reported their wives as using more positivity, openness, assurances, and social networks. Similarly, wives who perceived their marriage to be equal reported their husbands as using more positivity and assurances. Perceptions of equality in a close interpersonal relationship influence the use of relationship maintenance behaviors: The more a relationship is judged to be fair increases the use of maintenance strategies (Canary & Stafford, 1992).

Equity theory is based on interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which states that relational satisfaction is associated with the rewards and costs that are experienced by both individuals in the relationship. The satisfaction of the relationship is evaluated by what one partner truly experiences and by what he or she expects to experience in the relationship (Dainton, 2000; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If the results are equal to or more than the individual's expectations, there is satisfaction, and vice versa (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Dainton (2000) found in her study that there was a positive and linear relationship between a person's perceptions of his or her partner's

maintenance strategy use relative to expectations and satisfaction with the relationship. More specifically, Dainton (2000) found that the more a person judged his or her partner as using more relationship maintenance behaviors, compared to the person's expectations, the individual had higher ratings of relationship satisfaction.

Canary and Stafford (1992) created a five-factor model of relational maintenance behaviors and identified types of behaviors that individuals use to help maintain or sustain their romantic relationships with others. The five relational maintenance behaviors that were identified by Canary and Stafford (1992) consist of *positivity*, *openness*, *assurances*, *sharing tasks*, and *social networks*. *Positivity* is defined as “interacting with a partner in a cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical manner”; *openness* refers to “directly discussing the nature of the relationship and disclosing one's desires for the relationship”; *assurances* refers to “messages the stress one's continuation in the relationship”; *social networks* refers to “interacting with or relying on common affiliations and relatives”; and finally *sharing tasks* is defined as “attempts to maintain the relationship by performing ones responsibilities” (Canary & Stafford, 1992, pp. 243-244).

The use of relational maintenance strategies has been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction and love (Edenfield et al., 2012). Edenfield and colleagues conducted a study looking at use of relationship maintenance behaviors (and attachment styles) in college students who were in committed dating relationships. Edenfield et al. (2012) found that the participants in their study who used relational maintenance behaviors with their partners had higher ratings of satisfaction, commitment, trust, liking, and love in their relationship. More specifically, the

participants who expressed more positivity rated their relationship as more satisfactory and likeable; those who expressed more openness rated their relationships as more committed, likeable, and loveable; those who expressed more assurances rated their relationship as more committed and loveable; those who reported more social networks reported their relationship as being more likeable, committed, and satisfactory; and finally, those who expressed a higher level of task sharing reported their relationship as being more committed, likeable, and loveable (Edenfield et al., 2012).

Dainton (2000) conducted a study measuring maintenance strategies, expectations for maintenance strategy use, and relationship satisfaction among undergraduate college students currently in a romantic relationship. Results indicated that all five relationship maintenance strategies were expected to be used by partners (Dainton, 2000). Dainton (2000) also found in that just perceiving a partner as using relational maintenance behaviors was associated with more relational satisfaction than the individual's expectations of maintenance behavior use by his or her partner. She also discovered that expectancies stayed the same throughout time and that fulfilling those expectancies was not as strong at predicting relational satisfaction as was the actual use of maintenance behaviors and how much these behaviors were used (Dainton, 2000). Evidence shows that relationship maintenance strategies are positively associated with levels of relationship satisfaction.

Friendship maintenance behaviors. Researchers have begun to look at friendship maintenance behaviors, which are similar to relational maintenance behaviors, but are applied to friendships (Hays, 1984). Unfortunately, very little of the research looking at relational maintenance behaviors has been conducted on friendships

(Oswald et al., 2004). Like romantic relationships, friends must also engage in strategies that contribute to the development and continuation of these friendships (Oswald et al., 2004). Oswald and colleagues believe that it is important to recognize how relational maintenance strategies maintain interpersonal relationships. Understanding the importance can help people who have social skills deficits (Oswald et al., 2004). Lacking social skills is related to loneliness (Jones, Hobbs, & Hockenbury, 1982) which negatively affects personal well-being (Caspi et al., 2006; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010; Weeks et al., 1980; Wilson et al., 2007). Friendships play an important role in support systems (Oswald et al., 2004) and contribute to individuals' physical and mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Similar to relational maintenance behaviors, friendship maintenance behaviors have multiple definitions (e.g. Hays, 1984; Oswald et al., 2004). For the purpose of the present study, friendship maintenance strategies are defined as “behaviors that individuals engage in to maintain acceptable levels of satisfaction and commitment (Oswald et al., 2004, p. 418).

The investment model (Rusbult, 1980) is the most popular model that has been used in the literature to study friendship maintenance strategies. The investment model is based on interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and differentiates the terms satisfaction and commitment. According to Rusbult (1980), the investment model predicts that individuals will report higher levels of satisfaction in their interpersonal relationship when they offer more rewards and fewer costs compared to their expectations. The higher the levels of satisfaction that are reported, the more each person is committed to sustaining their relationship (Rusbult, 1980). It seems likely that

people will engage in friendship maintenance behaviors once satisfied and committed. Two types of investments have been identified: extrinsic and intrinsic investments (Rusbult, 1980). Extrinsic investments are factors such as emotional support and self-disclosures (i.e. supportiveness and openness, Oswald et al., 2004) and intrinsic investments are factors such as social network (i.e. interaction, Oswald et al., 2004).

Oswald et al. (2004) used the investment model to see how friendship maintenance behaviors are associated with satisfaction and commitment. Analyses showed that best friends used more friendship maintenance behaviors than did close and casual friends and, friendship maintenance behaviors are significantly correlated with levels of satisfaction and commitment to the friendship (Oswald et al., 2004).

Like relational maintenance behaviors, researchers have identified different types of strategies used by individuals in friendships (Hays, 1984; Oswald et al., 2004). Hays (1984), for example, identified four different strategies that help maintain friendships: *Companionship* (e.g. experiencing shared activities and similar interests that friends do together); *consideration* (being emotionally and socially supportive and being concerned for the other person); *communication or self-disclosure* (talking about personal information with each other hearing each other points of view) and *affection* (disclosing how each other feels about the other person).

Other researchers have identified alternative (but similar) friendship maintenance strategies that may also contribute to friendship behaviors. Oswald et al. (2004) created a friendship maintenance scale that consists of four different strategies which are similar to Hays' (1984) maintenance behaviors and to Canary and Stafford's (1992) relational maintenance behaviors. Oswald and colleagues identified *positivity* as

“behaviors that made the friendship rewarding and enjoyable”; *supportiveness* as “providing assurances by supporting each other and the relationship”; *openness* as “behaviors of self-disclosure and general conversation”; and *interaction* as “activities and behaviors the friends did together” (pp.420-421).

Different levels of friendship maintenance strategies will be used depending on the type of friendship people are engaged in (Hays, 1984; Oswald et al., 2004). Hays (1984) hypothesized that engaging in close and personal activities would be positively associated with the level of friendship. Also, engaging in close and personal activities would steadily increase as friendships progressed (Hays, 1984). Results indicated that the amount of intimate behaviors that were engaged in increased with the level of relationship (Hays, 1984). Specifically, friendship maintenance at the onset of a friendship was more superficial compared to later on in the friendship when maintenance became more intimate (Hays, 1984).

