

The Discrepancy Between Expectations and Reality: Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Romantic relationships are a prevalent component of human experience. There have been many theories formulated concerning the distinct qualities that lead to satisfaction in relationship satisfaction (commitment, the ability to resolve conflict, etc.). However, it may be that satisfaction is determined not just by the absolute levels of these qualities, but also by the degree to which partners' expectations for relationship are met by their actual experiences—relationships will be satisfying for those individuals whose expectations are met, while in contrast, people whose relationships are incongruent with their expectations are going to feel dissatisfied. The present study examines the discrepancy between expectations of a romantic relationship and the reality experienced by participants in their current relationship. Participants will complete three questionnaires; one to measure actual experiences in relationships, one to measure expectations of relationships, and one to measure overall relationship satisfaction. To measure actual experiences, participants will be asked to rate their satisfaction with eight factors previously found to be integral to romantic relationships: maintenance behaviors, commitment, quality of communication, conflict resolution, emotional self-disclosure, affection, relational certainty/security, role within the relationship, and equity. Participants will also complete a similar questionnaire that will assess their expectations on each of the above factors. To measure overall relationship satisfaction, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) will be employed. We predict that analyses will reveal that the larger the discrepancy between expectations and reality, the lower the levels of relationship satisfaction.

The Discrepancy Between Expectations and Reality: Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships

Personal relationships are central to being human, and forming these relationships is an innate and biological component of human behavior (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). People have been interested in the topic of relationships for thousands of years, but the formal study of personal relationships is a fairly recent trend. Research on interpersonal relationships is becoming more important because it is found in all aspects of human life and has been shown to have a great impact on the way people live. In fact, research has been found to show that good, healthy relationships are associated with better mental and physical health (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011).

As mentioned previously, romantic relationships are a prevalent component of human experience. Therefore, there have been many theories formulated concerning the many distinct areas that comprise the romantic relationship and how specific factors present in the relationship relate to and predict overall relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is defined as an interpersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one's partner and attraction to the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). According to interdependence theory, people want to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs in a relationship. People mentally account for rewards and costs so they can evaluate the outcome of their relationship as either positive or negative. When rewards outweigh the costs, the outcome is positive; on the contrary, when costs outweigh the rewards, the outcome is negative. This mental note of knowing whether the relationship has a positive or negative outcome is not always enough to satisfy people, because people often have prior expectations of what they believe the relationship should be like. For

example, some people expect highly rewarding relationships, so outcomes have to be particularly positive for them to be satisfied. To account for these expectations in the relationship, the concept of comparison levels is included in the interdependence theory. The comparison level involves the expectations of the kinds of outcomes a person expects to receive in a relationship. This expectation is based on the person's past relationship experiences and through personal observations of other people's relationships (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011).

Previous research on the topic of relationship satisfaction has focused on various components that have been shown to be significant indicators of relationship satisfaction. The majority of behaviors used to maintain relationships are prosocial, which help promote relational closeness, trust, and liking in the relationship. Five primary prosocial maintenance strategies are positivity, openness, assurances, social networking, and task sharing. Research suggests that relationships that contain high levels of prosocial maintenance strategies tend to be stable and committed, and people appear to be more satisfied within their relationship (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). Commitment is enhanced when individuals experience relationship satisfaction, and is increased when individuals invest important or numerous resources in the relationship. One such resource is the amount of time that the partners have devoted to the relationship (Sacher & Fine, 1996). This leads into the quality of communication between two people in a relationship. Communication is the substance of relationships, without it there is no relationship (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). Therefore, the quality of communication is important in determining the outcome of the relationship. When there is poor communication and conflicts arise, the way in which a couple handles the conflict is key. A conflict is a disagreement between two interdependent people (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). While conflicts are most commonly perceived as negative, it is a normal part of many close relationships. Gottman's

(1979, 1994) research shows that satisfied couples are more likely to discuss issues of disagreement, whereas dissatisfied couples are likely to minimize or avoid conflict. The way partners manage conflict is a better predictor of relationship satisfaction, than the experience of the conflict itself (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011).

Relationship satisfaction can also be measured by the emotional self-disclosure within a relationship. Self-disclosure is the process of telling another about one's intimate feelings, attitudes, and experience (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Communicating personal information about one's self is important in relationship satisfaction, but it is also important for an individual to communicate their feelings about their partner through affectionate communication. Affectionate communication is behavior that portrays feelings of fondness and positive regard to another (Floyd, 2006). Affection is a basic human need and it is met through interpersonal interaction and in forming mutually supportive relationships (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). Affection is a key to establishing relationships and keeping them close; the absence of it can propel the relationship into a negative state.

In addition to the open communication described above, relationship satisfaction can be measured by relational-certainty/security. People generally dislike uncertainty and high levels of uncertainty often lead to dissatisfaction in relationships (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). As a result, relational certainty is shown to be beneficial in relationships, leading to enhanced satisfaction. Relational security can be attributed to the role a person plays in the relationship; being comfortable in that role has been shown to have an effect on satisfaction. Men who conform to society's idea of masculine norms were more strongly associated with women's relationship satisfaction, than men's relationship satisfaction (Burn, 2005). Historically men were the breadwinners and protectors of the family, while women were responsible for household

chores and child-rearing. Although these roles have changed, women still seem to prefer men who exhibit parts of these masculine norms. Due to this, the roles that men and women play in a romantic relationship have not always been equitable. However, as gender roles have begun to shift, research has shown that equity has become a contributing factor in relationship satisfaction. Equity theory focuses on determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to both relational partners. Equity is measured by comparing the ratio of contributions and benefits for each person (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). For example, partners do not have to receive equal benefits (e.g., receiving the same amount of love and care) or make equal contributions (e.g., investing the same amount of time and effort) as long as the ratio between these benefits and contributions is similar. Individuals who perceived their relationships to be equitable reported being happier and more content than those who perceived their dating relationships to be inequitable (Walster, Walster & Traupmann, 1978). Couples who experienced equity also reported more commitment, more self-disclosure, and more assurances (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011).

