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Historical Romances: An Analysis of Co-constructed Narratives from Engaged Couples

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Speech Communication](#) at Eastern Illinois University.

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Historical Romances: An Analysis of

Co-constructed Narratives from Engaged Couples
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BY

Katie Himes

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THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Abstract

By studying the manner in which romantic partners tell accounts of their relationship events, researchers can gain insight into the process of relational development. This study examines how five engaged couples socially construct their own shared reality. Using critical incidents, couples first individually described three critical incidents common to engaged couples, including: their first meeting, worst fight, and decision to become a mutually exclusive couple. Next, couples collaborated to produce a shared narrative of significant events in the relationship. Through content analysis, the use of conflict avoidance is examined as a means of creating the collective reality. This research provides both a better understanding of joint remembering and the social construction of romantic relationships.

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Introduction

Romance is a fascinating theme to most human beings; it is evident in the literature we read, movies we watch and songs we sing. An individual cannot watch the news, enjoy a meal, or commute to work without being reminded of the influence of love upon society. Apparently, people are embracing this notion of love. To many individuals, romantic partnerships comprise the most important class of human relationships. In fact, more than 90% of all people in all cultures marry at some point (Speed & Gangestad, 1997). Romantic relationships affect the lives of human beings so immensely that even overall well being and physical health may be influenced (Speed & Gangestad, 1997).

Due to the importance placed on romantic interactions, scholarly interest in love relationships has flourished. Because of this increased attention, research in the area of interpersonal romantic connections has grown in recent times. Language usage (Bradac, 1983; Weimann & Krueger, 1980), mate selection (Dobson & Houseknecht, 1998; Taylor, 1997), physical attraction (Speed & Gangestad, 1997), marital adjustment (Bochner, Krueger, & Chmielewski, 1982; Gottman, 1979) and relationship deterioration (Duck, 1981) have all been examined in association with romantic connections.

However, in this abundance of interpersonal literature examining romantic relationships, only a few researchers have studied the process by which people co-construct their relationships (Alberts, 1986; Baxter, 1992a; Beall & Sternberg, 1995; Mandelbaum, 1987). By examining the process by which partners “do” their relationship, scholars can better understand the mystery of love. Primarily through the study of narratives co-constructed by romantic partners, this study seeks to highlight the

importance of the shared narrative to relationships, from a social constructionist perspective.

Commonly two individuals begin and subsequently develop a relationship based on conversation (Alberts, 1986). In order to understand how such relationships develop, scholars analyze the talk of those who participate in these romantic relationships. Because the creation of relationships occurs through conversation, the interpersonal exchange practices produced within these interactions are essential to understanding the relationship process.

However, this is not to suggest that simply any language spoken by participants would be revealing of their particular relationship. Alberts (1986) argues that the conversations that serve best for an analysis of romantic talk are those which serve as “crystalizing conversations,” that is, those conversations by which “couples reveal the nature of their relationship and the stage at which it exists” (p. 128). While crystalizing conversations may produce the most insight into relational development, they most certainly are not easy to collect. Because capturing such intimate, naturally occurring conversation on audiotape appears problematic, researchers have moved to other means for data collection.

Some researchers have adopted an approach in which participants describe significant events or “critical incidents” in the relationship in order to gain insight into the relationship (Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Using this retrospective interview technique, participants explain turning points in their romantic relationships, thus providing recall of “crystalizing conversations” and events to be analyzed. This critical incident method

produces rich, descriptive data based on the individual's perceptions of forces that have influenced their relationship. Because close interpersonal romantic relationships are full of interpretations, evaluations and explanations, significant event description allows each individual within the couple to understand and make sense of the events.

Often participants retell these turning point events in narrative form (Baxter, 1992b; Opt, 1988; Shaw, 1997). Opt (1988) describes narratives as stories "that human beings tell and on which they base their lives" (p. 298). Through storytelling, humans are able to glimpse the way in which people communicatively make sense of the world around them. By explaining lives through narrative, people are able to negotiate their reality and make sense of their surroundings. Bormann (1983) explains a related concept, symbolic convergence, to describe the process of blending subjective meanings into a shared social reality (p. 102). Thus, viewing life from the narrative paradigm assumes that people's "stories are part of a larger pattern of continuity and change in the way in which we make sense of human experience" (Opt, 1988, p. 308). These relationship accounts are "story-like explanations of past actions and events, an organized narrative of sense-making by which the account giver organizes the meaning of his or her relationship" (Baxter, 1992b, p. 254). Therefore, stories can be ways to understand human symbolic constructions of reality.

In addition to interpreting human reality, narratives also construct identity. The stories people tell "play an essential role in creating both the person we are, and the persons we present to others" (Shaw, 1997, p. 302). Each day, within common social practices, people tell each other stories as a way of constructing and negotiating social

identity (Bauman, 1986; Langellier, 1989). This is true of identity construction, not only for individuals, but for couples as well. Romantic relationships are conducted within a particular context and people's understanding of their relationships is partly due to the way they refer to their relationship (Shotter, 1987). Thus, love is "created" by the people who experience it (Beall & Sternberg, 1995).

Because narrative creates joint identity, a shared story is a wonderful vehicle for analysis of a romantic relationship. By examining the telling of a story by two persons about events they participated in together, researchers can obtain a better understanding of the process of relationships from a social constructionist viewpoint (Mandelbaum, 1987). When partners retell an account of a shared event, their co-participation becomes an issue in their talk, for both partners know the details they recount. Co-participating in an event and its retelling highlights specific aspects of the relationship that might otherwise go unnoticed. Examining shared stories allows researchers to witness the process of "translating knowing into telling" (White, 1980, p.5). Comparison of the manners in which stories are told gives insight to researchers regarding how two partners who shared an event may share a storytelling.

In recent times, increasingly popular social approaches to communication have highlighted an interpretivist perspective (Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995). By examining the manner in which individuals make sense of the world through their communicative behaviors, communication research has grown to include more thorough means for qualitative study. This interpretivist approach replaces the scientific notion of objective truth with the qualitative view, accepting what society creates as the world.

Researchers have embraced one approach in particular, social construction, as a means to study communication (Beall & Sternberg, 1995; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Edwards & Middleton, 1986; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; Searle, 1995; Shotter & Gergen, 1994; Shotter, 1987; Willmott, 1994). Early work in social construction focused upon a symbolic interactionist approach to describe the process of communicating and understanding with the use of signs (Jacobs, 1996). Based on the foundation of these early positions, theorists have produced several renditions.

Social construction focuses primarily upon the process of meaning creation from unfinished segments of behavior (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995). According to Leeds-Hurwitz (1995), social construction underscores the method by which social meanings are created willfully, with particular emphasis on identity creation of self and others, by language within human interaction (p.6-11). Thus, the major premise of the theory is based on the assumption that active participants create their own reality through the use of symbols within progressive interpersonal exchanges.

This research strives to uncover the ways couples co-construct a shared reality with the following research questions:

RQ1: How do individuals construct significant events in their romantic relationship?

RQ2: How do couples co-construct a shared narrative of significant events in their romantic relationship?

RQ3: How do individual and co-constructed narratives compare?

Methodology

Participants

Romantic partners at a mid-sized Midwestern university participated in research to access the social construction of premarital relationships. Participants were invited to engage in the study by course instructors in communication classes. Research participants met three criteria to be included in the study based on previous research of engaged couples (U.S. Department of Census, 1997): heterosexual sexual orientation, age range (between eighteen and thirty-five), and a relationship history in excess of six months (Dobson & Houseknecht, 1998; Taylor, 1997; Russell, 1997).

In total, five dyads participated in the research, yielding an N of ten respondents (five males and five females). Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 31. The average participant age was 24.8 years for males and 24.2 years for females. Length of the relationships ranged from seven months to six years. The average length of the relationships was three years. Educational backgrounds of participants also varied from high school graduates (1), college graduates (9), to advanced degrees (4).

