

This article tests three competing theories that attempt to explain the reasons for and shape and direction of the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship quality among nonmarital cohabiting couples. The data strongly support the linear model which suggests that the greater the degree of self-disclosure, the greater the degree of relationship quality the couple will achieve. The article concludes that relationship depth emerges only after the couple are able to deal openly and creatively with conflict. One of the key prerequisites for achieving the ability to creatively handle conflict seems to be that the couple must have a high level of commitment to working on the relationship and possess the necessary communication and problem-solving skills that permit the couple to change and grow.

SELF-DISCLOSURE AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY A Study Among Nonmarital Cohabiting Couples

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The late Sidney Jourard will no doubt be remembered for his pioneering research on self-disclosure. Perhaps his legacy is the vast interest he has stimulated in continuing this research. In a recent monograph on self-disclosure by Chelune et al. (1979), over a thousand publications on self-

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disclosure are cited in the bibliography of research published between 1970-1978. Despite this vast interest in studying self-disclosure, the number of unanswered questions seems almost endless.

Self-disclosure is defined by Jourard (1971) as "the act of revealing personal information to others." Gilbert (1976) notes that little is known about the way in which self-disclosure affects the development of intimacy. Furthermore, she notes that little is known about the relationship between intimacy and stability. Gilbert contends that intimacy and stability may be inversely related (Gilbert, 1976: 226). She defines intimacy as a deep form of acceptance of the other, as well as a commitment to the relationship (Gilbert, 1976: 221).

The relationship between self-disclosure and marital satisfaction was examined by Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980), who tested three competing theoretical models (the linear model, the curvilinear model, and the social desirability model) and found empirical support for only the linear model. They treated marital satisfaction as a unidimensional concept, although they did not specifically examine the issue of dimensionality and how self-disclosure might affect different dimensions of marital satisfaction in uniquely different ways. Some dimensions of marital satisfaction may have a curvilinear relationship to self-disclosure, while other dimensions may have a linear relationship. This line of reasoning is consistent with Gilbert's (1976) contention that satisfaction in a marital relationship seems strongly related to maintenance of a safe, secure relationship that is harmonious and free of conflict. Gilbert argues, as do others

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(e.g., Mace, 1967), that intimacy and relationship depth may be inversely related to needs for safety.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the body of empirical literature on self-disclosure and relationship quality by examining data on nonmarital cohabiting couples, contrasting the same three models that Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980) examined with their sample of married couples, and also to contribute to the literature on dyadic adjustment and relationship quality by (1) focusing on data from a sample of unmarried cohabiting couples and (2) analytically distinguishing between different dimensions of relationship quality.

CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEORETICAL MODELS

SELF-DISCLOSURE

The construct of self-disclosure is defined by Jourard (1971) as an act "of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you." Cosby (1973: 73) suggests that the scope of empirical inquiry about self-revelations has been limited to disclosures that are communicated verbally from one person to another. Following this line of reasoning to sharpen the conceptual focus of self-disclosures, Cosby (1973: 73) defines self-disclosure "as any information about himself which Person A communicates verbally to Person B." Chelune et al. (1979) list five major components of self-disclosure: (1) breadth of personal information disclosed, (2) degree of intimacy of the information revealed, (3) rate of disclosure, (4) affective manner of presentation, and (5) self-disclosure flexibility.

RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

The construct of relationship quality was suggested by Klein (cited in Spanier and Cole, 1976) as a term to be used to replace semantically ambiguous concepts such as marital

adjustment, marital satisfaction, and marital happiness. Lewis and Spanier (1979: 269) use

the concept of marital quality to encompass the entire range of concepts (i.e., marital satisfaction, marital happiness, role strain and conflict, couple communication, marital integration, marital adaptability, and marital adjustment, etc.) which have been used as the traditional dependent variables in marriage research.

They note further that

what these concepts have in common is that they represent qualitative dimensions and evaluations of the marital relationship. At an empirical level, they are highly intercorrelated. Marital quality is thus defined as a subjective evaluation of a married couple's relationship. The range of evaluations constitutes a continuum reflecting numerous characteristics of marital interaction and marital functioning. High marital quality, therefore, is associated with good judgment, adequate communication, a high level of marital happiness, integration, and a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship.

Spanier (1976) notes that relationship quality can be assessed for nonmarital cohabiting couples and married couples. Following this line of reasoning, relationship quality is assumed to possess common adjustment processes that all cohabiting couples will have to work out regardless of whether they are married or unmarried.

The literature on marital quality contains support for all the dimensions identified by Lewis and Spanier (1979). However, when one examines strength of support, the variables that have received the clearest support are: (1) communication styles (Cromwell and Olson, 1975; Miller 1975; Bienvenu, 1970; Figley, 1973; Dean and Lucas, 1978, 1979); (2) commitment (Johnson, 1968; Dean and Spanier, 1974; Dean and Lucas, 1979; Lewis et al., 1976; Cole, 1973; Spanier, 1976); and (3) dyadic consensus (Spanier

and Cole, 1976; Spanier, 1976; Booth and Welch, 1978; Kerckhoff, 1972; Byrne and Blaylock, 1963; Larson, 1974). Therefore, relationship quality is conceptualized as containing the following three dimensions: (1) communication style, (2) relationship commitment, and (3) dyadic consensus.

Communication Style

Bienvenu (1970) found several elements of communication that significantly differentiate between good and poor communication in couples, with the key dimension being the couple's communication style. Several researchers (e.g., Miller et al., 1975) have documented the importance of communication styles in assessing the quality of marital relationships. Clinical researchers and family therapists (Satir, 1964; Bateson et al., 1963; Watzlawick et al., 1967; Lewis et al., 1976; Beavers, 1977; Haley, 1964) have found communication patterns and styles to be significant factors that discriminate between functional and dysfunctional families. In essence, research has found competence in communication styles to be characterized as flexible, open, supportive, clear, and congruent, with an atmosphere of warmth, respect, and affirmation. Each family member is permitted and encouraged to accept responsibility for self and to use "I" messages when speaking. In summary, effective communication has many elements of interpersonal skills (speaker, listener, and so on) which are highly related to interpersonal competence (Foote and Cottrell, 1955; Cole et al., 1980).