Expectations are formulated across each of the components above, and have been shown to be particularly important in predicting romantic relationship satisfaction. In previous literature, it has been found that the expectations one holds, whether of the relationship or of one's partner, can often differ in terms of bias and accuracy. When one has biased expectations, they see their relationship and partner through rose colored glasses and expect that their partner will meet their very high standards. On the other hand, accurate expectations are held by those who view life with a more realistic lens and assume that their expectations will align with their real life experiences of the relationship. Kenny & Acitelli (2001) lay the claim that expectations that are accurate "enable perceivers to correctly evaluate their partners' needs and anticipate their

behaviors, thus fostering a sense of control, predictability, and security” and ultimately leading to more harmonious interactions and higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, understanding the reality of one’s partner is a key to enduring satisfaction, as bias may “leave intimates vulnerable to dashed hopes and expectations” (Murray & Griffin, 1996). Yet, other researchers counter such arguments and assert that high expectations are a “critical feature of satisfying dating and even marital relationships”, as they appear to function as buffers and entrust “a sense of security” in the midst of relational uncertainty (Murray, Homes & Griffin, 1996). Thus, literature on the role of expectations on relationship satisfaction has been shown to be vast and incongruous, and is in need of further refinement.

Despite its inconsistencies, we are able to see a pattern emerge in previous literature; all studies thus far have determined that it is the nature of the expectation (whether biased or accurate) that is predictive of relationship satisfaction. However, we seek to demonstrate that such studies are limited in their conclusions, and that it is not the nature of the expectations, per se, that determines whether a partner is satisfied in the relationship. Rather, it is the size of the discrepancy, or the difference, between expectations and realistic experiences that is ultimately predictive of relationship satisfaction. This is not to say that expectations play no role, but rather that it is the nature of the expectation (whether it is accurate or biased) that influences and predicts the size of this discrepancy. As a general rule, accurate expectations will lead to smaller discrepancies between expectations and reality, while biased expectations will lead to larger discrepancies. Thus, the reason for why previous conclusions have been so contradictory is that such studies did not recognize that it was the discrepancy, and not expectations alone, that predicts relationship satisfaction. Therefore, introducing discrepancy as a construct can help to alleviate much of the confusion in existing literature.

Consequently, we have concluded that it is not necessarily high expectations alone, but the fact that such biased expectations are more likely to lead to a larger discrepancy between those expectations and reality that has predictive power. It is within that discrepancy gap that the seeds of discontent are sown. However, we believe that there may be certain domains in which discrepancy may be more tolerable than others, and we will investigate the correlation of discrepancy size in each domain with relationship satisfaction separately.

Our hypotheses are two-fold. First, we predict the more positively one experiences the factors of maintenance behaviors, commitment, quality of communication, conflict resolution, emotional self-disclosure, affection, relational certainty/security, role within the relationship, and equity, the higher their relationship satisfaction levels will be. Lastly, we propose that the larger the discrepancy between expectations and reality, the lower the levels of relationship satisfaction.

Methods

Participants

One hundred and twenty-nine participants were obtained using an online questionnaire posted on an approved psychological website. The age range of the participants was 18 to 62 years of age, with a mean age of 25. Participant's gender was 86% female and 14% male; two participants did not indicate their sex. One stipulation for inclusion in the study was that participants had to be in a monogamous, romantic relationship for three months or longer. There were varying relationship lengths: 15% of participants were in a relationship of 3-6 months, 16% were in a relationship of 6-12 months, 20% were in a relationship were in a relationship for 1-2 years, and 49% were in a relationship for 2 or more years.

Procedure

Participants accessed our questionnaire through an approved online psychological website and a social media website, where they were able to review the conditions for participation and proceed directly from their personal computer. Before starting the survey, participants encountered an informed consent form. The continuation of the questionnaire signified consent. Participants were then presented with the demographics section; following it were each of the three questionnaires, in randomized order. Upon the completion of all questionnaire sections, participants were debriefed.

Materials

Three questionnaires were used within this study; one to measure realistic experiences, one to measure expectations, and one to measure overall relationship satisfaction. On the realistic experiences questionnaire, each component* was measured individually with five questions, resulting in a total of 45 questions. Refer to appendix three for the realistic experiences questionnaire. On the expectations questionnaire, each component* was measured individually with five questions, resulting in a total of 45 questions. Refer to appendix four for the expectations questionnaire. To measure relationship satisfaction, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) developed by Hendrick (1988) was employed. Refer to appendix five for the scale. A demographics section gathered information on age, biological sex, length of the current relationship, marital status, proximity to partner, and sexual orientation. Each of these sections was given in a randomized order so that previous exposure to one section had no effect on the

responses given in another. A breakdown of the questions for each factor is shown in appendix seven and appendix eight.

* maintenance behaviors, commitment, quality of communication, conflict resolution, self-disclosure, affection, relational certainty/security, role within the relationship, and equity

Results

Participants rated their satisfaction within their romantic relationship using a previously adapted Relationship Assessment Scale. This RAS contained seven items on a 0-4 Likert scale. The scale's reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .86. This indicates that the seven items contained in the scale are highly related to each other. After reverse scoring the appropriate items, a mean score for satisfaction was computed by averaging participant's responses. High scores indicate high relationship satisfaction, while low scores indicate low relationship satisfaction.

Participants also rated their current relationship experiences across nine components previously found to be integral to relationship satisfaction. Each component was analyzed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. We required that reliability of the component be above .7 in both our current relationship and expected relationship scales to merit inclusion in our analysis. Due to reliability scores below .7 in one or more of our scales, our factors of self-disclosure, equity, commitment, maintenance behaviors, and role in the relationship were excluded in our data analysis. However, we had four factors that were included in our data analysis. The reliability for the component of affection in our current relationship scale was .73; for relational certainty/security, $\alpha = .74$; for quality of communication, $\alpha = .78$; for conflict resolution, $\alpha = .71$. This shows that the items that assessed each of these components were highly

related to each other and are accurate assessments of that factor within the current relationship. A mean current relationship score was computed for each of these four components.

Participants also rated their expectations of relationships across the nine integral components. As mentioned before, our factors of self-disclosure, equity, commitment, maintenance behaviors, and role in the relationship were excluded in our data analysis due to reliability scores below .7 in one or both of our relationship scales. However, in our expectations scale, the reliability for the component of affection was .79; for relational certainty/security, $\alpha = .77$; for quality of communication, $\alpha = .83$; for conflict resolution, $\alpha = .77$. A mean expectations score was again computed for each of these four components.