Procedure

Each couple arrived at the research location for one session lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. Individual participants first completed an adapted premarital assessment tool to reveal background information about the relationship. Participants described three critical incidents: their first meeting, worst fight, and the decision to become a mutually exclusive couple. These events were chosen for study because of the commonality of these happenings within romantic relationships. Each person completed

the survey in a separate room to maintain individual accounts of shared experiences. This method of data collection allowed for personal accounts describing individual perceptions within the shared relationship.

After completing individual assessments, couples were reunited. In order to obtain the stories used to “construct and negotiate a social identity” (Bauman, 1986; Langellier, 1989), interviews were conducted to discuss the information gathered. Partners read one another’s responses, as did the primary researcher. Following the exchange of data, the couples told a collaborative version of their experiences. During this interview, couples jointly described each of the critical incidents detailed in the written instrument. Using this approach, couples created a joint narrative account of formative events in their relationship history (Bellman, 1997; Wackerman, 1997). As Langellier (1989) contends, “in a profound way, our stories tell us who we are and who we can—or cannot—be, at both surface and deep-level meaning” (p. 267).

Discussions were audio taped to ensure accurate data collection. Later the tapes were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative methods. Four trained coders conducted a content analysis to allow prominent themes to emerge from the data. The principal functions of analyzing text for content include describing characteristics of communication, as well as making inferences as to the antecedents and consequences of communication (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Using content analysis allowed coders “to make inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Smith, 1988, p. 263). Multiple coders were used to ensure face validity and intercoder reliability.

Findings

Variations appeared when comparing the individual and co-constructed accounts of the critical incidents. Overall, the co-constructed accounts illustrated symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1983) and coordinated management of meaning (Cronen & Pearce, 1981). The manner by which couples attempted to coordinate meaning is evident here through conflict avoidance and coherence of thought between partners. By examining the descriptions of relationships events collected within the critical incident responses, consistent themes emerge.

Narrative Analysis

Critical Incident 1.

For critical incident one, couples were asked to describe how they met one another. When recounting events few individuals were willing to name one specific incident as their first encounter with one another. Rather, many participants suggested that their association developed over a period of time through a series of meetings. Couple A remarked that they met over a course of time. She said “I got a job at the video store next to Domino’s, his place of employment. He would come over and talk and things began from there” (Appendix A). Male A stated “She [and my mom] worked at the same flower shop. The lady they worked for kept telling us we would be perfect for each other” (Appendix A). Couple B noted that their relationship began in a similar manner. Female B said that “We went to high school together but really never took notice of each other” (Appendix B). Similarly, Male B claimed that he and Female B merely “had some classes together” (Appendix B). No specific time or incident was mentioned.

The co-constructed narratives differed from the individual accounts in that the joint narratives focused more upon agreement between partners rather than preservation of personal opinion. In the individual accounts, Couples A and B claimed to have encountered each other through a process, rather than one initial encounter. However, when asked to describe how partners met in the joint narrative, couples placed more emphasis on a unified version of accounts. For instance, in the co-constructed narrative Couple A recounted one isolated encounter as their initial meeting. For Couple A the incident involved a phone call in which Male A used “his famous pick-up line” on Female A. She told the story as: “He had someone call me and then he got on the phone and then he asked me” (Appendix A). As the couple went into more detail, discrepancies between his and her stories arose. Referring to their attendance at a party together, Female A called the episode “that first real time we went out” (Appendix A). When asked about their first date together, Female A responded “I thought that it [the party] was but apparently it wasn’t. Apparently we had gone out...” (Appendix A). Male A countered her statement with “Well, it was our first date. We’d gone to the mall one day I mean, that doesn’t really count” (Appendix A). Here Male A appears to be striving to match her account of their first date together in order to present a cohesive portrayal of relationship events.

Research indicates a significant effect of communication upon recall of events (Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Sias, 1996). Through interactions with others, partners altered their descriptions of past events to construct congruent accounts of the incident. By discounting their initial individual accounts of the event, Couple A collaborates in

“making sense” of the event. Because the partners continued to interact after their initial meeting, joint experiences have influenced how they “interpret past, present and future experiences, and new ways of interpreting that we [they] import from others alter the meanings we [they] assign to experiences” (Wood, 1995, p. 134).

Similarly, Couple B indicated a specific incident as integral to the initial stages of their relationship. For Couple B, a Homecoming dance they attended was quite influential in their relational development. When asked how the encounter began, Male B responded “I didn’t have a date and she didn’t have a date so I was like, ‘Hey?’ ...Well, I picked her up at her house, because we lived five minutes from each other, so I picked her up. Her dad said have her home by ten o’clock or something. She made a face and he was like ‘All right, ten-thirty if you want to finish the evening’ (Laughter). I forget what time she had to be home-it was after twelve or something”. Female B explains “It was our first date together and stuff.” Then, Male B continues with “We went out to dinner.” Female embellished his account with “We dressed up. We went out to dinner.” Then Male B explains in more detail “At an Italian restaurant. And then we went to Homecoming” (Appendix B). In this account, Couple B describes the events that took place on the evening of their first date. After one partner presented an idea, the other added to that and an elaborated, jointly constructed account emerges. However, it is interesting that minimal disclosures into the evening are provided. Perhaps the hesitancy in revealing the personal details of the evening is related to the uncertainty of one partner with the level of disclosure that is acceptable with the other partner. Here the couple may be attempting to socially reconstruct past events in a manner that is comfortable for each individual.

Partners negotiate boundaries about how much personal information to disclose in a way that also indicates a need to reach levels of comfort (Wood, 1995). While Couple B's low level of intimate disclosure may be a constraint when studying joint remembering, it enhances their collective story for future use. Upon leaving the interview, Couple B may have a negotiated level of intimate disclosure, as well as a shared story of their first date together. Hence, this very pragmatic reality constrains the process of joint re-telling.

Bormann refers to this negotiation as symbolic convergence. Symbolic convergence theory was primarily developed by Bormann (1983) as a means to illustrate how sharing provides the essential communication episodes that create a common social reality. Through this social reality, partners are able to accomplish sense making. Symbolic convergence is based on three primary tenets (Bormann, 1983). First, communicative forms and practices are discovered and arranged into organized patterns to demonstrate the evolution of shared consciousness. Second, a description of dynamic tendencies is developed within communication systems to explain why the observed practices took place. Third, factors are identified to explain why people share the images that they do (Bormann, 1983, p. 102). The goal of symbolic convergence is coorientation. Coorientation develops within ongoing interpersonal episodes, in which individuals who bring their unique orientations begin to coordinate their meanings (Bormann, 1983).

Through their negotiation of events, Couple B works to reach a comfortable level of disclosure through coorientation. Thus, "when members share, they have jointly experienced the same emotions, they have developed the same attitudes and emotional responses to the personae of the drama; they have interpreted some aspect of the

experience in the same way” (Bormann, 1983, p. 104). By working with each other through conversation, the partners move closer together in their explanation of events until their individual accounts merge into a joint account, thus reaching symbolic convergence or a “meeting of the minds” (Bormann, 1983, p. 110).

Critical Incident 2.

Critical incident two asked participants about being a mutually exclusive couple. Unfortunately, the terminology used in the interview process was not consistent with the language used in the adapted premarital assessment tool. Due to this inadvertent error, comparisons between the individual and co-constructed accounts cannot be made. However, the data is useful in examining the way couples co-create a shared reality.