Dyadic Commitment

Research by Leik et al. (1978) suggests that three types of commitment need to be analytically distinguished: (1) personal commitments and (2) situational commitments, which can be further broken down into (a) commitments to activities and (b) commitments to a contextual setting. Johnson (1973, 1978) makes a similar analytical distinction between personal commitments and structural commitments. Johnson (1978) notes that most research on personal commit-

ment to relationships in the marriage and family area has focused on the development of the relationship in the direction of permanency and intimacy (see Hillsdale, 1962; Dean and Spanier, 1974; Dean and Lucas, 1979; Lewis et al., 1976; Cole, 1973, 1977).

Cole (1977) makes an analytical distinction between three types of personal commitment: (1) commitment to the partner as a person, (2) commitment to the relationship, and (3) commitment to retain valued statuses associated with the relationship. The second type, personal commitment to the relationship, seems most closely related to the way commitment has been treated in the marriage literature (e.g., Cole, 1977). Reiss (1976: 229-248) proposes a model for predicting the stability of marriages based upon this conception of relationship commitment. He notes that the level of dyadic commitment is a function of three explanatory variables: (1) the total reward-tensions balance, (2) the normative inputs that contribute to relationship identity and permanence, and (3) the structural constraints which make leaving the relationship costly to one or both partners in the relationship. Note that the concept of structural constraints is similar to what Johnson (1978) labels as structural commitments and what Levinger (1965, 1976) labels as barriers that constrict the ease of terminating relationships.

In this article we are using the concept of dyadic commitment to mean those personal commitments that both partners make to continue the relationship. Implied in this conceptualization of commitment is the notion that the relationship is valued by the partners and worth continued investments of self to make it meaningful.

Dyadic Consensus

Dyadic consensus is defined by Spanier and Cole (1976) as a working agreement between partners on critical matters of importance to the marriage that permits the couple to make joint decisions and share common interests. This definition is consistent with the way Burgess and Wallin (1953) and Burgess et al. (1971) have used the concept.

They contend that consensus is one of the most critical criteria that need to be used to evaluate the level of adjustment a couple has achieved. Locke and his colleagues (Locke and Williamson, 1958; Locke and Wallace, 1959) likewise cite consensus as one of the most important criteria for evaluating marital adjustment.

THE LINEAR MODEL

Sidney Jourard (1964, 1968, 1971) proposed that the mental health of both partners in an intimate relationship like marriage is affected by the ability of both partners to openly disclose their feelings (fears and disappointments as well as hopes and dreams) and concerns. Jourard (1971) contended that an individual could not be truly healthy unless he/she were able to reveal inner thoughts and feelings to another person. He also suggested that one of the primary functions of a marriage is to serve the individual's need to reveal this private aspect of the self to his/her partner. Derlega and Chaikin (1975: 71-72) make a similar point, contending that

self disclosure seems necessary in establishing and maintaining deep interpersonal relationships. For most Americans, marriage is the relationship in which the highest levels of disclosure are expected. The spouse serves the role of confidant and best friend, someone whom we can trust more than anyone else.

In essence, Derlega and Chaikin take a position much like that of Jourard when they argue that negative feelings allowed to accumulate over time are likely to escalate marital tensions. These unresolved tensions not shared through open disclosures between partners will tend to block other avenues to intimacy and thus undermine the overall quality of the relationship.

Some empirical support for this notion is found in the literature on marriage. Hurvitz (1965a, b) found that being

an empathic partner and good companion was highly valued by both husbands and wives. Cole (1973) found that the two values most important to both husbands and wives were related to self-disclosure between mates. Nye (1974, 1976) found that the therapeutic role was considered normative and was highly valued in the marriage.

Empirical research on marriage tends to support the linear model (Levinger and Senn, 1967; Jorgensen and Gaudy, 1980) that predicts that the greater the level of self-disclosure between spouses, the greater the marital satisfaction will be for both spouses. Related research on the relationship between marital communication and spousal satisfaction with the relationship (Navran, 1967; Murphy and Mendelson, 1973) suggests that marital satisfaction is highest in marriages that are characterized as having open, rewarding communication patterns. Navran (1967) reports that happily married couples enjoyed high levels of self-disclosure and felt understood and affirmed by their mates. These findings support Jourard's (1964) contention that open communication channels used to discuss all aspects of married life contribute to each spouse a feeling of being understood and accepted, and thus increase overall satisfaction with the relationship. Further support for this line of thinking is afforded by Figley (1973) and Dean and Lucas (1978, 1979), who report a strong positive association between marital communication and adjustment. Research on premarital couples by Rubin et al. (1980) found a strong positive correlation between self-disclosure and love. Rubin and his colleagues report further that self-disclosure was not significantly related to the power structure. In a study of marital and premarital couples, Larzelere and Huston (1980) found a strong positive relationship between depth of self-disclosure and dyadic trust.

THE CURVILINEAR MODEL

Cosby (1973) proposed that a curvilinear relationship exists between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction.

He contends that perhaps there is a point in the self-disclosure process whereby added information actually decreases the level of relationship satisfaction. Remember, however, that Cosby's (1973) review of literature dealt primarily with psychological experiments conducted with strangers as the research subjects. Since the research subjects in the majority of experiments reviewed by Cosby were unrelated individuals, often strangers with no prior relationship established, it is questionable if these conclusions can be extrapolated for intimate relationships such as married and/or unmarried cohabiting couples. Kirkendall (1961) posits a model for developing intimacy that suggests that self-disclosures made need to have a foundational basis before they make a positive contribution to increasing the depth of a relationship. He notes that among strangers, the threshold of self-revelations is much more shallow than it is among a couple who have a firmly established foundation upon which a relationship can be built. When the relationship is firmly grounded in a shared set of experiences with a developmental history, self-disclosures will be perceived as contributing to positive relationship growth.