We first hypothesized that the more positively one experiences the components of affection, relational certainty/security, quality of communication, and conflict resolution, the higher their levels of relationship satisfaction will be. This hypothesis was confirmed with our results. Individually each of our four factors was significantly positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. For affection, $R = .463$; for relational certainty, $R = .767$; for quality of communication, $R = .634$; for conflict resolution, $R = .594$. All of these correlations were significant at the .01 level. Additionally, a scale was computed which combined the mean scores on each of our four factors for the current relationship questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .85. The analysis revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between the overall experience of these factors and relationship satisfaction, $R = .738$, $p < .01$. Thus, people who positively experienced these factors in their current relationship showed higher relationship satisfaction levels.

In our study, we were also interested in how the discrepancy between expectations and current relationship experiences correlated with relationship satisfaction. In our analysis, discrepancy was computed by taking the absolute value of the mean current relationship score minus (-) the mean expected relationship score. This absolute value represents the size of the difference between a participant's expectation of a relationship and what they experience within their current relationship. We expected that the larger the discrepancy, or difference, between expectations and current experience, the less satisfied the participant would be with their romantic relationship. Our hypothesis was confirmed.

The scores from each of the four relationship components were combined to create an overall relationship functioning score for both the current and expected relationship scales. This score was formed by taking the absolute value of the current – expected relationship scores. Thus, relationship functioning was measured in terms of how much current experience deviated from expectations. This new scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .89. As Figure 1 shows, a significant negative correlation was found between overall relationship functioning and our RAS scale, $R = -.67$. This demonstrates that the lower the discrepancy between expectations and actual relationship experience across the combined factors, the more satisfied participants were with their relationship.

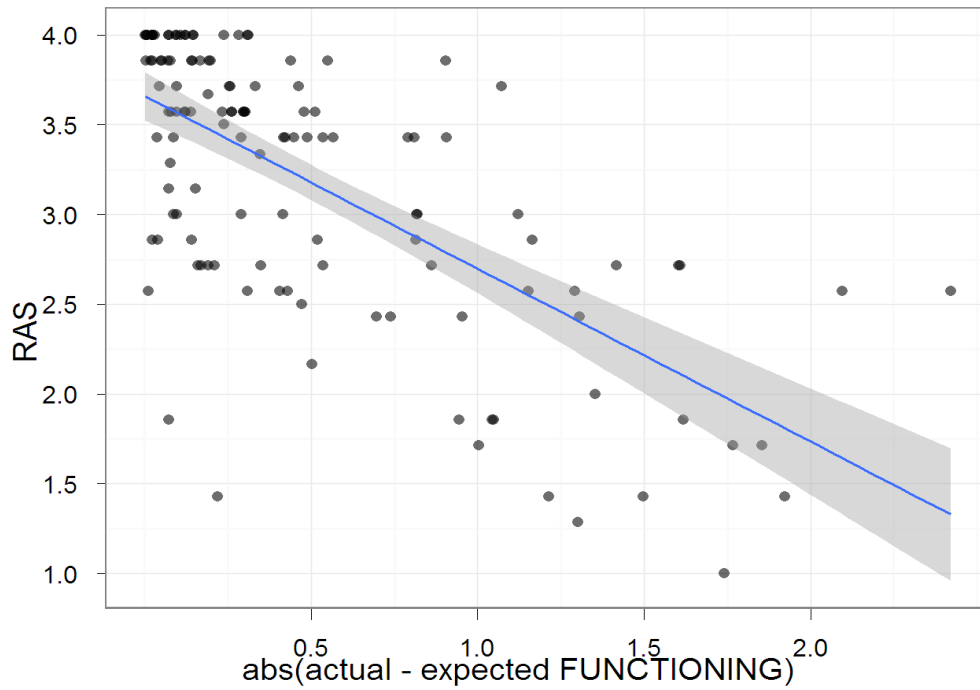


Figure 1. Pearson's correlation between overall relationship functioning and the RAS scale.

Discrepancy between expectations and reality was then correlated with relationship satisfaction on each of our four components. As Figure 2 shows, discrepancy between expectations and reality on the component of affection was significantly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, such that the higher the discrepancy one experienced, the lower the level of relationship satisfaction, $R = -.401, p < .001$.

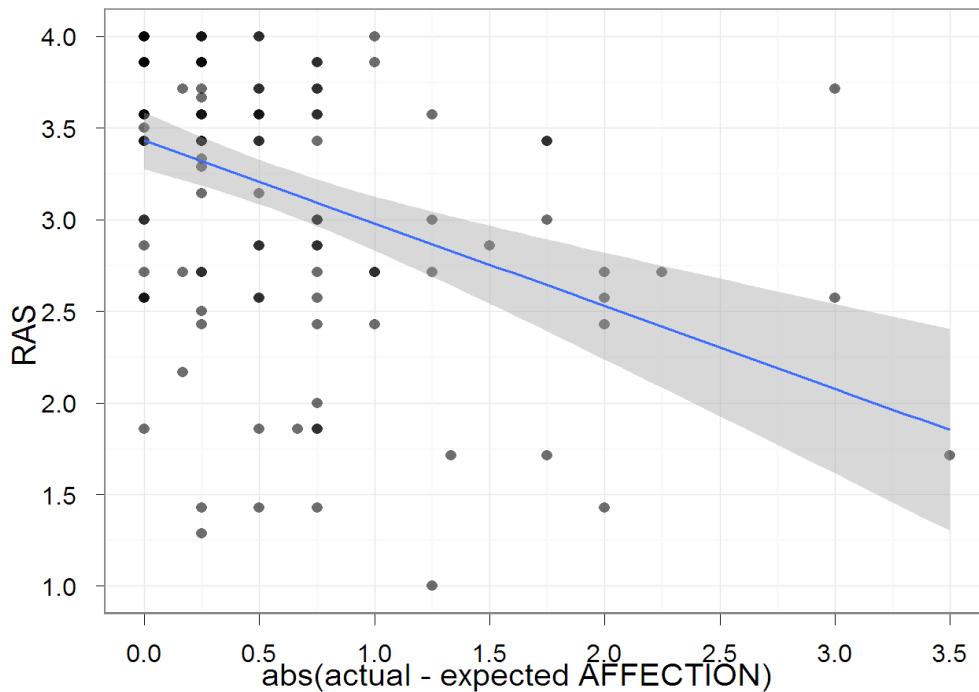


Figure 2. Pearson's correlation between the discrepancy in affection and the RAS scale.