Individuals offered varied reactions regarding the realization of their exclusivity within the co-constructed accounts. Some participants had definite ideas on the couples’ exclusivity. For instance, Female E says that she realized their exclusivity “Quite early in the relationship because I had played around for a few years and I knew that he was special” (Appendix E). Male D stated that they had discussed “commitment and stuff”. In contrast, others claimed that the realization was more indefinite. . For instance, Female D claims they adopted a monogamous attitude toward the relationship without discussing the matter (Appendix D). Similarly, Male E stated “We never really said ‘We’re going steady’ or anything like that. It sort of evolved and at some point I knew she was the only one I wanted to be with” (Appendix E). Obviously, the partners in these relationships had different perceptions of the initial decision to become a mutually exclusive couple.

When Couples D and E created a joint narrative of critical incident two, the co-

created account illustrated much cooperation between romantic partners. After discovering each other's perceptions of past events, Couple D changes their versions of events slightly to come to a consensus. Female D claimed that "I don't think that we talked about it. We just, I just naturally assumed. I think that it was just understood" (Appendix D). Then her partner revises his recollection of events by saying "We talked about it one time, about you know, commitment. And that was probably about three months into the relationship" (Appendix D). Female D then changes alters her account by agreeing with his version of happenings by adding "Yeah" (Appendix D), followed by Male D's response "About commitment and stuff" (Appendix D). In this narrative, both participants alter their original accounts. Neither individual stands firm in his/her claim of the sequence of events, rather each slightly alters his/her tale to appear more congruent with the other's rendition of happenings, perhaps because of a need to avoid conflict or uncertainty about relational status.

Several studies have identified the deteriorating effect of conflict on relationships (Bass, 1993 in Wood, 1995; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Because of the correlation between unresolved conflict and divorce, conflict between romantic partners is commonly viewed as undesirable (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Therefore, couples frequently attempt to avoid conflict in order to reach conformity in conversation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997) as is seen here with the techniques used by Couple D.

In this example, Couple D responded to distress in the relationship with one of the four responses outlined by Rusbult et al. in Wood, 1995. Couple D exercised the neglect

response to conflict by failing to address relationship tension. Specifically, these partners react passively to the conflict by denying or minimizing problems, and refusing to discuss the issue (Wood, 1995).

Another possible explanation for the Couple D's behavior involves uncertainty theory (Berger & Bradac, 1982). With this theory, the need to eliminate uncertainty is examined. By examining their responses, it becomes apparent that perhaps the couple is unsure about how to respond to the question because they have different individual constructions. Because of high levels of uncertainty at this point, partners may strive to reduce the uncertainty in their joint account and present a cohesive narrative.

A similar phenomenon occurred with Couple E in their co-constructed narrative of the decision to become a mutually exclusive couple. Both participants read each other's responses for individual accounts of the critical incidents. Female E responds that the decision to become mutually exclusive "Just kind of happened. We'd hung out all summer and it just kind of happened. We weren't dating anybody else, that I know of (Laughter)" (Appendix E). Male E continues to reiterate his point by restating "Yeah, there was never a conversation like 'You want to go steady?'" (Appendix E). Then, Female E again contradicts her original utterances on the subject by agreeing "No" to this statement by Male E (Appendix E). Here Couple E appears to strive to present the most cohesive narrative of their mutual exclusivity as possible. In doing so, the couple works toward a coordinated management of meaning.

Each couple negotiates rules and regulations for themselves regarding behavior, emotion, disclosure etc. (Wood, 1995). Rules are understandings about what is

appropriate and inappropriate in various situations (Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993 in Wood, 1995). When couples come to agree upon a particular set of rules for themselves, the couple has achieved what Cronen and Pearce (1981) would call a “coordinated management of meaning”. These rules have to do with what we can do, must do, or must not do at particular situated moments.

Couple E may have had differing opinions regarding the point at which exclusivity was reached. However, for Couple E, the rules of their relationship indicated that disagreement on this particular topic was undesirable. Therefore, Couple E created a story to offer an account of events that was congruent with each other’s personal beliefs based on their relational rules. Woods (1995) addresses this phenomenon when stating:

Partners will develop expectations for each other’s responses to various actions, who initiates rapprochement, what topics and what tactics are off limits, and how to resolve differences. Sharing understandings become part of the relational culture that includes agreements about how to conduct the relationship in general and specific interactions in particular (p. 57).

Critical Incident 3.

Couples were asked to describe their worst fight in critical incident three. Individuals offered unique responses to this significant event description. Some individuals claimed that fighting was not an important factor in their relationship, so much so that they did not offer an account. Couple C had difficulty responding to this critical incident in particular. In the individual accounts, Female C claimed “We seldom fight-I can’t remember” (Appendix C). Male C offered this response: “I don’t remember

one, honestly!” (Appendix C). Other individuals perceived that their fights were not a problem, such as Male A’s reply: “I don’t think we have had a really bad fight” (Appendix A) or Female A’s explanation: “It was more of a debate than a fight. A back and forth talk about our opinions that weren’t the same” (Appendix A). Within the individual accounts, most partners tended to avoid the question or downgrade the severity of the fight by renaming the event as a “debate”, “discussion”, or “argument”, etc.

During the joint version of events, couples reiterated the notion that fighting was not an issue in their relationships. Partners continued to characterize their disagreements as something other than a “fight”. For instance, Male A stated in the joint account that “We’ve never fought we’ve just had more of a debate” (Appendix A). Female A claimed that sometimes they have a debate “or a discussion” (Appendix A). Then Male A countered with “And it’s not, I’m not mad at her because everybody feels their own way about any given subject, as you know so. I can’t say as though we really had a fight” (Appendix A). Later he stated “We usually are able to work things out before...or she gives in or I give in. We just usually don’t argue about it” (Appendix A) further indicating the conflict avoidant nature of their relationship.

In a similar conversation, Couple C also continually minimized the severity of their disagreements. When asked to co-construct their worst fight, Male C said, “I honestly can’t remember. We argue sometimes about like ‘Pick up the coat’ or ‘Clean the kitchen’ but that’s like roommate problems” (Appendix C). Then Female C agreed “Yeah, I mean we don’t really fight” (Appendix C). Next Male C went so far as to claim “I can’t remember one single fight we’ve had” (Appendix C). In this excerpt, the need for

coordinated management of meaning is apparent. For this couple, conflict avoiding behavior is prized. Therefore, because the couple has agreed that conflict avoiding behavior is desirable, they have reached a coordinated management of meaning.

In a related example, Littlejohn (1983) examined conflict avoidance in the context of coordinating meaning. In the example, a husband and wife tend to withdraw from conflict. On the content level, an observer would concentrate on the actual utterances of the husband and wife, looking closely at the types of words used and at the grammatical structure. At the speech act level, the observer would assess the interactional rules, perhaps discovering that when the wife objected or disagreed with the husband, he would withdraw or fail to respond. At the level of contracts, one might note that the couple maintained an implicit agreement not to argue with each other. In a sense, we would say that this agreement was a required "contract" of the relationship. In analyzing episodes, one would look for repetitive behavior patterns. The observer might note that the husband's withdrawing in the face of disagreement occurs over and over, and at a higher level one might infer that conflict-avoidance is an important part of his life-script. Finally, as an archetype the couple might believe that harmony and happiness should pervade all human relationships (p. 67). This example is very similar to the behavior exhibited by research participants, indicating their valuing conflict avoidant within their relationship. Thus, these couples have coordinated meaning to express that for them, conflict is undesirable.

Conclusions

In summary, this study provides insight into the process by which romantic couples create their own social reality. By examining the individual and co-constructed accounts of five couples, the influence of the partner on individual behavior is obvious. In these accounts, the quest for coordinated management of meaning is attained through the process of symbolic convergence. Primarily couples attempt to reach conflict avoidance through the process of constructing their relational stories. Through these individual and joint narratives, scholars can learn more about the process of relationship co-construction.