It can be presumed that without meaningful and intimate interpersonal relationships, a person can experience increased feelings of loneliness. People in interpersonal relationships need to engage in maintenance behaviors in order to continue and keep these relationships, especially at satisfactory levels (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004). Thus, individuals who are experiencing distress in their relationship may have difficulty maintaining their close interpersonal relationship and therefore become prone to loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Loneliness can negatively affect the use of these maintenance strategies (Hensen et al., 2004).

Loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors. Some of the existing research shows that loneliness has an inverse relationship with the use of maintenance

behaviors to sustain interpersonal relationships (Hensen et al., 2004, and Yum, 2003). Some researchers (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992) suggest that the use of relational maintenance behaviors fluctuates with factors such as loneliness (Yum, 2003).

Research find that the lonelier an individual is, the less work they do to maintain their interpersonal relationships (Hensen et al., 2004). Hensen and colleagues correlated scores on a loneliness measure with Stafford and Canary's (1992) maintenance strategies measure and found that feelings of loneliness were negatively associated with engaging in relational maintenance behaviors with others.

Disengagement could be explained in part by the idea that individuals experience loneliness because they perceive that their current interpersonal relationships do not meet their expectations (Weiss, 1973); therefore, they feel that trying to maintain their relationships is hopeless (Hensen et al., 2004). This behavior, in turn, continues their experience of loneliness in a vicious cycle, especially if these relationships were to end. Hensen et al. (2004) also demonstrated that individuals who experience both chronic and situational loneliness are the least likely to use relational maintenance behaviors.

Yum (2003) looked at the differences in levels of loneliness and use of relational maintenance behaviors within a sample of Korean and American participants. Yum (2003) found that the Korean sample reported greater levels of loneliness than did the American sample, possibly because they identify as a collectivist culture (and interpersonal relationships are very important). The American sample indicated more use of relational maintenance behaviors than did the Korean sample. Results also showed that lonely participants (regardless of culture) indicated decreased use of relational maintenance behaviors than did participants who were not lonely (Yum,

2003). Also, participants who were lonely interpreted that their partners engaged in less use of relational maintenance strategies than did the non-lonely participants.

An assumption can be made that because the use of relational maintenance behaviors is associated with levels of relational satisfaction, that relational maintenance behaviors are also associated with ineffective arguing. Ineffective arguing has been found to be related with decreased levels of relational satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). If people engage in more negative conflict resolution strategies, resulting in more distress and less relational satisfaction, they may therefore engage in less relational maintenance behaviors.

Ineffective Arguing

Typical interaction patterns are bound to develop between individuals who are in close relationships with others (Sullaway & Christensen, 1983). Some types of communication patterns that are developed can be dysfunctional and create distress between two individuals, such as how individuals handle conflict. Conflicts in romantic and close interpersonal relationships are almost impossible to avoid and can be defined as “disagreements, incompatibilities, and differences in viewpoints” (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006, p. 383). Communication, in general, has been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction (e.g. Bradbury & Karney, 1993), and an inverse relationship has been found between conflict communication and relationship stability and satisfaction (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995). According to Gottman and Korokoff (1989), individuals who are incapable of effective communication strategies when solving issues in the relationship, have a higher chance of experiencing marital distress. Gottman (1994, 1999) has studied hundreds of couples and their interactional patterns

and has suggested that not only does ineffective communication have a positive association with relationship dissolution; how individuals in a relationship interact is more important to relationship stability than the topic of the argument. Apparently, most of the literature to date focuses on conflict resolution strategies in marital relationships, and very little research has been done on romantic relationships and close friendships.

“Ineffective arguing is a global, unidimensional couple interaction pattern” (Kurdek, 1994, p.706). This conflict resolution strategy is marked by consistently arguing over the same issues, mindreading (i.e., how the argument will end), leaving the situation feeling like the issues at hand were not resolved, and with each individual feeling like they were not heard or understood (Synder, 1981). As previously mentioned, this communication strategy is important because this style has been found to be associated with the maintenance and dissolution of interpersonal relationships (Gottman, 1994).

Kurdek (1994) found evidence to support the hypothesis that high scores on a scale called the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and positively associated with relationship termination. His analyses included both nonparent and parent heterosexual couples and gay/lesbian couples (parenthood not specified). He found similar and stable patterns among participants. He found that couples who engage in more positive conflict resolution, and who rarely engage in negative conflict resolution and conflict withdrawal, had higher ratings of relationship satisfaction than those couples who engaged in more negative conflict resolution styles (Kurdek, 1994). These results are

consistent with other results found in the literature (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that engaging in any type of negative conflict resolution strategy is deleterious for the relationship over time.

In his research, Gottman (1994, 1999a) identified four different types of ineffective arguing styles in which couples engage and referred to these behaviors as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”(Gottman, 1994; p. 110). These types of ineffective conflict resolution strategies have been positively associated with relationship dissolution and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. These four behaviors are; criticizing, contempt (any type of insult or sarcasm directed towards another individual), defensiveness, and stonewalling (withdrawal). Although evidence has shown that criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling are present in both satisfied and unsatisfied partnerships, these three conflict resolution strategies are more prevalent among the unsatisfied partners than among the more satisfied partners (Gottman, 1999a). Also, contempt was found to be very prevalent among the dissatisfied partnerships and are practically absent from satisfied partnerships (Gottman, 1999a).

How individuals generally handle conflict in terms of their personal style has also been analyzed, and these strategies (which are similar to those listed by Gottman, 1994, 1999a) have been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Based on previous writing of Gottman and Krokoff (1989), Kurdek (1994) identified four strategies related to personal style: “Positive problem solving (e.g., compromise and negotiation), conflict engagement (e.g., personal attacks and losing control), withdrawal (e.g., refusing to discuss the

issues further and tuning the other partner out), and compliance (e.g., giving in and not defending one's position)" (p. 706).

Gottman and Krokoff (1989) conducted a longitudinal analysis of heterosexual married couples' conflict interaction strategies and their satisfaction with their marriage. Self-report data from participants and observational data were both collected and analyzed. Results revealed that, in both the short-term and long-term of the marital relationship, defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal from the conflict were more dysfunctional to the relationship (i.e., resulted in more stress and less satisfaction). Correlations from analyses revealed that, in terms of the current conflict that both spouses were experiencing, the wife's withdrawal predicted more immediate and short-term disturbance than the husband's withdrawal (Gottman & Korokoff, 1989). The opposite was found for the husband's withdrawal: When husbands engaged in withdrawal from conflict, this strategy was strongly related to a change in satisfaction in the long run (i.e. a decrease in marital satisfaction over time). In particular, results also showed that defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal on the husband's part, as compared to wives, is more dysfunctional to the marital relationship overall. In terms of how each partner should and should not be in the relationship varies.

Another type of conflict resolution strategy that individuals in close interpersonal relationships may engage in is the demand/withdraw pattern (Christensen, 1987). Numerous studies have been conducted over the years assessing the demand/withdraw pattern in couples and how this contributes to relationship satisfaction (see Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Sullaway & Christensen, 1983 for a review). The demand/withdraw strategy can be

defined as “ a pattern of marital interaction in which one spouse attempts to engage in a problem-solving discussion, often resorting to pressure and demands, while the other spouse attempts to avoid or withdraw from the discussion” (Heavy et al., 1993; p.16). Each spouse can also engage in other negative interactional strategies such as “emotional criticism and complaints” and “defensiveness and passive inaction” (Christensen & Heavy, 1990; p.73).

Gender differences in the demand/withdraw strategy have been found (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) and different researchers have theorized about the possibility of these differences.