Figure 3 shows that there was a significant negative correlation found between discrepancy and relationship satisfaction in terms of the component of relational certainty/security, $R = -.703$, $p < .001$. This is to say that the more discrepancy one experienced between expectations and reality on this component, the less satisfied they were in their romantic relationship. Similarly, Figures 4 and 5 show the same pattern, such that the more discrepancy that one has between expectations and reality on the components of quality of communication and conflict resolution, the lower their levels of satisfaction, $R = -.581$, $p < .001$ and $R = -.481$, $p < .001$ respectively. Results on each component were significant at the $p < .001$ level.

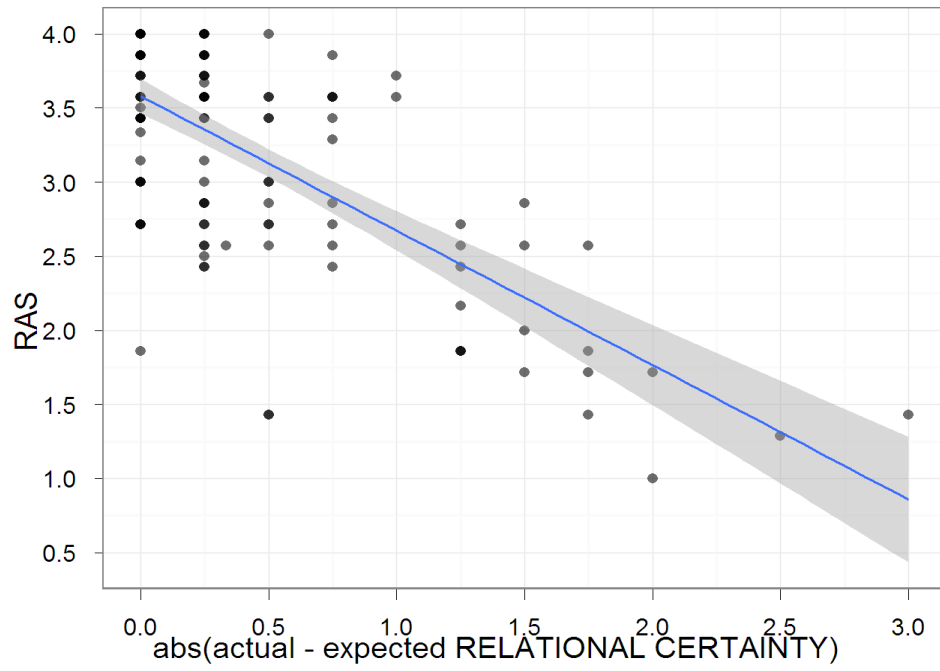


Figure 3. Pearson's correlation between the discrepancy in relational certainty and the RAS scale.

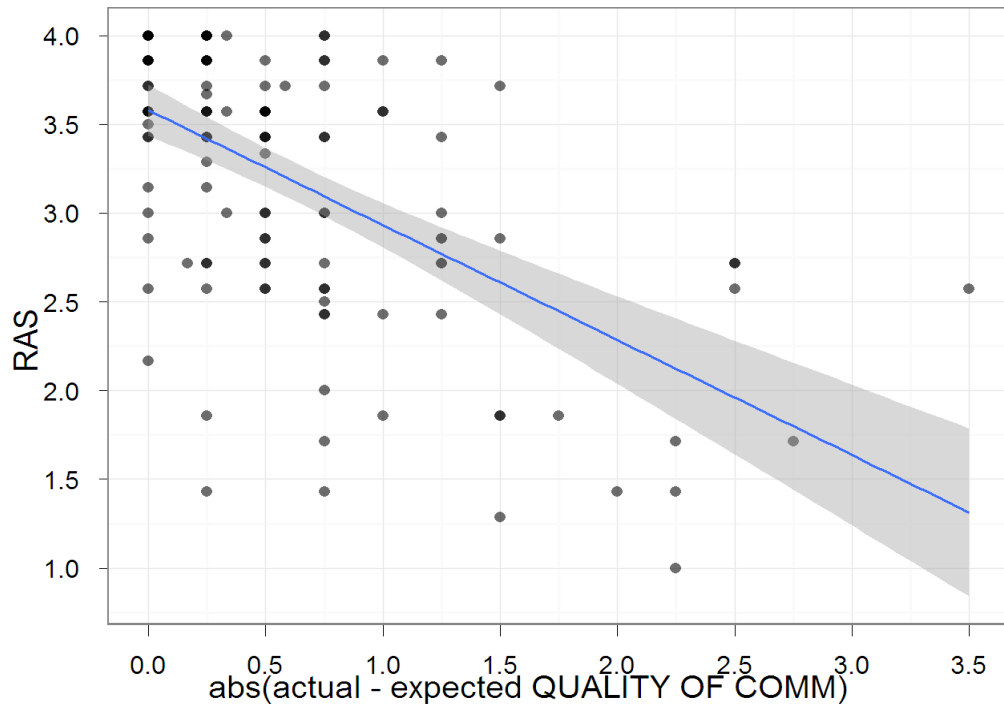


Figure 4. Pearson's correlation between the discrepancy in quality of communication and the RAS scale.