Although revealing, this study was limited in several ways. First, while the sample size of five couples allows for descriptive analysis, a larger sample would make generalizing to the entire population more feasible. Second, follow-up interviews with the couples may enhance the study by producing more intimate interview responses. Finally, because of the discrepancy in terminology used for critical incident two, a true comparison between individual and co-constructed accounts is not valid. For the purposes of this research, both individual and co-constructed accounts can be studied but no correlation between the two cannot be drawn. More careful language usage would eliminate such problems in future studies.

Future research in the area of social construction of the romantic relationship will prove insightful for the field of interpersonal communication. By studying couples for an extended period of time, a more thorough understanding of their relationships and social constructions would be possible. Specifically, longitudinal studies using a similar methodology may provide understanding of the effect of time upon a romantic

relationship, as well as the developmental stages of relationships. In addition, studies exploring the tendency to avoid conflict by recanting statements may be useful to conflict management studies of interpersonal relationships.

In this work great insight into the co-construction of romantic relationships has been reported. By comparing relational accounts, the process of socially constructing an “us” has been recorded. With these accounts, researchers can witness the process of relational development. By studying individual and joint narratives used by five couples to “do” their relationship, scholars can better decipher the language of love.

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Appendix A
Couple A: Critical Incident Responses

Female A

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
The owner of a flower shop in which his mom and myself were working introduced us. Soon after, I got a job at the video store next to Domino's, his place of employment. He would come over and talk and things began from there.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
For me it was the first "real" evening we spent together. My graduation night we spent with all my friends at a party and the connection between him and my friends and myself was amazing. The next day it felt as though I had known him for years.
3. Describe your worst fight.
We had a discussion about a tax increase for the high school. It was more of a debate than a fight. A back and forth talk about our opinions that weren't the same.

Male A

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
My mom worked at a flower shop. She worked at the same flower shop. The lady they worked for kept telling us we would be perfect for each other.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
Our first date. We joked about it our first summer together. Then she went away to school. I would say the next summer when she came home and we were still crazy about each other. We knew then.
3. Describe your worst fight.
I don't think we have had a really bad fight.

Couple A: Co-constructed Narrative

1. I: I noticed that you both have filled out these sheets, which is fantastic for my data collection, but how did you feel as you were answering these questions?
2. F: I kept thinking about what he'd put.
3. I: Yeah?
4. M: Trying to- worrying if we were going to say the same thing. Probably.
5. F: I don't know if I worried about it.
6. M: Well not, you know what I mean, I mean. Thinking is this, is this right? Is this the right answer? Is that what she thinks that I think? Or, you know, kind of.
7. I: Were you comfortable answering these questions? Were any of them too personal? Or did you feel as though this was asking you to share too

- much?
8. M: Kind of. If, I mean, I guess if I didn't want to answer it I wouldn't have.
 9. I: Okay.
 10. M: I mean if one of them had bothered me enough to where...
 11. I: Okay, maybe I should've told you that from the beginning. Definitely. But I was also wondering, did you feel comfortable with all of these questions in the realm that you'd thought about them before?
 12. F: Oh yeah. I think that I have in one way or another.
 13. I: Any of them specifically, more so or less so?
 14. M: The "Why we were getting married" but I never really thought of any answers to it that I would put down on there. But I thought about it.
 15. F: Do you think that's like? You just had never thought about that?
 16. M: I thought about it but I'd actually come up with like, you know, five answers that I would put in like order of importance.
 17. F: Yeah. If someone asked. Yeah.
 18. M: You know, I can think of reasons but which one is more important?
 19. F: Yeah.
 20. M: You know. That kind of thing.
 21. I: Okay. And for you? Were there any?
 22. F: I don't know. I think just. There I don't think there was something more personal than others were. Probably just how my life has been just. I don't think that there's a question that's too... I mean it's not asking you to reveal your life darkest, deepest thoughts or anything.
 23. I: Well that's good. I'm glad that you felt as though you could answer all of these. How did you feel as you were reading his responses?
 24. F: I don't know. A couple times, I thought that he was being pretty sweet. And then a couple times I kind of wanted to laugh on how maybe he had thought of it when he'd read the question and I didn't think of it when I read the question. Kind of funny.
 25. I: Did you agree though?
 26. F: Yeah.
 27. I: Okay. How did you feel as you were reading hers?
 28. M: Pretty much the same. She went into more detail than I did but pretty much the same way. Most of our answers were where she had a couple more than I did or I'd have a couple more than she did. But they were all pretty right on.
 29. I: So tell me about the time that you guys first met. I've read both of your individual accounts but I'd like to hear it from you guys, verbally.
 30. F: Well, it was pretty close but I could've kept going. I had this big long spiel.
 31. M: Actually, our first meeting was drug out like forever.
 32. I: How so?
 33. M: Because we didn't. When we first met, I don't think we thought nothing of

- it. Because I had a girlfriend that I had been with and it just wasn't something that I thought about. Yeah, it just wasn't something that I thought about. And then, I don't know. It got weirder, and weirder, and weirder and then we ended up together.
34. F: The lady that I'd worked for before and his mom was working for introduced us. And then, his mom has a shop.
35. M: A formal shop, right down from the flower shop.
36. F: And so I'd see him there. And then I got a job next store to him, where he worked. So then, he'd come over and talk every now and then. And now I have to tell your famous pick-up line.
37. M: No, don't. That's okay.
38. F: When he...
39. M: It wasn't really a pick-up line.
40. F: When he asked...He had someone call me on the phone and then he got on the phone and then he asked me, he gave me this big long situation about him and his girlfriend. And he said, "What would you do?" Wanting me to say, "Oh just dump her. You should get rid of her". I'm like, "Well, you should go talk to her about it". And the next night you went and talked to her about it.
41. M: Well...
42. F: And got rid of her. (Laughter).
43. F: So it was like, over the span of like two or three months.
44. M: There wasn't really a time. I don't know when we actually met. Where we actually talked you know. Because we met and we knew...
45. F: Who each other was.
46. M: Yeah. And then it just kind of happened. Because it was like an infatuation thing.
47. I: So over a period of time. One day this person came in and was talking to you about what to do with this girlfriend that they had type of thing?
48. F: Yeah. Kind of.
49. M: In a round about way. Knowing what we both wanted. Or what I wanted.
50. F: Well he says that it took longer for him to...I mean, I swear that the first time I saw him I was like "Oh". Somebody just hit me upside the head and tells him to but...
51. M: When you first went away to school though it was real iffy. I mean you can't say that it wasn't.
52. F: What?
53. M: Our relationship. If that, it was going to last. Because I knew that you were right for me, but did I know if it would make it? You know, with you being away at college and me being at work. And we'd only been together three months. You can't say that you did because you didn't. You told me you didn't. So there.
54. I: So now, your twenty.

55. F: Yeah.
56. I: And how old are you?
57. M: Twenty-one.
58. I: So how long have you been at school? You're graduating in May?
59. F: This is my third year, so I'm graduating early.
60. I: So at some point you must have decided to just see each other and not anyone else. And as you said, you had a girlfriend and I don't know if you were like seeing other people at the same time as her, but at what point did you guys decide that you were only going to see each other, that you were going to be exclusive. That it was just going to be you two?
61. M: Uh. Well, you can go ahead and answer that one. (Laughter).
62. F: I wanted you to answer it first. (Laughter).
63. M: I'd say pretty much, I mean, I'd say pretty much from the beginning. Because I mean that's just the way I was. I mean, I don't know if she was that way. But I didn't, you know?
64. I: Date around?
65. M: Yeah. If I was with somebody, I was with her.
66. F: Well I thought about it, because you asked that question on the questionnaire.
67. I: Hmm.
68. F: And that first real time that we went out?
69. M: Yeah.
70. F: At my high school graduation. Like that next day I just felt like, because he walked into a party where he knew one person beside myself.
71. M: And I'd only met him once.
72. F: And it was just like, he knew everybody from way back in kindergarten. And it was just, it was wonderful. So like that next day it was like, "Okay, we'll keep him around and see what happens".
73. M: That's one of my good qualities. (Laughter). I put it on there.
74. I: Now did you guys have a date at that party or did you just arrange to meet each other there?
75. M: We had, you could call it a date.
76. I: Was that your first date?
77. F: I thought it was but apparently, it wasn't. Apparently, we had gone out...
78. M: Well, it was our first date. We'd gone to the mall one day I mean, that doesn't really count.
79. F: We were going to go out that night together and do something and then I found out about this party. And he was like "Oh, well let's go". And I was like "No".
80. M: It was her graduation night. You're supposed to go out and party.
81. F: And I was like "No, I really don't want to go". I didn't want to take him to the party basically. And he ended up finding the party and he went so I was kind of like "Oh?"