Christensen (1987) based his explanation on the different socialization processes of males and females concerning intimacy in relationships. He believed that women have been socialized to want more connection and intimacy in their interpersonal relationships, while males are socialized to want greater independence and freedom in their interpersonal relationships. Because females want to be closer to their partner, they tend to be more persistent in their attempts to achieve this closeness; while males, who want more independence, tend to withdraw from the relationship in order to achieve more independence. Gottman and Levenson (1988) proposed that there are gender differences between the demand/withdraw strategy because males and females react differently to stress and conflict. According to Gottman and Levenson (1988), males tend to react physically to stress and conflict while females are more resilient to stress and conflict. Therefore, because of these gender differences in stress and conflict reactions, females may tolerate the conflict situation and continue to engage in conflict more so than males (Gottman & Levenson, 1988). This, in turn, can

influence the perceived demand behaviors attributed to females. Because males cannot tolerate stress and conflict as much as females, they tend to avoid and withdraw from the conflict situation (Gottman & Levenson, 1988).

In a study conducted by Christensen and Heavey (1990), they hypothesized that in general, the wife-demand/husband-withdraw strategy was more likely to occur during conflict than was the husband-demand/wife-withdraw strategy. Their results supported their hypotheses. Additionally, they found that the wife-demand/husband-withdraw strategy tends to appear in conflict situations when the female initiates discussion of the issues, but disappears when the male initiates the conflict discussion (i.e. both are equally demanding and avoidant).

In the study conducted by Heavey et al. (1993), these researchers used a longitudinal design to measure the association between conflict resolution strategies (i.e., the demand/withdraw strategy) and relationship satisfaction. They assumed certain types of strategies could be beneficial (i.e. could improve) or consequential (i.e. could breakup) to individuals in the short- and long-term of the relationship. They also looked at how satisfied each participant in the relationship was after engaging in two different conflict resolution strategies. Results revealed that individuals' levels of satisfaction in the relationship are significantly related to the type of conflict resolution strategy they used in discussion. Individuals' global rating of their levels of satisfaction was significantly related to the demand characteristic of the conflict resolution strategy. The wife-demand/husband-withdraw strategy had a negative relationship to ratings of current and future levels of satisfaction. Their results support those of Gottman and

Krokoff (1989) who found that the wife-demand/husband-withdraw strategy is extremely detrimental to relationship satisfaction and stability.

Graber, Laurenceau, Miga, Chango, & Coan (2011) assert that very little research has been conducted on and few studies have reproduced similar results for the effects of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (Gottman, 1994, p. 110), such as contempt, on conflict resolution strategies. Graber and colleagues conducted a longitudinal study looking at positive affect (i.e., affection) and negative affect (i.e., contempt) in positive and negative conflict interactional contexts to see how these variables influenced marital satisfaction and stability (Graber et al., 2011). They found that contempt was positively and significantly related to relationship breakdown for both husbands and wives. Gender differences were also found in the interactional contexts when contempt was used to predict relationship breakdown. Wives who used contempt in the conflict interactional situations were more likely to initiate divorce 12 to 15 months later, whereas husbands were more likely to initiate divorce in the same time frame when they used contempt in positive interactional situations (Graber et al., 2011). Research evidence shows that using contempt as a conflict resolution strategy in certain contexts can have profound effects on relationship stability. Also, who uses contempt and when can positively influence relationship breakdown.

Different theoretical perspectives have been used to explain why and how certain conflict resolution strategies are used. Attachment theory, which is based on the work of Bowlby (1973), helps to explain what types of conflict resolution strategies individuals with a particular type of attachment style will use in times of conflict with others (see Bartholomew, 1990; Domingue & Mollen, 2009). Attachment theory can

be defined as “the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others” (Bowlby, 1977, p. 201). According to this theory, encounters that infants and children experience with primary caregivers can act as a guide for developing relationships later on in life. An assumption of attachment theory is that attachment styles continue on in adulthood and have important implications for relationships (Ainsworth, 1989).

Domingue and Mollen (2009) conducted an analysis of attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies among different- and same-sex couples. Couples were divided into three attachment style groups: secure-secure, secure-insecure, and insecure-insecure. Results revealed that attachment styles are associated with types of conflict resolution strategies. More specifically, couples in the secure-secure group used more constructive resolution strategies and used less of the demand-withdraw, avoidance, verbal aggression, and withholding strategies than couples in the other two attachment style groups. Interestingly though, the secure-insecure and insecure-insecure groups did not differ much in their use of the demand-withdraw, avoidance, verbal aggression, and withholding communication strategies when compared with each other. Unexpectedly, results also revealed that different-sex couples used the avoidance and withholding strategy more than did the same-sex couples, regardless of attachment style. These results are consistent with Gottman’s findings (1999a) and the Four Horseman (Gottman, 1994) because individuals who are characterized by insecure attachment tend to be more demanding and critical of their partner or can lead the individual to be defensive, in contempt, or to stonewall, namely, to hold onto their independence.

Conflict resolution strategies and loneliness. How people handle conflict is related to relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994). Engaging in ineffective arguing strategies can terminate relationships and friendships (Kurdek, 1994). Experiencing a lack of interpersonal relationships is associated with experiences of loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, people who engage in more negative conflict resolution styles may experience lower levels of relational satisfaction, which may result in decreased use of relational maintenance behaviors, and an increase of experiences of loneliness.

Conflict can cause distress in interpersonal relationships, and based on the literature, distress can negatively influence ratings of satisfaction, which can also negatively influence levels of loneliness. Gottman (1994) explained that feelings of loneliness could be associated with the withdraw method (i.e. stonewalling) of conflict resolutions strategies, especially when partners feel dissatisfied with their interpersonal relationships. When peoples' interpersonal relationships become stressful and have negative consequences on their physical and psychological health (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006), people can be more susceptible to experiencing feelings of loneliness.

Based on the research, conflict in interpersonal relationships can have a positive relationship with feelings of loneliness. Dykstra and Fokkema (2007) looked at how levels of conflict can affect levels of loneliness. They hypothesized that partners in interpersonal relationships who tend to engage in considerable conflict will be more susceptible to experiencing emotional loneliness than those partners who did not engage in extensive conflict (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). This hypothesis was based on their *discrepancy hypothesis*, which is an inconsistency between reality and desire.

Results found that participants who experienced higher levels of conflict in their relationship were more susceptible to emotional loneliness (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). Dykstra and Fokkema (2007) also found that participants who experienced more conflict in their relationship were also prone to social loneliness. This finding could possibly be explained by the fact that high-conflict interpersonal relationships can influence seclusion from other social networks. Conflict in interpersonal relationships may not solely affect the individuals in the relationship but also influence the way they perceive their other relationship (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). Therefore, if individuals in relationships perceive their other interpersonal relationships more negatively, they may discontinue interaction with their friends, influencing social loneliness.

There does not appear to be much literature that looks at the relationship between conflict resolution strategies the use of relational maintenance behaviors. The closest line of inquiry that addresses these concerns is found within the attachment literature. As previously shown, attachment styles are related to conflict communication strategies (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). One study was found in the literature that looked at attachment styles and how these styles are related to use of maintenance behaviors and conflict resolution strategies (Bippus & Rollin, 2003). Bippus and Rollin (2003) conducted their analyses using undergraduate students who had a close relationship with another person and who were not in a romantic or dating relationship. Their result showed that individuals with a secure attachment were reported by their friends as using more positive maintenance behaviors than the individuals with a non-secure attachment style. This finding could be interpreted as individuals who feel safe with their friendships are more likely to use constructive strategies to maintain their

relationships. Individuals with a secure attachment were less like to use *avoiding* as a conflict resolution strategy (Bippus & Rollin, 2003).