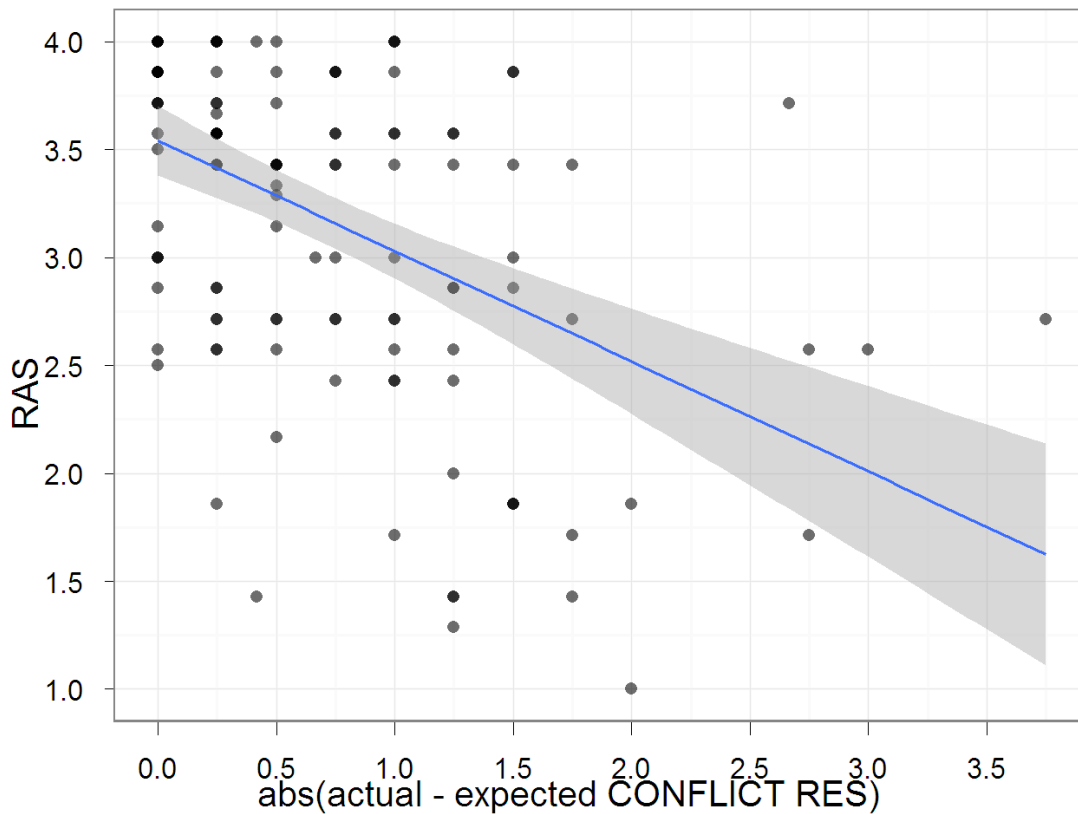


Figure 5.

Figure 5. Pearson's correlation between the discrepancy in conflict resolution and the RAS scale.

To check and see if there were differences between men and women, we ran a linear regression model to predict RAS from gender and overall relational functioning. There was a main effect for functioning, $\beta = -1.01$, $p = .001$. Also, there was a significant interaction $\beta = .67$, $p < .001$. Additionally, our analysis indicated an adjusted R squared value of .45, which means that if you know both functioning and gender, you can predict 45% of a participant's relationship satisfaction. As you can see in Figure 6, the slopes do differ between men and women, indicating that higher levels of discrepancy experienced between expectations and reality had more of an

effect on women's relationship satisfaction than men's. For women, as discrepancy increased, relationship satisfaction quickly decreased. For men, the decrease in satisfaction experienced as discrepancy increased was much less severe. Furthermore, as you can see, gender differences did differ dependent on the discrepancy level, as there were big differences in high discrepancy levels, but those differences were much smaller in levels of low discrepancy. It should be noted that there was an even gender distribution among the various relationship lengths, indicating the length of the relationship is not a confounding variable in these results.

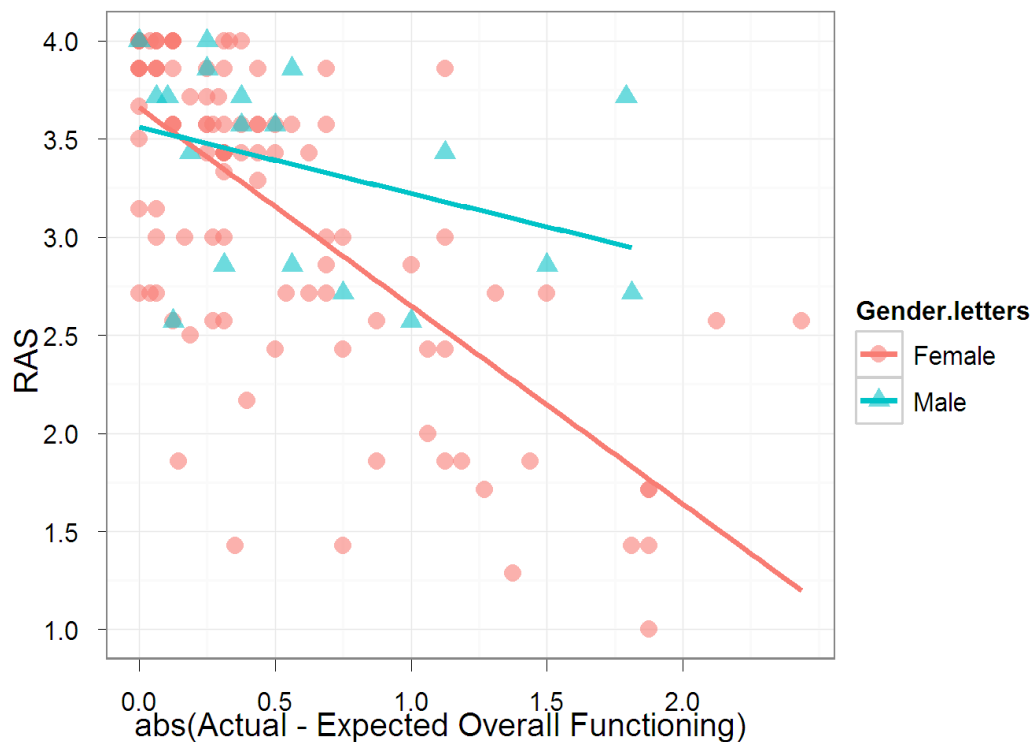


Figure 6. Correlations between overall relationship functioning and the RAS scale by gender.

We found that there was a positive correlation between overall relationship functioning and relationship satisfaction. This is to say that participants whose relationship experiences matched their expectations on these components had higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Participants whose actual relationship experiences exceeded their expectations were the most

satisfied, while participants whose expectations exceeded their actual experiences were the least satisfied. These relationships are indicated in Figure 7.