82. I: And how did that go?
83. M: It was, it was fine. You know.
84. I: It had to have been better than fine. You guys are getting married.
(Laughter).
85. M: That was, it was a long night. And we were only there for three or four hours. A lot happened.
86. F: Yep. (Laughter).
87. M: A lot happened. It was, it was kind of an awkward situation for me because I only knew her a little bit. And I'd only met one of her friends once talking to him, parked next to him in a truck and that was, that was it. Well, I guess I knew Dean, and I knew Joanne. But it was just real awkward. But everything worked out.
88. I: How did you feel?
89. F: Well, I felt really, really strange showing up with him because I knew that he didn't know anybody and I was like "How is this going to work?" Because coming from a small town where you don't date people from other towns, you kind of get like "Oh, I don't know if I'm going like this". It was just kind of like, we walked up there and everybody was just so friendly, of course that may've been due to the alcohol but (Laughter). Um, it was just like that feeling went away real quick. It was just like everybody was everybody's friend.
90. I: Well that's great. I am glad to hear that that went well, but I am sure that there were times that it didn't go quite so well. I'm interested in hearing a little more about this because you opted not to write anything down for the worst fight part and I was just curious what you guys think about that now that you've had a little more time to think about it.
91. M: There's not really-I mean she wrote that and I'd thought about that and there was one other discussion that we had at Dairy Queen one night and that's it. I mean we've never fought we've just had more of a debate...
92. F: Or a discussion.
93. M: And it's not, and it's not, I'm not mad at her because everybody feels their own way about any given subject, you know so. I can't say as though we've really had a fight.
94. F: That was the one because that just happened a couple weeks ago that just popped into my head.
95. M: Yeah.
96. F: But we don't...
97. M: We usually are able to work things out before, or she gives in or I give in. We just don't argue about it.
98. I: Okay. What surprised you the most about your partner's response on this?
99. M: You mean like, which response?
100. I: Yeah. What were you like, "Oh my gosh, I had no idea that you thought that".

101. F: I don't think anything.
102. M: Yeah, I don't think...
103. I: Nothing surprised you?
104. F: Nothing really stands out.
105. M: Yeah.
106. F: Maybe the only thing would be like the worst thing that had ever happened to him. I didn't know that.
107. M: But you knew that.
108. F: But I didn't know that after high school you, you felt that bad. You know what I'm saying? I think that was the one thing that jumped out.
109. I: So his perception of events was different than yours?
110. F: Well, he graduated a year...
111. M: That was before.
112. I: Oh, you didn't know each other then.
113. M: I didn't go to the same school even. We were from totally different towns and we'd never known each other until most of that was water under the bridge by then.
114. I: I see.
115. M: I was starting to deal with it and then she came along and so...
116. F: To fix it. (Laughter).
117. M: So that was it, you know.
118. I: Okay, is there anything on here that you guys thought was interesting. That made you think "That's exactly right, that's just how I feel too?". That question hit the nail on the head as far as what you were thinking and the other's response?
119. F: I think, for the communication, like what things you've been talking about lately, I think that with the wedding being so close, we both have finances at the top. And that's something that we were just talking about today. I mean that's something we've been talking about a lot lately.
120. I: Oh really?
121. M: Well with her trying to find a job and I make enough money but you never make enough.
122. I: Right.
123. M: And trying to start and trying to make a new adjustment to a new life where we've both lived with our parents up until two weeks from now. And it's just a whole big, of this thrown at us.
124. F: That and then our spending habits are very different.
125. M: Money is a big. Yeah, which we totally agreed on that.
126. F: So that's, that was one of the questions that I was like "Oh yeah". (Laughter).
127. I: Now do you guys ever have fights about that or are they maintained and managed before they get to that point?
128. M: We always know that the other one, like if she's telling me that I don't

- need to do this or do that then I know that she doing it for my best, it's in my best interest.
129. F: Though he may not do that.(Laughter).
130. M: Right. (Laughter).
131. F: No, we're pretty good at keeping stuff like that, not a serious issue but...
132. M: But, and that's one thing that, I know I put it on mine, I don't remember if she put it on hers, but we're so different. That's one of the things she wants to change about me and that I want to change about her. That's one of the things that, is because she's so pinchy-pinchy and I'm so get rid of it when I'm gone, so I might as well not have it.
133. F: See that's one thing that I didn't think about. When you put that down for what do you want to change, I didn't even think about that.
134. M: Because you've been trying to change that for the last three years so you just think of it as an everyday thing.
135. F: Yeah. (Laughter). And your job.
136. I: In regards to like your job?
137. F: His job.
138. I: Oh, his job.
139. F: Because, I think that he feels like he really wants to do something else. I know that his has this little thing in the back of his head but...
140. M: It's hard.
141. F: And I know that he can do it too.
142. M: It's hard. I can't right now. Because I couldn't go to college right out of high school, it just wasn't an option for me. I had to start working pretty much. I don't want to deliver pizzas forever. I mean it's good money for driving around in my car all day but I know I can't do it forever. And now with getting married, it's when am I, it's going to be hard for me to ever go to college. I mean I can't go as a full time student, I'll have to go part time, if I ever go. And that's a big issue with both of us, me going to school and me getting a better job.
143. I: Now, you're currently looking for a job. How is that going?
144. F: It's not. (Laughter).
145. I: Well, you're trying to finish up the semester at the same time.
146. F: I'm trying to do too many things at once.
147. M: And plan a wedding.
148. I: It's got to be nightmare. One other thing I wanted to ask you. I found your responses to this very different. In his description of marriage roles, he was like "Whatever makes you happy".
149. F: Oh, it was very general.
150. M: Well, there's...
151. I: And yours are very, very specific and I wondered what your feelings were reading each other's because they were so different.
152. M: That was as specific as I can get. I mean I can't say this is because I just

- don't think it's because I came from. never really had a dad so I think that might have something to do with it. You know she's got this whole traditional thing where you know the wife does the dishes and the husband goes and watches the news or whatever after dinner and she makes dinner. And you know all of that. I just, I don't think that a woman's place is in the kitchen. I think that whatever she wants to do is fine.
153. I: Okay. So how does that make you feel or what do you think about that?
154. F: That's fine. I know that's how he feels and I know how it'll end up. However I want to do it, however I want to make it that's how it'll be but it just made me laugh. That I was so specific and he was like you know whatever he or she wants to do, than that's what they can do. And I was like, "Okay, now tell me what you really think?"(Laughter).
155. M: Well that, I mean, I wasn't trying to be general you know, that's just, that's it. I'm not going to say that she should be working fifty hours a week and I should be doing dishes everyday and that's it. And obviously we should both help with everything but I'm not going to say that you know this is the way it should be. I don't think that, I mean not to sound like I'm lazy or anything, but I don't think that I should make the most money just because I'm a guy or that I shouldn't be the main source of income just because I'm the man you know. Why is that?
156. F: That's just how I was raised.
157. M: Yeah. See, I mean, it all goes back to how you were raised. But I've just never thought that.
158. I: Have you guys given any thought to how it will be at your house when you have your own house and are living on your own?
159. F: We talked about it a couple times but I was getting this college education, and I'd get this really good job, and then I'd be the one making all of the money. And he'd be the one staying home.
160. M: Watching my soap operas.
161. F: Well, we know that's not going to happen.
162. M: That's more of a joke. I couldn't do that.
163. F: I think that we both intend on being employed. Like it's not one or the other.
164. M: Sure, we both like are not like our parents, but how our parents act. Because are parents are both good. We wrote that down. I think it'd be good if we were like them but different traits, different ways of doing stuff. I think. Be on our own.
165. I: Do you guys have anything else that you'd like to share? Questions or anything else that you thought should be asked or addressed?
166. M: I circled your spelling error. (Laughter).
167. I: I know, thank you. You guys are the first couple.
168. F: I didn't even notice.