Since secure individuals use more positive maintenance behaviors and less negative conflict resolution strategies (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Domingue and Mollen, 2009), one can deduce that there is an inverse relationship between maintenance behaviors and conflict resolution strategies. More specifically, an increase in use of positive maintenance behaviors would be associated with a decreased use of negative conflict resolution strategies. This inverse relationship could also be associated with decreased levels of loneliness as well.

Summary

Taken together, empirical evidence indicates that loneliness is a result of insufficient interpersonal ties (Hagerty et al., 1996) and can influence experiences of worthlessness and depression (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). Experiences of loneliness have been positively associated with physical health problems in adulthood (Caspi et al., 2006); chances of developing dementia and/or Alzheimer's disease in older age (Wilson et al., 2007); depression and anxiety (Russell et al., 1984); and negatively associated with relational quality (Flora & Segrin, 2000; Segrin et al., 2003).

Loneliness, when experienced by a lack of social networks, negatively influences people's use of relational maintenance behaviors to further develop and sustain new interpersonal relationships (Hensen et al., 2004).

Engaging in relational maintenance behaviors helps to develop and maintain friendships and romantic/dating relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Oswald et al., 2004). The use of relational maintenance behaviors is positively associated with

relationship satisfaction (Edenfield et al., 2012; Oswald et al., 2004). Use of relational maintenance behaviors is also positively associated with breadth and depth of a relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton, 2000; Hays, 1984; Rusbult, 1980; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Walster et al., 1973).

Using ineffective conflict management skills in a close interpersonal relationship can be both dysfunctional and distressing to both individuals (Sullaway & Christensen, 1983). Negative conflict resolution strategies have been negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994, 1999; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek 1994). Different types of conflict resolutions strategies have been identified in the literature such as “The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse” (Gottman, 1994, p. 110) and the demand/withdraw pattern (Christensen, 1987). Both types of conflict resolution strategies have been found to be negatively associated with relational quality and stability (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey et al., 1993).

Despite the strong evidence supporting the role of both relational maintenance behaviors and conflict management skills in relationship satisfaction and or loneliness (Hensen et al., 2004; Weiss, 1973), no study to date has looked at whether conflict management (operationalized in Gottman’s Four Horsemen Theory, 1994) predicts loneliness above and beyond the absence of relational maintenance behaviors alone. While many marriage and family therapists have argued that the ineffective management of conflict in a committed relationship is the biggest predictor of relationship dissolution (Gottman 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), others have indicated that ineffective conflict management is an outcome of the absence of a core

friendship (i.e., relationship maintenance behaviors) (Gottman, 1999; Domingue & Mollen, 2009). It is possible however, that a third approach is worth exploring. Specifically, we are predicting that relational maintenance behaviors will predict loneliness, but that ineffective arguing will have additional predictive powers over and above that of relational maintenance behaviors alone.

Purpose

The present study looked at how ineffective arguing impacts the experience of loneliness above and beyond the use of relational maintenance behaviors. It appears there is a lack of literature describing how ineffective arguing affects both the use of relational maintenance behaviors and the experiences of loneliness. The rationale for conducting the following research was to increase knowledge about how ineffective arguing can influence the use of relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness of people who are in close interpersonal relationships. Making educators and professionals aware of the implications of these effects can influence treatment and intervention strategies in the counseling field as well as how educators approach couples and marriage counseling in the classroom.

In essence, the question that was asked was: Does ineffective arguing impact individuals' perceptions of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors? Based on research found in the literature, the following are hypothesized; 1) there will be a large inverse relationship between experiences of loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors, and 2) ineffective arguing moderates the relationship between loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Participants

The participants consisted of 182 individuals, all over the age of 18 years. Mean age of the total sample was 33.92 ($SD = 12.88$). One hundred and thirty five participants identified themselves as female, 46 identified themselves as male, and 1 identified the self as other. One hundred and seven participants identified as heterosexual, 5 identified as gay/lesbian, and 7 identified as bisexual. A majority of the participants indicated that they lived either in Winnipeg or North Dakota; 47 participants were situated elsewhere (within Canada and the U.S.). Participants were asked who their closest relationship was to (friend/relative or romantic partner). Seventy- five participants indicated that their closest relationship was to a friend or relative, whereas 107 indicated that their closest relationship was to their romantic partner. Of those participants who indicated that they were in some type of romantic relationship, mean length of relationship for the sample was 5.13 ($SD = 2.24$). A majority of the participants indicated that they were White/Caucasian (84.1%); the remaining participants identified as African American/Black (1.1%), Native American (0.5%), Hispanic/Latin(a) (1.1%), Asian American (3.3%), Biracial (2.7), and as other (7.1%). Please see Table 1.a and Table 1.b for additional demographic information.

Table 1a

Qualitative Participant Demographics

	Total Sample		RPG		FG	
	N	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	46	25.3	23	21.5	23	30.7
Female	135	74.2	84	78.5	51	68.0
Other	1	0.5	0	0	1	1.3
White/Caucasian	153	84.1	92	86.0	61	81.3
African American/Black	2	1.1	0	0	2	2.7
Native American	1	0.5	0	0	1	1.3
Hispanic/Latino(a)	2	1.1	1	0.9	1	1.3
Asian American	6	3.3	4	3.7	2	2.7
Biracial	5	2.7	4	3.7	1	1.3
Other	13	7.1	6	5.6	7	9.3
Heterosexual	170	93.4	100	93.5	70	93.3
Gay/Lesbian	5	2.7	2	1.9	3	4.0
Bisexual	7	3.8	5	4.7	2	2.7
Middle School	1	0.5	1	0.9	0	0.0
High School	38	20.9	20	18.7	18	24.0
Associates	20	11.0	9	8.4	11	14.7
Trade	19	10.4	10	9.3	9	12.0
Bachelor's	69	37.9	44	41.1	25	33.3
Master's	29	15.9	18	16.8	11	14.7
Doctorate	6	3.3	5	4.7	1	1.3
Manitoba	97	53.3	61	57.0	36	48.0
North Dakota	39	20.9	22	20.6	16	21.3
Other	47	25.8	24	22.4	23	30.7
Children	61	33.5	43	40.2	18	24.0
No Children	121	66.5	64	59.8	57	76.0
Employed	154	84.6	93	86.9	61	81.3
Unemployed	28	15.4	14	13.1	14	18.7

Table 1a continued

	Total Sample		RPG		FG	
	N	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
< \$15,000	32	17.6	18	16.8	14	18.7
\$15,000-25,000	15	8.2	5	4.7	10	13.3
\$25,000-40,000	43	23.6	26	24.3	17	22.7
\$40,000-60,000	44	24.2	24	22.4	20	26.7
\$60,000-90,000	23	12.6	18	16.8	5	6.7
\$90,000-120,000	6	3.3	5	4.7	1	1.3
\$120,000-150,000	2	1.1	2	1.9	2	2.7
+ \$150,000	4	2.2	2	1.9	2	2.7
N/A	13	7.1	8	7.5	5	6.7
Christian	72	39.6	41	38.3	31	41.3
Catholic	33	18.1	23	21.5	10	13.3
Atheist	18	9.9	9	8.4	9	12.0
Other	9	4.9	7	6.5	2	2.7
None	50	27.5	27	25.2	23	30.7
Friend/Relative	75	41.2			75	100
Romantic Partner	107	58.8	107	100		
Single	40	22.0	0	0.0	40	53.3
Dating, no commitment	13	7.1	1	0.9	12	16.0
Committed	56	25.3	34	31.8	12	16.0
Engaged	12	6.6	11	10.3	1	1.3
Married/Domestic Partnership/Commitment Ceremony	71	39.0	31	29.0	10	13.3
North Dakota	39	20.9	22	20.6	16	21.3
Other	47	25.8	24	22.4	23	30.7
N/A	37	19.9			34	45.3