Although we suspect that Cosby's (1973) conclusions about a curvilinear relationship between self-disclosure and satisfaction with a relationship may have limited utility for intimate relationships, there is some empirical evidence from the family literature to support the hypothesis. For example, Cutler and Dyer (1965) found that shared, open communication did not necessarily lead to more favorable adjustment to marriage. Indeed, their data indicate that almost half the couples who openly shared dissatisfaction because of expectations that were not met were not successful in making mutually satisfying relationship adjustments.

Gilbert (1976: 223, 228) extends Cosby's arguments regarding the curvilinear hypothesis to marriage and family communication, arguing that "there exists a point at which increased disclosure actually reduces the satisfaction with the relationship," and noting that "satisfaction as a curvili-

near dimension of disclosure appears to be strongly related to maintenance and needs for safety and security in a relationship." In this context, Gilbert argues that these needs for security and stability may supersede the needs for developing relationship depth, and that

intimacy . . . may be inversely related to needs for safety and positively related to commitment to the relationship. That is, the far end of the disclosure continuum may be characterized more by a reciprocity of disclosures which goes beyond satisfaction with the relationship . . . to include an affective response of acceptance and commitment, in their deepest form, of not only disclosure, but of the person making them [Gilbert, 1976: 228].

Despite the fact that Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980) report that they found no empirical support for the curvilinear model, they do suggest that subsequent research should continue to examine the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction for evidence of curvilinearity. In a subsequent study examining the same data set, Jorgensen (1980) looked at the importance of a series of contingency variables though to further clarify the nature of the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction in marriage. Jorgensen (1980) concludes that, while there is no evidence of a curvilinear relationship emerging in any of the contingency variable hypotheses, the magnitude of strength of support was weakened.

THE SOCIAL DESIRABILITY MODEL

The study by Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980) was one of the first to empirically examine the relationship between self-disclosure and marital satisfaction for possible contamination due to social desirability. In their article, Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980) report that when social desirability is controlled for by using a five-item version of Edmonds's (1967) Marital Conventionalization Scale, they found no

empirical support for the hypothesis that the data were contaminated by the respondents answering in a socially desirable manner to impress the researchers that they represented the ideals of conventional marriage norms. In an attempt to further clarify if social desirability and/or marital conventionalization may contaminate the true nature of the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship quality, the current study will also examine this model. We will do this by first testing for dimensionality and use unidimensional measures of self-disclosure, as well as of each measure of relationship quality. Then, we will examine the concepts of social desirability and marital conventionality for dimensionality. Finally, we will reexamine each of the original hypotheses by using a series of partial correlations that will partial out the effects of social desirability and marital conventionality separately.

The three previously discussed models will be empirically tested by examining data on nonmarital cohabiting couples with regard to the following hypotheses. All of the hypotheses will be written in terms of the linear model assumptions.

HYPOTHESES

- (1) The extent of self-disclosure is positively associated with the quality of the relationship among nonmarital cohabiting couples.

From this general level hypothesis, the following subhypotheses can be derived:

- 1-A. The extent of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of personal commitment to the cohabitant relationship.
- 1-B. The extent of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of dyadic consensus among cohabiting couples.
- 1-C. The extent of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of communication effectiveness of the cohabiting couples.

- (2) The depth of self-disclosure is positively associated with the quality of the relationship among nonmarital cohabiting couples.

From this second general hypothesis, the following subhypotheses can be derived:

- 2-A. The degree of depth of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of personal commitment to the cohabitant relationship.
- 2-B. The degree of depth of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of dyadic consensus among cohabiting couples.
- 2-C. The degree of depth of self-disclosure is positively associated with the degree of communication effectiveness of the cohabiting couples.

METHOD

SAMPLE

Data are drawn from the first phase of a longitudinal study on cohabitation adjustment patterns. Although the total sample includes over 300 cohabiting couples,¹ data for the current article are based primarily upon the responses of a smaller data set of cohabiting couples collected in the first wave of phase one of the study in the spring, summer, and throughout the fall of 1974. The couples have been followed over time and reinterviewed in phases two and three of the study. Data from this study are being analyzed in terms of cohort waves of data collection, whereby all of the data from point one interviews collected in the same time period are being treated as a single data set. Point one data collected in 1975 and 1976 will be treated as separate data sets and reported in subsequent analysis.

The sample for this analysis included 125 research subjects, comprised of male-female cohabiting pair-bonds. Both members of the cohabital pair-bond were interviewed, and each was given several self-administered questionnaires which tapped several dimensions of relationship adjustment using modified versions of previously published scales and inventories.

Characteristics of the Sample

The research subjects ranged in age from 17 to 26, with less than 1% (0.8%) under the age of 18. Slightly over 80% of the subjects were between the ages of 18 and 25; the remainder were 26 years old. In 65% of the cases, both members of the couple were university students. In 28% of the cases, one member of the couple was a student and the other partner was not. In 7% of the cases, neither partner was a student at the time of the first interview. The number of years of formal education completed at the time of the first interview was indicative of a relatively highly educated group of subjects (mean number of years completed was 15.2). The mean income for the cohabitant's family of origin was approximately \$25,000, and the majority came from families of origin that had annual incomes in excess of \$40,000.

MEASURES

Separate, unidimensional scales were developed for each of the 6 independent variables, 6 dependent variables, and 5 control variables. These 17 scales were created through a series of factor analyses, either from new or existing scales (see Table 1).