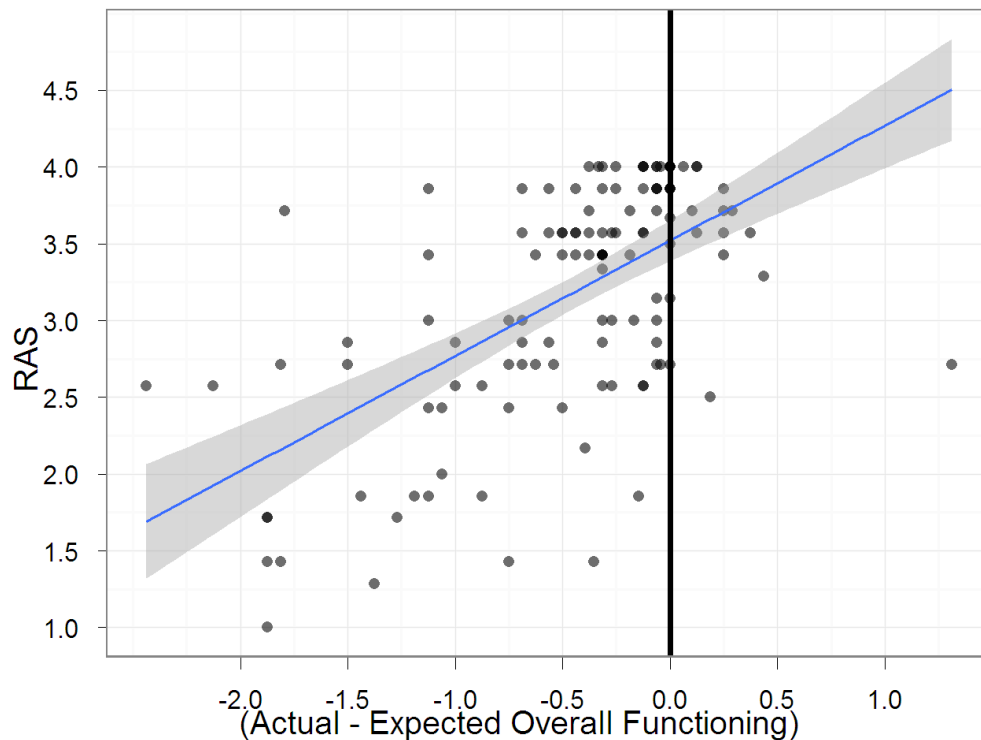


Figure 7. Pearson's correlation between experience and expectation on relationship components and relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

Our first hypothesis was partially supported in our study. We predicted that the more positively one experiences the factors of maintenance behaviors, commitment, quality of communication, conflict resolution, emotional self-disclosure, affection, relational certainty/security, role within the relationship, and equity, the higher their relationship satisfaction levels will be. Our results were consistent with our hypothesis, but only partially. Due to low Cronbach's alphas in five of our nine factors, we were not able to draw conclusions

on the components of commitment, self-disclosure, role within the relationship, maintenance behaviors, or equity that were originally included in our study. We are not saying that these factors no longer play a role in relationship satisfaction, but based on our results, the questions we used to measure these factors were not inter-related enough to comprise a true measure of that component. However, we did find that the more positively one experiences the factors of quality of communication, conflict resolution, affection, and relational certainty/security, the higher their levels of relationship satisfaction.

According to our results, good quality of communication between romantic partners contributed to their relationship satisfaction. In our study, we measured quality of communication by phrases such as “shares open communication”, “is a good listener”, and “has enjoyable interactions”. Participants who said that they or their partner practiced these methods experienced positive communication and were more satisfied in their relationship than couples who did not. Even when couples have good communication, conflicts in a relationship are often inevitable. While conflicts are most commonly perceived as negative, it is a normal part of many close relationships (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). According to John Gottman (1979, 1994), a well-renowned relationship expert, satisfied couples are more likely to discuss issues of disagreement, whereas dissatisfied couples are likely to minimize or avoid conflict. The way partners manage conflict is a good predictor of relationship satisfaction (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). To measure conflict resolution, we used phrases such as “working together to solve conflicts” and “willing to compromise”. Participants who said that they or their partner practiced these methods experienced positive conflict resolution and as a result were more satisfied in their relationship.

Another factor we used to measure relationship satisfaction was affection. Affection is a basic human need and is key in keeping relational partners close (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). We measured affection by phrases such as “happy with the amount of physical affection”, “regular compliments”, and “feels cared for”. Participants who said that they or their partner practiced these methods experienced positive affection and consequently were more satisfied in their relationship. Another measure contributing to relationship satisfaction was a couple’s relational certainty/security. We measured this by phrases such as “seeing a future together”, “wanting the relationship to last”, and “devoting time and effort”. Participants who said that they or their partner practiced these methods experienced positive relational certainty/security and as a result were more satisfied in their relationship.

Our second hypothesis was also supported in our study. We expected that the larger the discrepancy between expectations and reality, the lower the levels of relationship satisfaction. Because the issue of discrepancy is a new avenue in research, we have been unable to find previous literature that explains the role of discrepancy in romantic relationships. Because of this, we find our study to be particularly interesting in this realm, as it provides a good basis upon which this concept can be studied further. Although research has explored the role that the nature of the expectation (whether accurate or biased) has played in relationship satisfaction, it has yet to connect these findings to other significant constructs that play a role in determining satisfaction levels. We believe discrepancy to be one of these constructs, and our results are consistent in demonstrating that discrepancy between expectations and realistic experiences does indeed have a significant impact on relationship satisfaction.

In order to understand this study more fully, it would have been beneficial to be able to analyze our data for a few more weeks. We encountered some logistical problems with our data

file that did not allow us to begin analyzing our data when we had hoped, which inhibited our progress. There was a glitch in the web program that was designed to obtain our results into an excel spreadsheet, so that when we began labeling the columns depicting each question, we found that the data was out of order. This caused our data to be skewed when we began our data analysis. We had to take the time to correct the data file using the process of trial and error. To figure out where the questions lined up in the excel sheet, we had to take the survey 97 times, submitting it one question at a time. This allowed us to find the columns that aligned with each question and correctly re-label everything in our SPSS data file. After all of this was completed, we then were able to begin our analyses.

While the results of our study are somewhat limited, our data can be interpreted in multiple different ways which would provide an opportunity for further research on this topic. We chose to use the absolute value of the discrepancy in analyzing our data. The absolute value tells us the size of the discrepancy between expectations and reality, but it does not tell us whether the direction is positive or negative. Thus, in our study we were unable to examine how the direction of the bias mattered. As you saw in Figure 7, there are some minute differences in relationship satisfaction, depending on whether the participant was negatively or positively biased in their expectations. We chose to use an absolute value because the bias was overall in a negative direction for almost all of our participants, so the differences would have been small, but further exploration might uncover some alternate interpretations.