Note: RPG = Romantic Partner Group. FG = Friendship Group

Table 1b

Quantitative Participant Demographics

	Total Sample			RPG			FB		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	182	33.92	12.88	107	35.08	13.07	75	32.25	12.49
Relationship Length	182	5.13	2.24	107	4.78	1.53	75	5.63	2.91
Number of Children	182	.72	1.16	107	.80	1.14	75	.60	1.19

Note. RPG = Romantic Partner Group. FG = Friendship Group.

Measures

Demographics Form

Participants were asked to fill out a short demographics forms to provide information regarding sex, age, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation for generalizability purposes. Participants were also asked about their educational level, employment status, yearly income, religious affiliation/spirituality, and who they had a closest relationship with. Participants were also asked what their current relationship status was and the duration of their current relationship (if applicable).

Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure.

One of the relational maintenance behavior measures used for this study was the Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM; Canary & Stafford, 1992). The participants who indicated they are in a close relationship with their partner completed this scale. The RMSM consists of five factors, each with their own maintenance

behaviors: positivity (i.e. *“Attempts to make our interactions enjoyable”*), openness (i.e. *“Simply tells me how s/he feels about our relationship”*), assurances (i.e. *“Stresses his/her commitment to me”*), social networks (i.e. *“Likes to spend time with our same friends”*), and sharing tasks (i.e. *“Shares in the joint responsibilities that face us”*).

Participants were asked to rate each behavior using a 5-point Likert scale (1= *Never* to 5= *Almost Always*) based on the statement “Please indicate the extent to which you perceive your partner engaging in the following behaviors to maintain your relationship”. The reported coefficient alpha reliabilities for the individual maintenance strategies were: positivity $SD = .95$, $\alpha = .89$; openness $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .85$; assurances $SD = .91$, $\alpha = .86$; networks $SD = 1.18$, $\alpha = .82$; tasks $SD = 1.01$, $\alpha = .88$. The coefficient alpha for the Romantic Partner Group (RPG) for this study was $\alpha = .90$.

Validity issues were not addressed.

Friendship Maintenance Behaviors

The other maintenance behavior measure used for this study was the Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004). Participants who indicated they are in a close relationship with a friend or relative completed this scale. The Friendship Maintenance Scale consists of four maintenance strategies, each with their own sub-behaviors: positivity (i.e. *“Try to make each other laugh”*), supportiveness (i.e. *“Apologize or something that happened”*), openness (i.e. *“Share private thoughts with each other”*), and interaction (i.e. *“Go to social gatherings together”*). Participants were asked to rate each behavior using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Never* to 5= *Almost Always*) based on the question “How often do you and your friend...”

The reported coefficient alpha reliabilities for the individual maintenance strategies were: Positivity $\alpha = .92$; supportiveness $\alpha = .90$; openness $\alpha = .84$; and interaction $\alpha = .74$. All four subscales were intercorrelated, ranging from .17 to .64 (all $ps < .01$). Coefficient alpha for the Friendship Group (FG) for this study was $\alpha = .94$.

Validity was measured using the complete data set ($N = 666$) and the short form of the subscales. The reported coefficient alphas from combining the data set and the short form were: Positivity $\alpha = .95$; supportiveness $\alpha = .83$; openness $\alpha = .82$; and interaction $\alpha = .75$. The subscales were all positively associated and correlations ranged from .12 to .61.

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3).

The loneliness measure used in this study was the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3; Russell, 1996). Participants were asked to rate each statement based on how often they feel a certain way (i.e. "*How often do you feel you lack companionship?*"), using a 4-point Likert scale (1= *Never* to 4= *Always*). Coefficient alphas ranged from .89 to .94 ($p < .05$) across the samples. Coefficient alpha for the FG for this study was $\alpha = .94$. Coefficient alpha for the RPG for this study was $\alpha = .93$.

In a sample of college students, convergent validity for the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3; Russell, 1996) was demonstrated by strong correlations with the NYU Loneliness Scale ($r = .65$; Rubenstein & shaver, 1982) and the Differential Loneliness Scale ($r = .72$; Schmidt & Sermat, 1983).

Ineffective Arguing Inventory.

The ineffective arguing measure that was used in this study was the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI; Kurdek, 1994). The IAI measures different types of argument

styles that individuals in a relationship may experience with their partner (e.g. “Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved”). The scale contains eight items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= *Disagree strongly* to 5= *Agree strongly*). Higher scores indicate ineffective arguing style. The eight items are based on characteristics of ineffective arguing between couples (Gottman & Kurdek, 1989). Concurrent validity was supported with strong correlations (ranging from -.62 to -.71) between the IAI and measures of global relationship satisfaction. Coefficient alpha for the RPG for this study was $\alpha = .83$. Coefficient alpha for the FG for this study was $\alpha = .88$.

Procedure

All participants were recruited through Amazon Turk, through other on-line social media, or through word of mouth. Participants through Amazon Turk were compensated \$0.15 for their participation. Participants from other on-line social media or who were recruited through word of mouth were not compensated unless they accessed the surveys through Amazon Turk. All consent and surveys were accessed through the internet (Qualtrics). Participants viewed an informed consent document that contained information about the study and then indicated their willingness to participate in the study, and finally proceeded to fill out the on-line surveys.

The surveys included a brief demographics form (1 minute to complete), a survey of relationship maintenance behaviors (3 minutes to complete), a survey of arguing effectiveness (2 minutes to complete), and a survey of perceived loneliness (3 minutes to complete). If participants indicated on the demographics form that their closest relationship was with a friend or a relative, they were given the Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004). If they indicated their closest relationship was

with a romantic partner, they were given the Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM; Canary & Stafford, 1992). No participant took both scales.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This section provides the results of the data analyses that were conducted for the study's hypotheses. The types of analyses that were conducted are described below, followed by results for each hypothesis reported separately. The summary of alpha levels, means, and standard deviations for the three inventories are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample Size, Coefficient Alphas, Means, and Standard Deviations for All Scales by Romantic Partner Group (RPG) and Friendship Group (FG)

Scale	N	α	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
RMSM (RPG)	107	.90	118.16	12.49
FMS (FG)	75	.94	148.28	18.78
IAI (RPG)	107	.83	18.07	5.63
IAI (FB)	75	.88	18.93	6.06
UCLA (RPG)	107	.93	39.13	8.61
UCLA (FG)	75	.94	43.71	9.60

Note. RPG = Romantic partner group. FG = Friendship group. RMSM = Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (Canary & Stafford, 1992). FMS = Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004). IAI = Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994). UCLA = UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3; Russell, 1996).

Preliminary Analysis

A preliminary analysis was conducted in order to compare means between RPG and FG on levels of loneliness and levels of ineffective arguing. An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to test for these differences. Results revealed significant differences for levels of loneliness for the RPG and FG, $t(180) = -3.37, p = .001$, but did not reveal any significant differences for levels of ineffective arguing, $t(180) = -.98, p = .33$.