The Control Variables

The control variables were created by performing a factor analysis on the items in Edmonds's (1967) Marital Conventionalization Scale and the Crown-Marlow (1964) Social Desirability Scale. All factors with an eigenvalue above 1.0 were retained. For each factor, the four items with the highest item-to-factor correlations were included in the scale, provided that they had correlations above .10. The factors produced had no overlap between social desirability and marital conventionalization. Using both orthogonal and oblique rotations, the two scales loaded on distinct factors.

TABLE 1
Respondent Characteristics

<u>Age</u>		
\bar{x} = 23 yrs.		
Range = 17 - 34 yrs.		
Std. Dev. = 2.917 yrs.		
 <u>Education</u>		
\bar{x} = 15.2 yrs.		
Range = 9 - 22 yrs.		
Std. Dev. = 2.155 yrs.		
 <u>Family Income</u>		
\bar{x} = \$20,000 - \$25,000		
Range = under \$5,000 - over \$40,000		
Mode = \$40,000 (28.8%) (\$20,000 or above = 63.6%)		
<u>Religious Preference</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
None	46	36.8%
Protestant	48	38.4
Catholic	13	10.4
Jewish	8	6.4
Other	10	8.0
	125	100.0%

The one marital conventionalization scale presented was the only conventionalization scale with an eigenvalue even approaching 1.0.

SODES1-Egotism is a measure of self-centeredness, indicating "egotism" as a concern for self over the relationship. An example item from this scale is, "At times I have really insisted on having things my own way."

SODES2-Responsibility is a measure of feelings of responsibility for one's behavior, indicating an "internalized sense of responsibility." An example item from this scale is, "I always try to practice what I preach."

SODES3-Limitations is a measure of acceptance of one's fallibility, indicating that respondents "recognize their own limitations." An example item from this scale is, "I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake."

SODES4-Aggression is a measure of feelings of physical hostility, indicating respondents' feelings of "aggression." An example item from this scale is, "There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things."

MCON-Marital Conventionalization is a measure of the idealization of the relationship, indicating respondents' feelings of being "perfectly happy." An example item from this scale is, "I don't think anyone could possibly be happier than my cohabitant and I when we are with one another."

The Independent Variables

The independent variables were created by performing a separate factor analysis for each concept. An important consideration in using factor analysis on these established scales (or modified scales) was the determination that each scale was unidimensional. For each concept, the factor analysis identified two distinct factors. In each instance, the interpretation of the factors supported the methodological distinction.

Value Consensus is a measure of "dyadic consensus" concerning structures external to the cohabiting relation-

ship. This variable was derived through a factor analysis of the Locke-Wallace (1959) Scale. Examples include agreement about friends, conventionality, and philosophy of life.

Interaction Consensus is a measure of "dyadic consensus" concerning structures internal to the cohabiting relationship. This is the second factor derived from the Locke-Wallace Scale. Examples include the demonstration of affection and sexual relations.

Personal Vulnerability is a measure of the "extent of disclosure" to the partner concerning personal vulnerability. This variable was derived through a factor analysis of Taylor and Altman's, Jourard's (1964), and Johnson's (1968) Self-Disclosure Scales. Examples include "Weaknesses that I feel I have in my personality" and "What it takes to really hurt my feelings."

Disclosure of Sexual Values is a measure of the "extent of disclosure" to the partner concerning personal sexual values. This is the second factor derived from items from the Taylor and Altman, Jourard, and Johnson Scales. Examples include "My feelings about standards of sexual behavior before marriage" and "The amount of Sexual freedom I think a woman should have."

Maintenance Truth is a measure of the "truth of the disclosure" to the partner about needs to keep the relationship going from day to day. This variable was derived by adding a second scale to Johnson's to measure the degree of truth in the communication. This modified scale was then factor analyzed, producing two truth of disclosure scales. Examples of Maintenance Truth are "Who I think should make important family decisions" and "Whether I like to do things alone or in groups."

Development Truth is a measure of the "truth of the disclosure" to the partner about needs to keep the relation-

ship going in the future. This is the second factor derived from the modified Johnson scale. Examples are, "My ideas concerning marriage" and "The kind of work I would like to do in the future."

The Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were created by performing a series of factor analyses on items and scales measuring: (1) tensions in the relationship, (2) communication styles and honesty, (3) conflict resolution, (4) satisfaction, and (5) personal commitment to the relationship. The total number of items measuring elements of dyadic satisfaction, the generalized dependent variable, was greater than the program capacity for a single factor analysis. Consequently, a series of runs was performed, replacing elements until all combinations of elements had been tested. From this stage of analysis, all variables containing factors with an eigenvalue above 1.0 were retained. These items were included in a second stage of factor analysis which generated six dependent variables with eigenvalues above 1.0. For each factor, the four items with the highest item-to-factor correlations were included in the scale, provided that the item-to-factor correlation was above .10.

Communication Style is a measure of communication tension, indicating the respondent's style of communicating. An example item from this scale is, "Does your cohabitant nag you?"

Communication Apprehension is a measure indicating the respondent's willingness to communicate openly and honestly with the cohabitant. An example item from this scale is, "Do you find it difficult to express your true feelings to him (her)?"

Anticipatory Dissolution is a measure indicating the extent to which the respondent has considered ending the rela-

tionship. An example item from this scale is, "How often do you contemplate (or fantasize) breaking off your relationship with your cohabitant?"

Empathy is a measure of the feeling of empathy shared with one's cohabitant, indicating the quality of understanding between the cohabitants. An example item from this scale is, "How satisfied are you with the understanding you get from your cohabitant on your problems and feelings?"

Commitment Adaptability is a measure indicating the respondent's willingness to change locations or lifestyles in order to continue the relationship. This scale repeatedly asks, "If it were clear that your cohabiting relationship would be broken unless you made one of the changes listed below, would you make that change?" An example of the specific changes would be, "You had to leave your hometown or area."