In future research, it would be interesting to examine how the factors in our demographics section, such as age, length of relationship, and proximity to partner, would correlate with relationship satisfaction. Intuitively we have a sense that such factors would have an influence on one's relationship satisfaction, and thus it would be interesting to test these

intuitions with empirical data. In our current study, we were unable to assign a value to these factors, which made it difficult to definitely evaluate their influence on satisfaction levels. Gender would also be an important construct to study, as our research was limited due to an unequal gender distribution. Our preliminary results suggest that discrepancy in relation to relationship satisfaction does indeed have differing patterns based on gender. Therefore, not only should we examine how discrepancy relates to satisfaction, but it is of utmost importance that we look at how gender itself relates to both discrepancy and satisfaction levels.

As society continues to shift towards the acceptance of alternative choices, the issue of sexual orientation becomes increasingly important to study in terms of the romantic relationship. Because of a lack of participants who indicated that they were of a non-dominant sexual orientation, we were unable to gain a clear picture as to how this specific factor influenced satisfaction levels, and how. However, this particular topic of study is essential and must be considered in all forms of future research as different sexual orientations become more prevalent.

Our study was extremely successful in its ability to fill an existing gap in literature with its focus on discrepancy. However, as with all new avenues of research, the issue of discrepancy is one that demands further study. Furthermore, the issue of discrepancy should be studied in relation to the nature of expectations in order to understand to the fullest extent the influence that both exert on a person's ultimate satisfaction within their romantic relationship. Romantic relationships have a significant impact on the way that people live, and relationships will always be a prevalent part of human experience. Because of this, it will be important to continue to study these relationships, the factors that comprise them, and what ultimately makes them successful.

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Appendix 1

*Before participants enter the survey, they will be informed that they are only eligible for participation if they are currently in a monogamous relationship of 3+ months..

Informed Consent Form

This research is being conducted by Brandi Tedder and Jessica Miller, students in the Psychology Research Course at Hanover College. The questionnaire in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the romantic relationships people form. The questionnaire is comprised of four sections and will not take longer than 20 minutes.

There are no known risks involved in being in this study, beyond those of everyday life. The information you provide during the study is completely anonymous; at no time will your name be associated with the responses you give.

For questions about the research itself, you may contact the researchers: Brandi Tedder at tedderb12@hanover.edu and Jessica Miller at millerj12@hanover.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the faculty member supervising the research, Dr. Skip Dine-Young, at youngst@hanover.edu, or the chair of Hanover College's Institutional Review Board, Dr. Bill Altermatt, at altermattw@hanover.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusing to participate or ceasing to participate at any time will involve no penalty. Please inform the researchers if you would like to receive a copy of this informed consent form.

The continuation of this questionnaire signifies consent.

[Next button]

Appendix 2

Demographics

Age: _____

Sex: male female

Length of Relationship:

- * 3-6 months
- * 6-12 months
- * 1-2 years
- * 2+ years

Proximity to partner:

- * Living with partner
- * Within 1 hour
- * 1-2 hours
- * 2-4 hours
- * 5+ hours

Sexual Orientation: heterosexual homosexual bisexual

Appendix 3

Reality Questionnaire

In my current relationship:

I do not feel comfortable disclosing what I need or want from our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am under-benefited.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel like my partner is romantically interested in me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I see a future with my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am fully committed to my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner attempts to make our interactions enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner is willing to do things with my friends or family.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner is not willing to compromise.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am confident about myself as an intimate partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel that I should be able to disclose intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I feel the same way about each other.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner displays an appropriate amount of affection towards me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner's feelings are as strong for me as mine are for them.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I do not feel my partner is committed to me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I use open communication.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am patient and forgiving of my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I work together to solve conflicts.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am happy with my role in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner sincerely reveals to me their feelings and experiences.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I expect the same standard of behavior from my partner as they expect of me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am happy with the amount of physical affection.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I do not want my relationship to last.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner is strongly motivated to devote their time and effort to our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner listens to me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel like my partner does things to maintain our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner tries to understand why I am upset.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am happy with my partner's role in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner does not contribute as much to our relationship (financially) as I do.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner compliments me often.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am strongly motivated to devote time and effort.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner often discusses our future together.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable voicing my preferences in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am not very motivated to be involved.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable letting my partner know when I am upset.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner is not dependable.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

As a whole, my partner's disclosures about our relationship are more positive than negative.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner supports me in my endeavors as much as I support them.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I do not feel cared for.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am certain my feelings for my partner will not change.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner keeps their promises

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner does not try to understand my needs.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I experience honesty from my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I are able to successfully reach conflict resolution.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner feels responsible for their part.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Appendix 4

Expectations Questionnaire

In romantic relationships, I expect:

To feel comfortable disclosing what I need or want from our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be under-benefited.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To feel like my partner is romantically interested in me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To see a future with my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be committed to my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

That my partner will attempt to make our interactions enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

That my partner will not be willing to do things with my friends or family.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to be willing to compromise.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be confident as an intimate partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be able to disclose intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I to feel the same way about each other.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to display an appropriate amount of affection towards me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner's feelings won't be as strong for me as mine are for them.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to be committed to me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

That my partner and I will not use open communication.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be patient and forgiving of my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I to work together to solve conflicts.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be unhappy with my role in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to not sincerely reveal to me their feelings and experiences.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

The same standard of behavior from my partner as they expect of me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be happy with the amount of physical affection.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My relationship to last.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to be strongly motivated to devote their time and effort to our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to listen to me.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To feel like my partner does things to maintain our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to try to understand why I am upset.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be happy with my partner's role in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be able to intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to contribute as much to our relationship (financially) as I do.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to not compliment me often.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be strongly motivated to devote time and effort.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to not discuss our future together.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To feel comfortable voicing my preferences in the relationship.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be very motivated to be involved.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To feel comfortable letting my partner know when I am upset.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to be dependable.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

As a whole, that my partner's disclosures about our relationship will be more positive than negative.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

That my partner will not support me in my endeavors as much as I support them.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To feel cared for.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To be certain that my feelings for my partner will not change.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to keep their promises.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to try to understand my needs.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

To experience honesty from my partner.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner and I will not be able to successfully reach conflict resolution.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My partner to feel responsible for their part.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Appendix 5

Relationship Assessment Scale

How well does your partner meet your needs?