In Independent Samples *t*-test was also conducted to in order to compare means between males and females on levels of loneliness and levels of ineffective arguing. Results revealed that there were no differences between males and females in levels of loneliness and levels of ineffective arguing.

A final Independent Sample *t*-test was conducted in order to make comparisons between males and females in RPG and FG on levels of relational maintenance behaviors. Results revealed no significant differences between males and females in the RPG, although results were significant for the FG, with females showing more friendship maintenance behaviors than males, $t(72) = -2.51, p = .01$. Results also indicated that females scored higher ($X = 151.55, SD = 18.09$) than males ($X = 140.13, SD = 18.13$).

Pearson Product Correlations were conducted to assess the relationship between each of the total scores of the three questionnaires that were used for this study. Correlational analyses were conducted splitting participants into two groups. The First group, called the romantic partner group, consisted of participants who indicated that their closest relationship was with their romantic partner and therefore completed the

Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM; Canary & Stafford, 1992). The second group called the friendship group, consisted of individuals who indicated that their closest relationship was to a friend or relative and therefore completed the Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004). Total scores from both groups were analyzed with each of the total scores of the remaining questionnaires.

In regards to the romantic partner group, correlations ranged (in absolute values) from .34 to .45, where $p < 0.01$, as shown in Table 3. In regards to the friend/relative group, correlations (in absolute values) ranged from .26 to .47, where $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, as show in Table 4. The summary of the Pearson Product Correlations are reported in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Correlations between Levels of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, Loneliness, and Ineffective Arguing

Variable	1.	2.	3.
1. RMSM	-	-.339**	-.416**
2. UCLA		-	.450**
3. IAI			-

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). RMSM = Total Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (Canary & Stafford, 1992), UCLA = Total Loneliness (Version 3; Russell, 1996), IAI (Kurdek, 1994) = Total Ineffective Arguing.

Table 4

Correlations between Levels of Friendship Maintenance Behaviors, Loneliness, and Ineffective Arguing

Variable	1.	2.	3.
1. FMS	-	-.472**	-.307**
2. UCLA		-	.264**
3. IAI			-

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); Correlations significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). FMS = Total Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004), UCLA = Total Loneliness (Version 3; Russell, 1996), IAI (Kurdek, 1994) = Total Ineffective Arguing.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a large inverse relationship between loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors (both romantic and friendship maintenance behaviors). As reported in Tables 3 and 4, Pearson Correlations did not support Hypothesis 1 for both the relationship maintenance behaviors (RMBs) and the friendship maintenance behaviors (FMBs). As can be seen in Table 3, the correlation between the total scores of the RMSM (Canary & Stafford, 1992) and the total scores of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3; Russell, 1996) was $r(105) = -.34, p < 0.01$. As can be seen in Table 4, the correlation between the total scores of the Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004) and the total scores of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3; Russell, 1996) was $r(73) = -.47, p < 0.01$, respectively. Both correlations indicate that the more participants use relational maintenance behaviors, the less lonely they feel in their relationships and/or friendships. No causal inferences can be made. Though the correlations were not as large as hypothesized, they do

indicate a medium strength relationship between relational maintenance behaviors (both romantic and friendship, respectively) and loneliness.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated that ineffective arguing would add predictive ability to the relationship between loneliness and relational maintenance behaviors. In other words, it was expected that ineffective arguing would aide in the prediction of loneliness above and beyond that of relational maintenance behaviors. In regards to the romantic partner group, results supported hypothesis 2 and indicated that ineffective arguing does predict experiences of loneliness above and beyond RMBs alone as evidenced by the $R^{2\Delta}$ ($R^{2\Delta} = .12$; $F[1, 104] = 15.57, p < .001$). In regards to FMBs within the friendship group, results of the linear regression analysis were not significant and therefore did not support hypothesis 2 as evidenced by the $R^{2\Delta}$, ($R^{2\Delta} = .02 F[1,72] = 1.48, p = .23$). Results of the regression analyses are reported in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Multiple Regression for Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, Ineffective Arguing, and Loneliness (N = 107)

Variable(s)	R	R2	R2 Δ	F Δ	df	sign. F Δ
1. RMSM	.34	.12	.12	13.61	1,105	.00
Variable(s)	R	R2	R2 Δ	F Δ	df	sign. F Δ
2. RMSM; IAI	.48	.23	.12	15.57	1,104	.00

Note. $p < .001$. RMSM = Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (Canary & Stafford, 1992). IAI = Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994).

Table 6

Multiple Regression for Friendship Maintenance Behaviors, Ineffective Arguing, and Loneliness (N = 75)

Variable(s)	R	R ²	R ² Δ	FΔ	df	sign. FΔ
1. FMS	.47	.22	.22	20.94	1,73	.00
2. FMS; IAI	.49	.24	.02	1.48	1,72	.23

Note. $p < .001$. FMS = Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 1994). IAI = Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section discusses results in reference to the two hypotheses. Hypotheses that were supported and that were not supported are explored in light of relevant research. Implications and limitations of the present study are also discussed, as well as directions for future research and conclusions.

Participants were first divide into two groups which determined which maintenance behavior measure they would complete. The two groups were: Romantic Partner Group (those who selected their romantic partner as their closest relationship and therefore completed the Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure; Canary & Stafford, 1992) and Friendship Group (those who indicated that their closest relationship was to a friend or relative and therefore completed the Friendship Maintenance Scale; Oswald et al., 2004).

The present study hypothesized that there would be a large and significant inverse relationship between relational maintenance behaviors (for both the romantic partner group and the friendship group) and loneliness. Hypothesis 1 has been supported in previously cited research on relational maintenance strategies and loneliness (Hensen et al., 2004, and Yum, 2003). The present study also hypothesized that ineffective arguing would add predictive ability to experiences of loneliness above

and beyond that of relational maintenance behaviors alone (hypothesis 2). There appears to be a lack of empirical research in the literature regarding hypothesis 2. Therefore, results regarding hypothesis 2 could increase and contribute to the existing knowledge of relational maintenance behaviors and loneliness. There is research that supports a positive relationship between negative conflict resolution strategies and loneliness (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007), although it appears there is a lack of research that specifically looks at how ineffective arguing can impact experiences of loneliness.

Results from the Pearson Product Correlational analyses did not support hypothesis 1 (that there would be a large inverse relationship between relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness). For both the romantic partner group and friendship group, correlations indicated a moderate (and significant) inverse relationship between relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness. Collectively, the findings of the present study demonstrate, although moderately, that people who engage in increased use of relational maintenance behaviors in their interpersonal relationships tend to experience decreased levels of loneliness in those relationships.

There appears to be a consistent trend in the literature demonstrating an inverse relationship between relational maintenance behaviors and feelings of loneliness. Results from the Pearson Correlations for hypothesis 1 (in the present study) appear to be in line with results found by Hensen et al. (2004). Pearson correlations from the Hensen et al. (2004) study demonstrated that both chronic and situational loneliness were moderately and inversely related to the relationship maintenance behaviors studied by Canary and Stafford (1992). In Yum's (2003) study, results from Univariate

F-Ratios also demonstrated moderate relationships between self and partner relational maintenance behaviors and feelings of loneliness. Given that other researchers have found similar results (Hensen et al., 2004, and Yum, 2003), the consistency of the moderate relationship finding across studies seems indicative of steady pattern across the two variables. Of course, this steady patterns needs to be examined to see if it stands up across different populations and different types of relationships.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that ineffective arguing would add predictive power, above and beyond that of relational maintenance behaviors, to experiences of loneliness. Results from the multiple regression analysis for the romantic group were significant. In other words, the results demonstrated that for romantic relationships, ineffective arguing does predict experiences of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors alone. In regards to the friendship group, results from the multiple regression analysis were not significant. These results indicated that for friendships, ineffective arguing does not predict experiences of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors alone.