169. M: Well, I was reading it and I said "Finance, what does that have to do?" and then I reread it because I was just kind of skimming through it real quick. I said, "What has finance got to do with this question?"
170. I: I know. I am sorry.
171. M: That's okay. I've always, I'm kind of picky like that. I like spelling.
172. F: You?
173. M: That's the only thing that I'm good at.
174. F: Shall I pull up a few e-mails that you've sent me?
175. M: I know. (Laughter). I know. That's e-mails though. That's...
176. I: Well, I don't have any more questions for you guys. I told him that I'd send you guys a copy of this paper because he said that it might be kind of interesting for you guys to see.
177. F: Yeah. Send it to this address.
178. I: Well thank you both so much. I appreciate it.
179. M: No problem.

Appendix B

Couple B: Critical Incident Responses

Female B

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
We went to high school together and really never took notice of each other until junior year. He asked me to Homecoming and then the rest is history.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
I've always felt that way. We were serious right from the bat. We clicked and everything grew so fast.
3. Describe your worst fight.
After a series of small fights, it had escalated to a situation where I felt like he'd rather be watching basketball and working. I caught him in a lie and broke up with him. I need honesty.

Male B

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
In high school, had same classes together and went to Homecoming dance.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
The beginning of our senior year in high school up 'til freshman year of college.
3. Describe your worst fight.
Valentine's Day 1996, involving her and a basketball game. Me "first" and her "second".

Couple B: Co-Constructed Narrative

1. I: We have several other couples but I won't be using your real names. Dr. Mills is my adviser and I'm sure that you don't want her to know all of the details of your personal life that may need to remain personal. And just for anyone else that might read it and know you, that way your identity is concealed. To do that you guys have to pick a pseudonym, so if you want to pick your middle name or another name. Do me a favor and jot it down on the top of your sheet. And then, when I'm transcribing I'll refer to you as your pseudonym. So, don't worry about that. Could I see your surveys please? Thanks. Would either of you be interested in receiving a copy of the finished paper?
2. F: Yeah.
3. M: Just one is fine. We'll get it.
4. I: Okay, I'll mail it to this address then. When are your guys planning to be married?
5. F: July 99.

6. I: So you guys went to high school together?
7. F: Yeah.
8. I: Tell me about the first time you met—the very first time.
9. F: The first time I remember him was freshman year; we had a biology class together. My friend and me used to go, he was the smart one in the class, and we used to go over and see what he had on his paper. (Laughter). But I mean that, we really didn't talk much until junior year then. Because he was, we were really opposite in high school. He was so loud and I was very quiet.
10. M: She didn't like me.
11. F: No, I stayed away from him.
12. I: When do you first remember initiating a date type of event?
13. M: Probably a week before Homecoming.
14. F: Of our junior year.
15. I: And what happened then?
16. M: I didn't have a date and she didn't have a date, so I was like "Hey".
17. F: Well, we sat next to each other in English class. And he was always talking to me and stuff. And the teacher had to separate us but then he asked me.
18. I: So then, how did it happen that somewhere from biology to English, were first you didn't like him and then what happened that you couldn't stop talking to each other in class?
19. F: Um, I don't know. Well, he was both of our personalities changed then. I guess he calmed now by then and I was a little more outgoing. And we were both in sports and stuff so we had seen each other from that. I just, he was very nice and respectful towards me and that was something that made me want to see him more.
20. I: Okay. What did you find most surprising as you were reading through your partner's responses?
21. M: They were pretty much the same. A lot of stuff.
22. F: MM.
23. M: Maybe a little bit different but a far as like "What do you expect" and "how do you describe love" and all of that stuff.
24. I: Okay, so nothing surprised you?
25. F: Not really. I knew, we like share a brain or something. (Laughter).
26. I: I noticed as you were going through you said, "You never broke up with me". What was that about?
27. M: Yeah. That was some fight that we had gotten into and she said had escalated and we'd broken up. But she never broke up with me.
28. F: I did. I did. But you just wouldn't let me. (Laughter).
29. M: She was like "That's it. We're done". And I was like "No". So she tired to but never did officially.
30. F: We were never officially broken up.

31. I: Okay. What was the fight about? How did that occur?
32. M: Probably growing because I am a sport freak. I like to watch basketball and officiate and work. I just uh, and she doesn't care for basketball. I don't know what...
33. F: No, it's not that I don't care...
34. M: I'm obsessed with it.
35. F: It's that he was lying to me about what he was doing and where he was going to be. He wasn't telling me the truth. And then, we had fought in December about this stuff. And I told him that he had one more chance if I caught him again. On Valentine's Day I caught him in a lie and that's when I told him that I didn't want to see him any more.
36. I: Of this year?
37. M: No, of 1996.
38. F: No, last year. Yeah, 1996.
39. I: How was that fight resolved? You say that you couldn't break up with him?
40. M: A lot of yelling and crying.
41. F: I did the yelling and crying and he cried.
42. M: I told her to be reasonable.
43. F: He told me...
44. M: To be rational.
45. F: No, (Laughter) that's not what happened. No, he told me that he wouldn't do it again and I told him that you better not because otherwise that was going to be it.
46. M: But I'm through that. After that, we've talked.
47. F: Yeah. And then, after that...
48. M: But I won't give up my basketball. I'll still go watch games and stuff.
49. F: And...
50. M: I tell you. You may not like it but I still tell you.
51. F: Right.
52. I: And that seems to have resolved that problem for you?
53. F: Yeah. As long as we talk about it and stuff.
54. I: So you've become more accepting of the truth and therefore you don't feel the need to lie about it?
55. M: I mean she's going to be mad no matter what but (Laughter). Well, I go to a lot of basketball games, not anymore but during the season, I had season tickets.
56. I: But it wasn't something you wanted to do together?
57. F: No. (Laughter).
58. M: No, she didn't enjoy it.
59. F: He's like a manic.
60. I: Tell me about when you went to this homecoming dance.
61. M: Well, I picked her up at her house, because we lived five minutes from

- each other, so I picked her up. Her dad said have her home by ten o'clock or something. She made a face and he was like all right, ten-thirty if you want to finish the evening (Laughter). I forget what time she had to be home—it was after twelve or something.
62. F: It was our first date together and stuff.
63. M: We went out to dinner.
64. F: We dressed up. We went out to dinner.
65. M: At an Italian restaurant. And then we went to homecoming. And then after homecoming we...
66. F: You dropped me off.
67. M: I dropped you off. Did I come in at all or no?
68. F: I don't know. I don't remember. It was so long ago.
69. M: Nothing really, I kind of, the week before that I'd call her up and I'd...
70. F: Oh that's when...
71. M: I tried to get to know her on the phone before I just went on a first date with her.
72. F: That's when you wrote me that card. He was always, that was his first, he gave me a card. And he was homecoming prince or something. I don't know he just wrote me something really sweet, something like I was his princess.
73. I: Before you went to the dance?
74. F: The day of the dance he gave me this card.
75. I: What did you think of each other after that?
76. M: I don't know. I just kept calling her and going over there. I don't know what she...
77. F: Yeah, he was over all of the time. And we had fun.
78. M: I was over there more than at my house. Her parents seemed to like me. The same with her sisters.
79. F: Yeah.
80. I: Is that something that's important to you?
81. F: Yes. Our fathers grew up together and then moved to Alvis.
82. M: They lived actually next store each other for a while.
83. F: So our great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers knew each other.
84. I: At what point did you realize that instead of that's my classmate that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
85. F: Probably right after that.
86. M: Yeah. I wrote down like senior year and then like into freshman year of college because we talked about stuff. And then she wanted to separate when I went away to school because she stayed at home.
87. F: I went to junior college.
88. M: And then we talked about it and she was very upset because I was going away because she didn't go away to school.
89. F: Right. I was going to go away but I didn't because...