Jealousy is a measure of relationship exclusiveness, indicating the respondent's jealousy over the cohabitant's dating or sexual relationship with others during the time that they are cohabiting. This scale repeatedly asks, "Would any of the following be a situation that could cause you to leave your cohabitant?" An example of the specific situations would be, "Your cohabitant dated other persons."

ANALYSIS

The reliability of each scale and the number of items that make up each scale are presented in Table 2. With the exception of the scale for Jealousy, the alpha values range from a low of .60727 to a high of .81515. Considering the limited number of items in each scale, the alpha values are acceptable.

Each of the variables was operationalized so that a positive correlation indicated a benefit to the cohabiting rela-

TABLE 2
Scale Reliability

Variables	Number of Items	Alpha	Standardized Alpha
SODES1-Egotism	3	.61283	.61367
SODES2-Responsibility	3	.69257	.70183
SODES3-Limitations	3	.60727	.60517
SODES4 -Aggression	3	.65642	.65361
Marital Convention- alization	4	.78742	.78815
Value Consensus	4	.78874	.79174
Interaction Consensus	3	.62995	.63374
Disclosure of Per- sonal Vulnerability	4	.66263	.68253
Maintainance Truth	4	.80774	.80804
Development Truth	3	.81515	.82070
Communication Style	4	.78607	.78582
Communication Appre- hension	4	.79197	.79119
Anticipatory Disso- lution	4	.71323	.74156
Empathy	3	.74630	.76271
Commitment Adapta- bility	4	.70850	.71829
Jealousy	3	.41853	.39575

tionship. In some cases this resulted in specific hypotheses that seem convoluted; however, it did allow a positive correlation to indicate a beneficial quality in the relationship. The correlation matrix for the independent and dependent variables is presented in Table 3. This table displays 32 correlations. The specific hypotheses, their correlations,

TABLE 3
Correlation Matrix

	Communi- cation Style	Communi- cation Appre- hension	Antici- patory Disso- lution	Empathy	Committ- ment Adapta- bility	Jealousy	Value Con- sensus	Inter- action Con- sensus
Disclosure of Person- al Vulner- ability	r=.1700 *	r=.1816 *	r=.2529 **	r=.2262 **	r=.3617 ***	r=.2612 **	r=.2924 ***	r=.2174 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values	r=.0548	r=.2042 *	r=.1285	r=.1027	r=.1808 *	r=.1880 *	r=.2742 ***	r=.2309 **
Maintenance Truth	r=.1793 *	r=.0781	r=.0947	r=.2141 **	r=.2731 ***	r=.1868 *	r=.0937	r=.2811 ***
Development Truth	r=.1623 *	r=.2106 **	r=.1737 *	r=.1619 *	r=.0751	r=.1391	r=.1851 *	r=.3298 ***

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

and levels of significance are presented in the Appendix. Of the hypotheses listed, only 24 are significant. The variable of Internal Consensus correlated with both disclosure and truth variables. Anticipatory Dissolution correlated with Personal Vulnerability and Development Truth, and the remainder of the variables correlated with three of the four independent variables. Of the disclosure variables, Personal Vulnerability correlated with all of the dependent variables and had the strongest correlations. Of the truth variables, Development Truth correlated with all of the dependent variables except Commitment Adaptability and Jealousy. This may reflect the future orientation of Development Truth that is unrelated to the immediate problems posed by Commitment Adaptability and Jealousy. Both Disclosure of Sexual Values and Maintenance Truth correlated with five of the dependent variables. For Disclosure of Sexual Values, the dependent variables that did not achieve significant correlations (Communication Style, Anticipatory Dissolution, and Empathy) may be too removed from the immediacy of sexual disclosure. That is, in contrast to the immediacy of coping with jealousy, the style of communication and em-

TABLE 4
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Marital Conventionalization

	Communi- cation Style	Communi- cation Appre- hension	Antici- patory Disso- lution	Empathy	Committ- ment Adapta- bility	Jealousy	Value Con- sensus	Inter- action Con- sensus
Disclosure of Personal Vulnera- bility					r=.3093 ***	r=.2339 **	r=.1899 *	
Disclosure of Sexual Values		r=.1757 *			r=.1562 *	r=.1747 *	r=.2477 **	r=.2017 *
Maintenance Truth				r=.1800 *	r=.2524 **	r=.1734 *		r=.2562 **
Development Truth		r=.1825 *					r=.1486 *	r=.3091 ***

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

pathy are of limited importance. The five independent variables that correlated significantly with Maintenance Truth are all concerned with skills, beliefs, and behaviors that affect the day-to-day quality of the cohabiting relationship.

Table 3 provides support for the variables created through factor analysis. Each of the variables shows unique correlations with other variables created by the factor analysis. Had each of the variables correlated with the independent variable in a similar manner, there would be no face validity to the distinct factors. This supports the concern for using global concepts in predicting the relationship between self-disclosure and quality of the relationship.

That the variables are empirically, as well as conceptually discrete is seen in the differential effect of using Marital Conventionalization as a control variable. As shown in Table 4, it reduces the number of significant correlations to 15. While all of the correlations for Communication Style are eliminated, two of the original three for Communication Apprehension remain. The willingness to maintain the relationship in spite of changes required, and the resistance

to allowing jealousy to end the relationship remain correlated with the three independent variables that are concerned with self-disclosure of immediate needs and desires. The only change in the correlations for the consensus variables is the elimination of significance for the correlation between Personal Vulnerability and Interaction Consensus.

The use of social desirability variables as controls again had a differential effect on the quality variables. The correlation between the Disclosure of Sexual values and low Anticipatory Dissolution became significant when the social desirability variables for Egotism, Responsibility, and Limitations were used. When the correlation between Personal Vulnerability and Communication Style was controlled by using SODES1-Egotism and SODES4-Aggression, significance was eliminated. When the correlation between Personal Vulnerability and Communication Apprehension was controlled, significance was eliminated when SODES1-Egotism, SODES2-Responsibility, and SODES3-Limitations were used. The effect of social desirability variables differed for the quality variables. Furthermore, the effect of social desirability as a control had a minor effect in contrast to the use of Marital Conventionalization. Clearly, for this sample the factors are empirically, as well as conceptually distinct. To attempt to predict the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship quality without treating each dimension separately obscures the many elements experienced by the cohabiting couple.