In regards to romantic relationships, it appears that ineffective arguing has a significant impact on loneliness, regardless of the levels of relationship maintenance strategy used. In other words, it is likely that people who engage in many positive relationship maintenance behaviors can still experience feelings of loneliness in their romantic relationship if they engage in ineffective arguing. It also appears that, in terms of friendships, ineffective arguing does not have a significant influence on experiences of loneliness regardless of relational maintenance use.

Research in the literature has demonstrated that different types of negative conflict resolutions strategies have a positive relationship with experiences of loneliness (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007; Gottman, 1994). Dykstra and Fokkema (2007) conducted a stepwise regression analysis among couples in a marital relationship, which included conflict in the marriage. Their results demonstrated that conflict in the marriage was largely and positively related to social loneliness, but had a small positive relationship with emotional loneliness.

As previously noted, there is a lack of research demonstrating how ineffective arguing directly influences experiences of loneliness. Kurdek (1994) demonstrated that engaging in ineffective arguing strategies can terminate relationships and friendships. Based on his findings, one can induce that because relational maintenance behaviors help to maintain romantic relationships and friendships at stable and satisfactory levels (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton, 2000; Hays, 1984; and Oswald et al., 2004), ineffective arguing can still have a strong influence on the stability levels of these relationships. Therefore, even if people engage in relational maintenance behaviors to sustain their interpersonal relationships, ineffective arguing can still influence emotional separation and even physical separation, including the termination of the relationship, which in turn would influence feelings of loneliness.

It is unclear as to why ineffective arguing does not have predictive ability on experiences of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance strategies in friendships. One possibility could be that friendship maintenance behaviors and conflict resolution strategies affect the friendship at different levels (i.e. individual and dyadic; Oswald & Clark, 2006). Empirical evidence has shown that relational satisfaction and

commitment to the friendship (therefore influencing experiences of loneliness) are correlated with friendship maintenance behaviors at the dyadic level, while conflict resolution strategies are correlated at the individual level (Oswald & Clark, 2006). In other words, “the behaviors that make ‘me’ happy are not necessarily what make ‘us’ happy with the friendship” (Oswald & Clark, 2006, p.345).

As previously noted, very little empirical research has looked at whether and how negative (and positive) conflict resolution strategies affect friendships. Oswald and Clark (2006) conducted a study looking at how conflict resolution strategies (both positive and negative) and friendship maintenance behaviors were associated with relational satisfaction and commitment. Oswald and Clark (2006) modified Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow’s (1986) scale, to use specifically for friendships. They looked at the resolution strategies of *exit* and *neglect* (two negative resolution strategies) and *voice* and *loyalty* (two positive resolution strategies). They found that *exit* was inversely related to all of the friendship maintenance behaviors and *neglect* was inversely related to positivity and support only (Oswald & Clark, 2006). Overall, the positive resolution strategies were positively related to use of friendship maintenance behaviors while the harmful resolution strategies were inversely related with friendship maintenance behaviors. In terms of associations with relational satisfaction and commitment, Oswald and Clark (2006) found that the friendship maintenance behaviors had the strongest relationship to relational satisfaction and commitment, while none of the conflict resolution strategies had any predictive abilities to relational satisfaction and commitment. These results demonstrate that friendship maintenance behaviors have stronger implications, and importance, for the maintenance and stability of friendships.

In terms of romantic relationships, it appears that relationship maintenance behaviors and ineffective arguing are distinct, yet equally important, components for happy and healthy relationships. Both constructs appear to influence experiences of loneliness in the relationship, although it is not entirely clear as to how or why ineffective arguing predicts feelings of loneliness more than the use of relational maintenance behaviors. In regards to friendships, it appears that ineffective arguing has no effect on experiences of loneliness more so than the use of friendship maintenance behaviors. Again, it is unclear as to why and how. Future studies can begin to look at how ineffective arguing adds predictive powers to the relationship of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors. Future studies can also look at why ineffective arguing does not predict experiences of loneliness, beyond friendship maintenance behaviors, in friendships.

Implications

The present study increases and contributes to knowledge in the area of relational maintenance behavior use and experiences of loneliness. Results from the present study, especially those supporting hypothesis 2, offer awareness and understanding into the relationship between ineffective arguing and feelings of loneliness, above and beyond relational maintenance behavior use for those in romantic relationships but not for those whose closest relationships are described as friendships. Inferences about these results are limited due to lack of research, yet the results open possibilities for clinical implications and future research.

Clinical Implications

Results from the present study have clinical implications for those working with clients in couples and marriage counseling. Due to the results supporting hypothesis 2, it may benefit clinicians to learn to distinguish between effective use of relational maintenance behaviors and ineffective use of arguing techniques. Because the results of the present study indicate that ineffective arguing can predict loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors,

There is a possibility that clinically, when professionals have been implementing interventions to distressed couples in counseling, their main focus may be on targeting relational maintenance behaviors that need to be improved in hopes of increasing relational satisfaction and stability. Professionals may assume that unhealthy and ineffective conflict resolutions strategies are a result of poor and inconsistent use of relational maintenance behaviors, when in reality, based on the results of the present study, they are not.

Clinicians can also help couples to recognize when they are engaging in ineffective arguing techniques. When couples in a relationship are able to identify when they begin to engage in ineffective arguing, they can learn how to stop engaging in that conflict resolution strategy and switch to a more healthy and effective strategy.

Clinicians and professionals can also look at increasing a couples' compatibility with each other, which has been shown to be associated with distressed couples and increased use of negative conflict resolutions strategies (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Exploring couples' needs and wants of 'we-ness' and independence and understanding how these needs could be affecting the relationship, can help the clinician understand

how these needs and wants interfere with the use of proper resolution strategies and therefore implement appropriate and effective intervention tactics.

It does appear though that both relational maintenance strategies and ineffective arguing are both important components to a healthy and stable relationship.

Intervention strategies can incorporate skills that help to increase and improve healthy communication between partners in a romantic relationship, which can also help to increase relational maintenance behaviors. When both partners argue with each other effectively, they can both provide support and empathy to each other while engaging in effective conflict resolution strategies. Providing support and empathy to a partner (and receiving support and empathy from a partner) are components of relationship maintenance behaviors (Canary & Stafford, 1992).

Clinical implications can also be made to those working with single individuals or individuals who have difficulty maintaining and sustaining friendships. Results from the present study indicated that ineffective arguing may have less importance to friendships than it does to romantic relationships. Maintenance behaviors may therefore have a bigger impact on friendships and have a slightly larger relationship with loneliness. Social loneliness has been shown to be related to insufficient social relationships and social ties (Russell et al., 1984), and loneliness has been related to a lack of, and inhibited, social skills (Horowitz & de States French, 1979, and Jones, Hobbs, & Hockenbury, 1982). Thus, individual counseling with clients where the focus is on social support should focus on building and engaging in friendship maintenance behaviors. Friendships appear to play an important role in support systems for

individuals (Oswald et al., 2004), which help to maintain physical and mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), as well as individual well-being (Caspi et al., 2006).