Poorly Extremely Well

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Unsatisfied Extremely Satisfied

How good is your relationship compared to most?

Poor Excellent

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

Never Very Often

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

Hardly at All Completely

How much do you love your partner?

Not Much Very Much

How many problems are there in your relationship?

Very Few Very Many

Note: Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored.

Appendix 6

Debriefing Form

The study in which you just participated was designed to measure satisfaction in romantic relationships. You completed one questionnaire that measured expectations of the relationship and your current partner, while another measured your realistic experiences of that relationship and partner. In our analysis, we wish to evaluate how the discrepancy, or difference, between these measures relates to satisfaction levels reported on a third questionnaire. We believe that the larger the difference between expectations and reality, the less satisfaction one will report with the relationship.

Please do not discuss this study with other potential participants until the semester is over. If people know what we're testing before the study begins, they may respond differently, jeopardizing our results.

As soon as the results from this study are available, you can access them at [insert link here].

For questions about the research itself, you may contact the researchers: Brandi Tedder at tedderb12@hanover.edu and Jessica Miller at millerj12@hanover.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the faculty member supervising the research, Dr. Skip Dine-Young, at youngst@hanover.edu, or the chair of Hanover College's Institutional Review Board, Dr. Bill Altermatt, at altermattw@hanover.edu.

Appendix 7

Reality Questionnaire

In my current relationship:

[Self-disclosure]

1. I do not feel comfortable disclosing what I need or want from our relationship.
2. I feel that I should be able to disclose intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation.
3. My partner sincerely reveals to me their feelings and experiences.
4. I intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully.
5. As a whole, my partner's disclosures about our relationship are more positive than negative.

[Equity]

1. I am under-benefited.
2. My partner and I feel the same way about each other.
3. I expect the same standard of behavior from my partner as they expect of me.
4. My partner does not contribute as much to our relationship (financially) as I do.
5. My partner supports me in my endeavors as much as I support them.

[Affection]

1. I feel like my partner is romantically interested in me.
2. My partner displays an appropriate amount of affection towards me.
3. I am happy with the amount of physical affection.
4. My partner compliments me often.
5. I do not feel cared for.

[Relational certainty/security]

1. I see a future with my partner.
2. My partner's feelings are as strong for me as mine are for them.
3. I do not want my relationship to last.
4. I am strongly motivated to devote time and effort.
5. I am certain my feelings for my partner will not change.

[Commitment]

1. I am fully committed to my partner.
2. I do not feel my partner is committed to me.
3. My partner is strongly motivated to devote their time and effort to our relationship.
4. My partner often discusses our future together.
5. My partner keeps their promises.

[Quality of communication]

1. My partner attempts to make our interactions enjoyable.
2. My partner and I use open communication.
3. My partner listens to me.
4. I feel comfortable voicing my preferences in the relationship.

5. My partner does not understand my needs.

[Maintenance behaviors]

1. My partner is willing to do things with my friends or family.
2. I am patient and forgiving of my partner.
3. I feel like my partner does things to maintain our relationship.
4. I am not very motivated to be involved.
5. I experience honesty from my partner.

[Conflict resolution]

1. My partner is not willing to compromise.
2. My partner and I work together to solve conflicts.
3. My partner tries to understand why I am upset.
4. I feel comfortable letting my partner know when I am upset.
5. My partner and I are able to successfully reach conflict resolution.

[Role in relationship]

1. I am confident about myself as an intimate partner.
2. I am happy with my role in the relationship.
3. I am happy with my partner's role in the relationship.
4. My partner is not dependable.
5. My partner feels responsible for their part.

* One item out of each of the nine factors was phrased in such a way that they can be reversed scored.

Appendix 8

Expectations Questionnaire

In romantic relationships, I expect:

[Self-disclosure]

1. To feel comfortable disclosing what I need or want from our relationship.
2. To be able to disclose intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation.
3. My partner to not sincerely reveal to me their feelings and experiences.
4. To be able to intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully.
5. As a whole, that my partner's disclosures about our relationship will be more positive than negative.

[Equity]

1. To be under-benefited.
2. My partner and I to feel the same way about each other.
3. The same standard of behavior from my partner as they expect of me.
4. My partner to contribute as much to our relationship (financially) as I do.
5. That my partner will not support me in my endeavors as much as I support them.

[Affection]

1. To feel like my partner is romantically interested in me.
2. My partner to display an appropriate amount of affection towards me.
3. To be happy with the amount of physical affection.
4. My partner to not compliment me often.
5. To feel cared for.

[Relational certainty/security]

1. To see a future with my partner.
2. My partner's feelings won't be as strong for me as mine are for them.
3. My relationship to last.
4. To be strongly motivated to devote time and effort.
5. To be certain that my feelings for my partner will not change.

[Commitment]

1. To be committed to my partner.
2. My partner to be committed to me.
3. My partner to be strongly motivated to devote their time and effort to our relationship.
4. My partner to not discuss our future together.
5. My partner to keep their promises.

[Quality of communication]

1. That my partner will attempt to make our interactions enjoyable.
2. That my partner and I will not use open communication.
3. My partner to listen to me.
4. To feel comfortable voicing my preferences in the relationship.
5. My partner to try to understand my needs.

[Maintenance behaviors]

1. That my partner will not be willing to do things with my friends or family.
2. To be patient and forgiving of my partner.
3. To feel like my partner does things to maintain our relationship.
4. To be very motivated to be involved.
5. To experience honesty from my partner.

[Conflict resolution]

1. My partner to be willing to compromise.
2. My partner and I to work together to solve conflicts.
3. My partner to try to understand why I am upset.
4. To feel comfortable letting my partner know when I am upset.
5. My partner and I will not be able to successfully reach conflict resolution.

[Role in relationship]

1. To be confident as an intimate partner.
2. To be happy with my role in the relationship.

3. To be unhappy with my partner's role in the relationship.
4. My partner to be dependable.
5. My partner to feel responsible for their part.

* One item out of each of the nine factors was phrased in such a way that they can be reversed scored.