Because of a general dissatisfaction with the conceptualization of consensus as either an independent or a dependent variable, consensus was used as a control variable. Conceptually, this defines consensus as a product of disclosure, hence, that until there was disclosure, there could not be consensus. At the same time, consensus was not considered to be a measure of the quality of the relationship. Tables 5 through 9 show the effect of the consensus variables on the correlations between the self-disclosure variables and the quality variables. Tables 5 and 6 show the

TABLE 5
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Value Consensus

	Communica- tion Style	Communica- tion Appre- hension	Anticipa- tory Dissolution	Empathy	Commitment Adapta- bility	Jealousy
Disclosure of Person- al Vulner- ability			r=.1791 *		r=.3156 ***	r=.2149 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values						
Mainten- ance Truth	r=.1630 *			r=.1941 *	r=.2595 **	r=.1719 *
Develop- ment Truth		r=.1647 *				

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

control effect of Value Consensus and Interaction Consensus, respectively. In general, Personal Vulnerability and Maintenance Truth are the independent variables that remain correlated with the quality variables. The willingness to change (Commitment Adaptability) and to confront jealousy are the variables that continue to show a relationship between self-disclosure and quality of the relationship. Table 7 shows the control effect of Value and Interaction Consensus combined. This table shows the most consistent self-disclosure variable for correlating with the quality variables. A set of correlations has been identified through the use of controls that are indicative of a depth to the relationship that survives "rocking the boat." Whether the relationships are controlled using consensus, Marital Conventionalization, or some combination of the two (Tables 8 and 9), two factors of self-disclosure are positively correlated with the desire to maintain the relationship. The nature of the quality variables (Commitment Adaptability and Jealousy) does not support a contention that the stability of a relationship arises from avoiding intimate and potentially troublesome self-disclosure. Nor is the contention supported that

TABLE 6
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Interaction Consensus

	Communication Style	Communication Apprehension	Anticipatory Dissolution	Empathy	Commitment Adaptability	Jealousy
Disclosure of Personal Vulnerability			r=.2031 *		r=.3301 ***	r=.2481 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values						r=.1721 *
Maintenance Truth					r=.2264 **	r=.1683 *
Development Truth						

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

the relationship is aided by confiding potentially disquieting feelings to "intimates" outside the relationship. The depth of the relationship that emerges was found in this study only after social desirability, marital conventionalization (as indications of polite nonconfrontation), and agreement between the respondents were controlled. This depth was found in the relationship between the willingness to disclose one's self, weaknesses and all, and to express one's immediate needs and to make sacrifices willingly to continue the relationship. Clearly, self-disclosure provides some rewards or intimacy that supports the relationship, especially when maintaining the relationship involves change and potential threats.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

THE DIMENSIONALITY ISSUE

Our article has examined the dimensionality issue that had been neglected in previous research on the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship quality. Our find-

TABLE 7
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Value and Interaction Consensus

	Communica- tion Style	Communica- tion Appre- hension	Anticipa- tory Dissolution	Empathy	Commitment Adapta- bility	Jealousy
Disclosure of Personal Vulnerabil- ity			r=.1706 *		r= .3104 ***	r= .2173 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values						
Maintenance Truth					r= .2400 **	r= .1862 *
Development Truth						

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

ings indicate that the strength of the relationship between these two variables depends upon how they are operationalized. None of the global concepts that we examined (Social Desirability, Marital Conventionalization, Commitment, Dyadic Consensus, Communication, Self-Disclosure) proved to be unidimensional, and thus cannot be used to test curvilinear hypotheses.

Our findings raise serious questions about past research studies which have assumed, without obtaining empirical evidence, that the concepts used are unidimensional. We recommend that researchers who have treated these concepts as if they were unidimensional without empirically examining the concepts for dimensionality reexamine their data to see if their conclusions hold, even if the concepts they used do not indeed prove to be unidimensional. We also recommend that future research using these concepts should examine them for dimensionality before using them in hypothesis-testing based upon linear assumptions.

It is possible that the reason some researchers have contended that the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction is curvilinear is that they

TABLE 8
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Marital Conventionalization and Value

	Communication Style	Communication Apprehension	Anticipatory Dissolution	Empathy	Commitment Adaptability	Jealousy
Disclosure of Personal Vulnerability					r=.2904 ***	r=.2091 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values						
Maintenance Truth				r=.1743 *	r=.2486 **	r=.1682 *
Development Truth		r=.1584 *				

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

operationalized the variables by using multidimensional measures while operating under the assumption that the measures were unidimensional. It is also likely that much of the controversy over whether the true relationship between the concepts of self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction is linear or curvilinear stems from the fact that researchers finding the shape of the relationship to differ did not measure the same concepts and/or did not operationalize variables by using the same instruments. For example, in our study we found that the various components of relationship quality each had multiple dimensions which were interrelated, but that had uniquely different relationships with the various components of self-disclosure that we examined.