Research Implications

In addition to clinical implications, researchers can clinically explore the predictive relationship between ineffective arguing and loneliness, above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors, to discover the reasons for this association (or lack thereof) in particular types of relationships. One possibility could be to use observational studies to determine what, if anything, is missed that is not conveyed with self-report measures. Another direction for future research would be to relate the Ineffective Arguing Inventory to observations of partners' problem-solving in both romantic relationships (Kurdek, 1994). Another interesting research possibility would be to determine the differences between relational maintenance behaviors and ineffective arguing, and how these differences affect the relationship. Future studies can also look at whether friendships or romantic relationships are more likely to terminate in the face of conflict (hence influencing feelings of loneliness), depending on the importance of ineffective arguing. Do more friendships terminate more in the face of conflict because how one argues does not appear to be important? Or do more romantic relationships terminate in the face of conflict because ineffective arguing is very important? Based on the findings from Oswald and Clark's (2006) study and the findings from the present study, it can be speculated that romantic relationships may have higher chances of ending versus friendships.

Future work can also look at whether ineffective arguing can be taught to couples in a romantic relationship (e.g. awareness, recognition, understanding of what

it is and how it affects individuals) and what types of interventions can help to lower the use of ineffective arguing. Also, future studies can look at the use of these intervention techniques and see whether or not any gains can be made in lowering experiences of loneliness after the implementation of interventions.

Other researchers can also replicate or further explore the findings from the present study with a more culturally diverse population. Demographics of the current study included a majority of White/Caucasian, Midwestern, female, and heterosexual participants. Future researchers can look at other participants of different races and ethnicities, such as African American/Black, Native American/American Indian, Latino(a)/Hispanic, and Asian American/Asian Canadian, etc. Research in the area indicates a difference in the use of relational maintenance behaviors among individuals from individualistic and collectivist cultures (Baptist et al., 2012). More specifically, Baptist's findings suggested that there are sex differences in the use of relational maintenance behaviors (with females using more than males) in an individualist culture, whereas there are not many differences in use of relational maintenance behaviors for males and females in the collectivist culture. Their findings also suggest that a collectivist culture may use more relational maintenance strategies in general than an individualistic culture because interpersonal relationships play an important role in the lives of individuals from collectivist cultures (Baptist et al., 2012). Again, there is a lack of empirical evidence in general describing how ineffective arguing affects experiences loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors, and consequently there is a significant lack of understanding regarding how the issues play out across cultures.

Future research can also incorporate more individuals who identify as a sexual minority. According to Kurdek (1994), the members of the gay and lesbian couples did not differ in levels of ineffective arguing compared to the heterosexual couples. Levels of relational satisfaction and dissolution also did not differ. There appears to be little empirical evidence demonstrating how relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness differ, or are similar, for non-heterosexual samples. Looking at this type of sample can add important findings and knowledge to the counseling profession.

In addition to using a more diverse sample of participants to replicate or further explore the current findings of the present study, future researchers can use or create more multiculturally acceptable measures of relational maintenance behaviors, ineffective arguing, and loneliness. It would be interesting to see if there are any changes in findings and how these changes are different from the existing literature.

Looking at the predictive relationship of ineffective arguing with feelings of loneliness, above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors, with diverse cultural groups in general can have additional benefits to the existing literature. Future findings can add and therefore increase the current knowledge that exists regarding relational maintenance strategies, ineffective arguing, and loneliness and how these play out in romantic relationships and friendships. Appropriate and effective intervention techniques can be created and implemented to maintain and sustain more healthy and satisfying relationships (more so for romantic relationships than friendships). More information can be discovered and more intervention strategies can be created and

implemented with individuals who lack social skills and/or appropriate friendship maintenance behaviors, hopefully alleviating any experiences of loneliness.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is the generalizability of the results to diverse populations of individuals. A majority of the participants of the present study identified as White/Caucasian, as female, as Midwesterners, and as heterosexual. The present findings can only be generalized to these populations. Sample limitations were further constrained because measures were distributed via social media (i.e. Facebook) and Amazon Turk, thus limiting individuals who could complete the questionnaires and leading to a possible self-selection bias.

In addition to sampling issues, the study is also limited by the measures used. Although the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI; Kurdek, 1994) and the Friendship Maintenance Scale (Oswald et al., 2004) both have satisfactory reliability alphas, there has been very little use of these measures in the literature. The lack of use of these measures can limit the understanding of their generalizability across populations and situations. Kurdek (1994) has also argued that the IAI would benefit from further construct validation by comparing self-reports on the IAI to observational reports of individual problem-solving strategies. The IAI (Kurdek, 1994) has not been used with friendships and other types of relationships besides romantic relationships. Future applications of the IAI (Kurdek, 1994) to other types of groups could be very beneficial to add to the literature.

How participants were divided into the RPG and the FG were put into limits. The RPG included married and non-married and dating individuals, whereas the FG

included a closest relationship to a friend or relative. One may assume that dating relationships and marriages are both similar and different in their own ways. One may also assume that a friendship with a friend versus a relative is also different (and yet similar on other aspects). The types of conflict that individuals engage in in the different relationships may not look the same, and therefore the IAI (Kurdek, 1994) may not be applicable to all types of relationships. Future research can look into these differences and similarities and determine how the differences affect or change the current results.

Finally, the measures used for this study were based on self-reports from participants. Self-reports can be impacted by errors in individuals' own self-perceptions, as well as variables such as mood, hunger levels, and the amount of sleep received the night before. Self-report measures can also be vulnerable to social desirability. Additionally, there could have been a chance that the participants of the present study were able to detect what was being looked at and answered in a way they thought would be acceptable. We did not include any measures to protect against social desirability.

Conclusions

The present study has two hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a large inverse relationship between relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness, for both romantic relationships and friendships. Pearson Correlations did not support this hypothesis, and only demonstrated a moderate relationship between relational maintenance behaviors and experiences of loneliness. These results tend to be consistent with the empirical evidence that currently exists within the literature (Hensen

et al., 2004). Hypothesis 2 stated that ineffective arguing would add predictive ability to the experiences of loneliness above and beyond relational maintenance behaviors.

Multiple regression analyses indicated significant results for the romantic partner group but not for the friendship group, which was unexpected.

Due to lack of empirical research on the relationship between ineffective arguing and loneliness, it is difficult to determine the reason for ineffective arguing having predictive abilities for the romantic partner group and not for the friendship group. This finding would be something of future interest to look into.

The present findings, especially hypothesis 2, offer new directions for mental health practitioners when working with couples who are experiencing distress in their romantic relationship due to conflict resolution strategies, and when working with individuals who are experiencing difficulties in their interpersonal relationships. Clinicians may need to carefully assess couples in distress to determine if the distress is predominately associated with relationship maintenance strategies, ineffective arguing strategies, or both. Clinicians may also need to focus more on developing and building friendship maintenance strategies in individuals who experience deficits in social skills. For individuals who experience problems with conflict skills, clinicians may need to focus their attention on building effective arguing techniques. Focusing and improving both relational maintenance skills and effective conflict strategies in individuals, may help to prevent and alleviate experiences of loneliness which, as previously noted, have effects on people's mental health (Russell et al., 1984, and Weeks et al., 1980) as well as their physical health (Caspi et al., 2006).

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