90. M: She was going to go to Tennessee but I said "No, No" then I got a scholarship to U of I and I went. But she was real upset, because to be away from each other for the first time and all of that. So I'd say that was real a time, during senior year that we really grew together. When I left for school and she stayed home kind of just staying together.
91. I: Would you say that was a turning point in the relationship?
92. F: Yeah. It was very trying.
93. M: After the first semester of freshman year.
94. F: It was really hard because we were with each other everyday before that.
95. M: A lot everyday.
96. I: Did that play a role in you deciding to come to Eastern?
97. F: Yeah. I wanted to go away to school but not to U of I; it was too big.
98. M: And then she wanted to go somewhere for teaching so she came here, which was also close to me.
99. F: Yeah, so he was a factor in all of this.
100. I: Would you say that you fought about the decision of who should attend which school and why?
101. M: No, she said she wanted to go to Tennessee. We actually went down to Tennessee and visited the college. And I don't know how...
102. F: We never fought.
103. M: No, but I don't know how excited she was to go to Tennessee but then after I went to U of I she was like "See, I should have gone to Tennessee". (Laughter). But we never fought about it though.
104. I: So, when did you decide to be engaged?
105. M: Well, we talked about it.
106. F: We've talked about it for a long time.
107. M: Maybe even freshman year of college, if not before that maybe.
108. F: Yeah.
109. M: About when we got older, and if everything worked out. That we would do it.
110. F: Yeah because I just found one of my old diaries and I read it and it said how I wanted to be engaged my senior year of college. And that was a couple years ago, that entry. So yeah, we've talked about it.
111. I: So when were engaged?
112. M: It was December 21st. At a restaurant, near our house kind of. An Italian restaurant, that is her favorite restaurant.
113. I: Was it the same restaurant as your first date?
114. M: No that's what she thought. She thought that I might go there when we had talked about it. But we just went there and asked to have a window seat and everything. And I asked her. She had no idea because I kept telling her that the place I was going to get rings didn't have them in and they wouldn't be ready until after the first of the year. (Laughter).

115. I: So you'd looked at rings before?
116. M: We'd looked.
117. F: Like a year before. (Laughter).
118. M: She told me what kind she liked but I picked everything out on my own. Well, with my parents and my sister helped.
119. I: So, now that you've decided to be married, what do you expect married life to be like?
120. F: I don't know. I think it's pretty much going to be like it is now, just a little bit more responsibility. I live in an apartment and he comes down and we cook for each other. We're very; we really don't do anything without the other knowing or without the other one being involved in it. I know it's going to be different because we are going to be with each other twenty-four seven, but I don't think it's really going to be that big of an adjustment.
121. M: That's what I said. You know, now I'm like, "No, I need to stay at school this weekend". And I don't see her for the weekend, but when you are married, you are going to see each other, which is, I'm actually looking forward to it. I know, like she said, there will be more responsibility but I've been able to assume them all so far.
122. I: You said that you expect to get love, respect, honesty and security from marriage or your spouse? What if you were marrying someone else?
123. F: Yeah. I expect that if it wasn't him, then from somebody else.
124. I: And you said you expect to get a wonderful experience, a wonderful family and a great understanding of love.
125. M: Right. I would expect that of anyone. What I give, I expect to get back in return.
126. I: Your reasons for getting married are almost identical.
127. M: Yeah, I was laughing at the "It's about time". (Laughter).
128. I: These are very specific and they almost mirror each other.
129. F: Well it was never like "Oh, it is about time".
130. M: Well we've, we haven't said that but we've been going out with each other for over five years so we decided that it's time to take the next step. We talked about family before and when to have kids and how many. She wants a lot. And then, love and stuff.
131. I: Tell me about any of your other fights.
132. M: When I had that interview and you were all upset. I scheduled an interview when I was home for Easter. I was thinking that she would get a ride back from her roommate or someone. And she was like "It's not just you anymore, it's two people and you just made me feel like you didn't care about me".
133. F: Because I had class and I couldn't miss anymore. And he went ahead and made this appointment and was kind of like "Okay, find your own ride

- home”.
134. M: I was just assuming that she would get a ride with her roommate or stay over and come back with me on Monday after the interview.
135. F: Right, he assumed. (Laughter).
136. I: What’s wrong? Was that the key word?
137. F: Yeah. He *assumed*. (Laughter).
138. I: What changes would you like to see each other make?
139. M: Not really. Well, we mentioned family.
140. F: Yeah, what was that?
141. M: Well, like how many kids you wanted to have and when you wanted to have them.
142. F: Well that’s not. I don’t think that was what the question was asking.
143. I: How did you interpret the question?
144. M: Like changes that she had for me when we get married. Like what she wanted me to do. That I didn’t really know, so I put N/A at first but then I put family.
145. I: What is your feeling on family?
146. M: Well, I just wanted to have like two kids kind of when I’m young but not too young.
147. I: At the age of?
148. M: Twenty-five. And then the other day, she was like “Yeah, when we are like twenty-nine”. And I was like “What?” And she wants to have three or four kids. And I was like “Okay”. I don’t want to be an old parent.
149. I: Have you ever talked about that before?
150. F: Yeah.
151. I: And you’ve known that you don’t see eye to eye?
152. M: Well, I’m all for, we can have as many kids as, I think four kids is fine. But I don’t want to start when I’m too old. There’s no such thing as too old but I want to have kids when, of course, it plays into her career too.
153. F: He wants to wait like two years.
154. M: Yeah, after we’re married about two years to start planning on having kids.
155. I: What do you think about that?
156. F: I think I made that comment just to see what he was going to say. I think that he wants to have kids right away but I was just thinking along the lines of when we’re older.
157. M: I said play it by ear too. Well have to see how it goes with her career and my career and see where we’re at. If we have money for kids.
158. I: So, that’s not something that either of you is especially concerned about.
159. F: No, because when I read the question I was thinking about “Don’t go golfing as much”. Something along that line.

160. M: I tried to be specific and I was trying to think of things, anything, to change about each other.
161. F: One thing I always badger you about is biting your nails but I don't think that is life changing.
162. I: Would you claim that each other is your first significant relationship?
163. F: Yeah.
164. M: Yeah. When I was looking at her thing and it said "Have you ever had other boyfriends beside this?" and she checked "yes". Then it said "How seriously?" or "For how long?" Though she's had a lot of boyfriends, it was like for a week when she was in eighth grade. And we were just talking about that the other day, that's why it sticks out.
165. F: No, I had one but other than him, I didn't really ever date anyone as seriously.
166. I: Does that worry either of you to marry the first person that you've seriously dated?
167. F: It used to, like at the beginning of college. Because when he first left because everyone was like "How do you know?" and I just kept hearing everyone ask and I was like "Maybe I don't know". But then why do you have to? I mean you can make that argument for anything. That's a pretty shallow argument, I think. You can look for someone the rest of your life and never find someone that's perfect. I mean, how do you know if you're ready for someone? You could date three people. What's the difference between three or fifteen?
168. I: What do you think about that?
169. M: I'm not worried about that. She was always worried about that. I feel if you find someone who's right for you that you get along with, then why not get married. Especially since we've been talking about it and been with each other. We've been through so much together, I feel like it's right. The time is right.
170. M & F: It's about time.