If we reexamine Gilbert's (1976: 228-229) model, we can see that she combined several components to make up the global concept of satisfaction which includes security, safety, and status quo maintenance on the one hand, and risk, growth, commitment, and intimacy on the other hand. Gilbert suggests that these two sets of components may indeed be antithetical. And she proposes that Jourard's (1971) contention about the relationship being linear may have some merit, although most research literature she

TABLE 9
Correlation Matrix Controlling for Marital Conventionalization
and Interaction Consensus

	Communica- tion Style	Communica- tion Ap- prehension	Anticipa- tory Dissolution	Empathy	Commitment Adapta- bility	Jealousy
Disclosure of Person- al Vulnera- bility					r=.2977 ***	r=.2302 **
Disclosure of Sexual Values						r=.1689 *
Maintenance Truth					r=.2269 **	r=.1672 *
Development Truth						

*p = .05; **p = .01; ***p = .001

reviewed would not support it. In reflecting on Jourard's (1971: 71) thesis that "the optimum in a marriage relationship is disclosure without reserve," Gilbert (1976: 229) notes:

optimum may be the key word in that statement and may have direct bearing on intimacy. The issue in disclosure for optimal husband-wife relations may be in learning how to deal with information, disappointments and conflicts at the end of the continuum, where risk is high. . . . Most likely, this parameter is characterized by a very high level of risk, and ventures into it may not be conducive to maintaining *long-term relationships*, such as marriage. That is, exploration of this part of the continuum may force issues and resolutions that go beyond just the maintenance of the relationship. Thus some, maybe most, relationships may not be able to survive an examination of this dimension.

RELATIONSHIP DEPTH: A SERENDIPITOUS FINDING

One of the more interesting findings of our study was the discovery of an element of relationship quality that emerges

only after consensus has broken down, an element which we have termed "relationship depth." When we examined the relationship between the various measures of self-disclosure and relationship quality and controlled on the effects of conventionality, social desirability, and dyadic consensus (both in terms of value consensus and consensus on the internal dynamics of relationship functioning and interaction), we discovered that two key dimensions positively related to self-disclosure and communication style continued to make a unique contribution to relationship quality. These two dimensions were: (1) a level of commitment to the relationship that transcended jealousy and possessiveness, which was measured by asking if the respondent would leave a partner who dated others or had sexual relations with others, and (2) a high degree of commitment to the partner and the relationship that reflected a willingness to make changes and continue working on the relationship, which we measured in terms of an individual's willingness to make life changes, such as changing your life style, moving to a new location, changing your line of work, and the like in order to continue your cohabital relationship with your partner.

Since relationship depth only emerges after the introduction of conflict in the relationship and survival of the highly emotional "rocking the boat" issues of changing one's life and confronting nonexclusive dating and sexual jealousy, and therefore indicates a high degree of commitment to the relationship and partner as well as a high degree of adaptability, it cannot be expected to surface in many relationships. Few couples are likely to possess the necessary relationship skills and to value their relationship enough to take the kinds of risks required to develop this type of relationship depth. It is also likely that many couples do not expect this type of depth in their relationship and therefore do not try to achieve it.

Our data support Mace's (1967) thesis that relationship depth emerges only in those relationships with a high level of commitment to continue working on the relationship

and make it even better, as evidenced by a willingness to take risks and make changes. He further suggests that most couples who come for marriage counseling and therapy are not willing to continue in the therapeutic process beyond the relationship maintenance level, and thus they never begin to explore what might be even more meaningful. It is only those couples who go beyond this point who ever find relationship depth and thus realize their relationship potential.

At the heart of Mace's thesis is that a couple must have good communication and problem-solving skills. However, skills alone are not sufficient for achieving relationship depth. These skills must be practiced, and the couple must have a high degree of commitment to continue working on the relationship with expectations of achieving a higher level of relationship quality.

Since our data are based upon nonmarital cohabiting couples rather than married couples, we wonder if we would have discovered this finding had our sample been married. We intend to explore this issue with married samples as well, to see if these results concerning relationship depth can be replicated for married couples. If the results of the replication on married samples do indeed support our cohabiting couple data, we may well have discovered significant empirical support for Mace's thesis, thus pointing to an important direction for marriage research as well as marriage enrichment to pursue.

THE MARITAL CONVENTIONALIZATION AND SOCIAL DESIRABILITY ISSUES

Our data afford some support for Edmonds's (1967; Edmonds et al., 1972; Miller, 1975) contention that much of the variance explained in relationship satisfaction and adjustment measures is explained in terms of an idealization of the relationship which Edmonds labels marital conventionalization. We found that 9 of the 17 empirical hypotheses

that showed a significant direct relationship between various self-disclosure and relation quality variables were not significant after partialling out the effects of marital conventionalization.

When we examined the results of our factor analyses, however, we discovered that marital conventionalization was not actually measuring social desirability (in none of the factors did we find conventionality items and social desirability items loading together), but instead, an idealization of the relationship. With this in mind, it is not surprising that relationship idealization correlates so strongly with various dimensions of relationship satisfaction and adjustment or quality. This relationship is predictable, based upon social psychological theory and research which suggests that sentiments of liking lead to increased levels of interaction and the establishment of normative expectations for the relationship (Homans, 1950). Rubin (1973) proposes a social psychological theory of relationship development and maintenance based upon his research on the relationship between liking and loving. In essence, Rubin's research suggests that, although liking and loving are uniquely different processes, the two concepts are interrelated, in that decreased levels of liking are positively associated with the intensity of love. Spanier's (1972) research on romanticism and marital adjustment suggests that idealization may serve an important function in relationship development and adjustment. Spanier's data, as well as Rubin's data, can be interpreted in terms of W. I. Thomas's now famous dictum that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Cosier and Rosenberg, 1969: 224). This suggests that idealization of one's relationship may create a mind-set that makes one want to continue working on the relationship to make it totally satisfying and to promote feelings of confidence that the relationship will be satisfying.

Our data clearly suggest that neither marital conventionality (as measured by Edmonds's Marital Conventionalization Scale) nor social desirability (as measured by the

Crown-Marlow Social Desirability Scale) are unidimensional concepts. Social desirability has four principal components: (1) egotism, (2) internalized sense of responsibility, (3) limitations and acknowledgment of personal fallibility, and (4) aggressiveness. We found no support for assuming that marital (relationship) conventionality is significantly associated with any of these components of social desirability. Therefore, we conclude that marital conventionalization does not reflect a response distortion, whereby a respondent wishes to seem more acceptable and favorable than reality, but rather is merely a reflection of an idealization of the relationship.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Our data need to be interpreted in light of certain methodological caveats. First, it must be recognized that these data are based upon a purposive sample of cohabiting couples at one point in time and are reflective of self-report responses from paper-and-pencil questionnaires. Second, the data, like that of Jorgensen and Gaudy (1980), are based upon measures of self-disclosure which may not have been sensitive to (1) unique expectation levels of self-other disclosures or (2) individual perceptions of situational, topical, contextual, or intensity normative expectations governing the appropriateness of self-other disclosures. Likewise, our measures of relationship quality may not have been sensitive enough to detect critical dimensions of relationship functioning and interaction adjustment processes. We do, however, feel confident that the measures used for both relationship quality and self-disclosure are likely among the more refined and conceptually sound measures of the concepts available at the time of the study.

There are a number of research questions that we think should be examined in future research in this area. First, since we found relationship depth to be an important residual, after dyadic consensus ceases, in explaining the

relationship between relationship quality and self-disclosure, it may be important to examine the effects of various levels of conflict, styles of conflict management, and conflict of self-other disclosure. It also seems important to explore the effects of sexual nonexclusivity on the trust levels and expectations of intimacy (both in terms of emotional sharing, such as occur in various types of self-other disclosure, and of sharing sexual and other physical forms of expressing affection and connectedness), and the influence of each of these factors on relationship quality at various stages of relationship development among nonmarital as well as married cohabiting couples.

SUMMARY

We have examined bivariate relationships between various dimensions of self-disclosure and relationship quality and found support for the linear model and no support for the curvilinear model. When we reexamined each of the bivariate hypotheses by controlling on various dimensions of social desirability, we found little systematic support for the social desirability model, nor did we detect any significant uniform change in the shape of the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship quality for any of the dimensions of the two concepts that we examined. Our data lend support to Jorgensen and Gaudy's (1980) conclusions stressing the significance of self-disclosure in achieving relationship satisfaction. Rather than "rocking the boat," intimate self-disclosures may enable couples to sustain their relationships in spite of controversial experiences.

APPENDIX

Hypotheses

1. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with effective communication style ($r = .1700$, $p = .05$).

2. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with low levels of communication apprehension ($r = .1816$, $p = .05$).
3. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with low anticipation of dissolution ($r = .2529$, $p = .01$).
4. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with high empathy for the feelings of the partner ($r = .2262$, $p = .01$).
5. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with high commitment adaptability ($r = .3617$, $p = .01$).
6. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with low willingness to end the relationship because of jealousy due to dating or sex with others ($r = .2612$, $p = .01$).
7. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with effective communication style ($r =$ positive, $p =$ *not* significant).
8. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with low levels of communication apprehension ($r = .2042$, $p = .05$).
9. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with low anticipation of dissolution ($r =$ positive, $p =$ *not* significant).
10. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with high empathy for the feelings of the partner ($r =$ positive, $p =$ *not* significant).
11. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with high commitment adaptability ($r = .1808$, $p = .05$).
12. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with low willingness to end the relationship because of jealousy due to dating or sex with others ($r = .1880$, $p = .05$).
13. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with effective communication style ($r = .1793$, $p = .05$).
14. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with low levels of communication apprehension ($r =$ positive, $p =$ *not* significant).

15. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with low anticipation of dissolution ($r = \text{positive}$, $p = \text{not significant}$).
16. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with high empathy for the feelings of the partner ($r = .2141$, $p = .01$).
17. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with high commitment adaptability ($r = .2731$, $p = .001$).
18. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with low willingness to end the relationship because of jealousy due to dating or sex with others ($r = .1868$, $p = .05$).
19. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with effective communication style ($r = .1623$, $p = .05$).
20. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with low levels of communication apprehension ($r = .2106$, $p = .01$).
21. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with low anticipation of dissolution ($r = .1737$, $p = .05$).
22. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with high empathy for the feelings of the partner ($r = .1619$, $p = .05$).
23. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with high commitment adaptability ($r = \text{positive}$, $p = \text{not significant}$).
24. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with low willingness to end the relationship because of jealousy due to dating or sex with others ($r = \text{positive}$, $p = \text{not significant}$).
25. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with high value consensus ($r = .2924$, $p = .001$).
26. High disclosure of personal vulnerabilities is positively correlated with high interaction consensus ($r = .2174$, $p = .01$).
27. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with high value consensus ($r = .2742$, $p = .001$).

28. High disclosure of personal sexual values is positively correlated with high interaction consensus ($r = .2309$, $p = .01$).
29. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with high value consensus ($r =$ positive, $p =$ *not* significant).
30. High disclosure of maintenance truth to keep the relationship working is positively correlated with high interaction consensus ($r = .2811$, $p = .001$).
31. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with high value consensus ($r = .1851$, $p = .05$).
32. High disclosure of development truth to keep the relationship working in the future is positively correlated with high interaction consensus ($r = .3298$, $p = .001$).

NOTE

1. For purposes of this article, nonmarital cohabitation is defined as an unmarried heterosexual couple who have no previous marital history, who jointly share a living facility and have done so for a minimum of three consecutive months prior to participating in this study, and who consider themselves to be cohabiting (living together as an unmarried couple). All of the couples included in the cohort panel analyzed for this article began their cohabiting relationship while they were living in a university environment where one or both of the partners was enrolled as a college student. Couples who met after they had left the university environment and began cohabiting while either or both partners was employed were assigned to different cohorts depending upon the occupational status characteristics (i.e., blue-collar workers in one group and professionals in another group, and so on). Couples who cohabit after having previously been married to either their partner or another person are treated as a distinctively different type of cohabitation than the never-married group analyzed in this article, and will thus be analyzed as a separate cohort at a later date.

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