Appendix C
Couple C: Critical Incident Responses

Female C

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
We had classes together in high school. We always goofed around in gym class and then a few months later we began dating—for about three to four months. Broke up shortly before graduating. We both went away to different colleges, but spent much of the time on visits home together. At the same time (about three years ago), we both decided to move home to complete our associates. We've been together ever since and got engaged December 24, 1996.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
Since we had dated previously, that's tough to answer. When we got back together, it was just the two of us.
3. Describe your worst fight.
We seldom fight—I can't remember.

Male C

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
Senior year in high school. We were in the same gym class. We used to flirt. One day her good friend's boyfriend approached me. This guy told me she was interested in me, so I asked her out. The rest is history.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
When we started dating again after returning home from our colleges. We were best friends and anything but mutual exclusivity would have been wrong.
3. Describe your worst fight.
I don't remember one, honestly!

Couple C: Co-constructed Narrative

1. I: I have a few questions for you. I noticed that you didn't pick a new name. Did you want to use your real name or...
2. F: Oh, I forgot to. I forgot to actually—I don't care. Um...What did you put?
3. M: Thomas.
4. F: Oh, I'll put... Acapulco was he...Just kiddingly when we were walking in he was like "Should I change my name to Acapulco?" Um, anything, I don't care. I don't care. Um, Lournel.
5. I: Okay. You both have your associate's degree from the junior college in your hometown. I noticed that you both responded that you met your fiancée in high school.

6. F: Yes.
7. I: Could you tell me about that?
8. F: Well, let's see. We had a class together before we ever really talked. He sat behind me in this really terrible class.
9. M: I don't remember. I remember the class, but I don't remember her sitting in front of me.
10. F: No, I just remember hearing your name and knowing that you were behind me in a black leather jacket. (Laughter). And that was about it. We never really talked or anything. I think it was the next year when we had gym class together, when we always goofed off and flirted. And had fun. Then we, I don't know...
11. M: Then we, uh, your friend's boyfriend came up to me in the middle of, one night and say "Hey, ask Laurnel out, she likes you". So, that was, that was high school, you know.
12. F: Yeah. (Laughter).
13. I: Was that your senior year?
14. F: Yeah. Senior year. That was like our second semester our senior year, right?
15. I: And then, what happened?
16. F: And then, we broke up. He broke up with me, like in April. (Laughter). Yeah, I think that it was April. So we'd just dated for a few months. And then, we still saw each other because we somewhat had mutual friends. You know, we'd hung out together. But it was kind of awkward at that point so... Once we went away to school, our first trip home, it felt like we were best friends or something. When we, it was like we couldn't wait to see each other. But we didn't start dating again for another two years.
17. I: Now, you went to the same junior college?
18. M: Yeah, we went there after. We both went away to separate colleges thinking that and then met at the junior college again.
19. F: Yeah. We both went our separate ways for a couple of years but we kept in touch. Whenever we came home, we'd plan a weekend home or just like hang out over Christmas break or something, for two years when we went to different schools.
20. I: Now, at that time were you dating?
21. M: No.
22. F: No, we were seeing other people.
23. I: How did you move from just being friends to dating for a second time?
24. F: Well, it was like we were deciding. We were both making decisions about whether we should stay at the school we were at. I was, I just had an awful semester and I felt like I didn't really know if I was really going in the right direction at that school. And, of course, merchandising was my major, and now look where I am. (Laughter).

And he was kind of in the same situation; neither of us had done very well that semester with our grades. So, we were both, we kind of were talking while we were home about whether we were going to go back. What we were going to do.

25. M: I think one was dependent on the other. You know, "I'll stay here if you..."
26. F: Yeah, "Do you want to do this together?"
27. I: Had you been far away from each other?
28. F: I was in Kansas and he was at Western Indiana. Yeah, we went opposite directions. But, we were both home in May for a few weeks and then he was living down at school for the summer. And we were discussing, his parents gave him two options you can do this or you can go to community college at home or by Western, right?
29. M: Right.
30. F: And come home every weekend or every other weekend. Some ridiculous option. And fax home all of your grades as you get them. As you get a paper back, fax it to me. And so that sounded a little bit ridiculous. So, we both decided, since we were both coming home it wouldn't be so bad. So we just stared hanging out like crazy during that time. And then, I guess we made out on the couch in his family room. We'd been up all night for like three days.
31. M: Oh yeah. We'd pulled like two all-nighters. And we were just like hanging out.
32. F: Yeah. We were just like going to Great-America, the amusement park, and then like to, doing all different things. We'd just drive places and then he had to go back to school but we were dating. And I went there a few times and he came home. Just during the two months that he was down there because he'd already signed a lease for the summer.
33. I: Then what happened?
34. F: Well, then he was coming home for good. He was just had signed a lease at the fraternity house.
35. M: Yeah, I'd signed a summer lease at the house.
36. F: Yeah and he was running the coffeehouse too.
37. M: Do we need to mention that?
38. F: Well, he was managing a coffee shop too.
39. I: Then you finished your associates' degree at home and decided too come here together?
40. F: Yeah. I mean the long distance thing was like what, two months?
41. M: Yeah. And like, we saw each other every other weekend.
42. F: We were like four hours away. It really didn't even feel like that.
43. I: How did you decide that you were mutually exclusive?
44. M: I don't think we really decided.
45. F: We never formally decided. It was just, I don't think that we ever

- considered any other way of doing it.
46. M: I don't think we both have ever—I know that anybody I've ever dated I've just...
47. F: Yeah. I haven't dated multiple guys at one time.
48. I: How did you feel as you were answering these questions?
49. F: My arm hurt after a while. (Laughter). Um, I don't know.
50. I: Regarding the topic matter?
51. F: Fine. It was easy.
52. M: It was pretty much what I expected.
53. I: How did you feel as you were reading you fiancée's answers?
54. F: Well, I realized that there were a few things that he thought of that I'd wished I put down. But most of the other stuff was very similar to what I put down.
55. M: And I probably, with every question I looked at I knew what she was writing down in the next room.
56. F: Yeah. It was amazing.
57. I: What would you say was your worst fight?
58. M: I honestly can't remember. We argue sometimes about like "Pick up the coat" or "Clean the kitchen" but that's roommate problems.
59. F: Yeah, I mean we don't really fight.
60. M: I can't remember one single fight that we've had.
61. F: Yeah, I mean we've argued a few times talking about the future, talking about how many hours he's going to work. And how I kind of have a limit of how many hours I'd like him to work. But that wasn't really a fight. It's kind of just an argument.
62. I: You mentioned a lot of work related issues—hoping that he wouldn't work too many hours a week. Can you explain that?
63. F: Well, it's because he wants to own a restaurant. It's a big...
64. M: It's like seventy-hour workweeks.
65. F: It's a big commitment. And I just want to make sure that when appropriate he hires someone to watch over the little things, so that he is not gone.
66. M: Yeah, I think that she's afraid that knowing the restaurant I told her you got to work seventy hours a week, at least. My father does that and...
67. F: See...And see, his parents' relationship, I don't want to end up like that.
68. M: Right, my father like came from nothing and has worked really hard to become successful and he works. He works those hours just to do it. And I think that impact on their relationship has kind of distanced them. So I think that's what she is really afraid of, and me.
69. F: And I've expressed that I would be happy having a slightly lower income level and having him home more than having all of the money

in the world and not being able to use it together. Rather than finding that I'm out alone spending it or him. That's basically what that's about.

70. I: Is this different from your family?
71. F: My family is not really like that.
72. M: They're polar opposites.
73. F: My family does a lot of things together. We set up times to be together. More than once or twice a year. And when like Christmas comes, it's not like, "Oh God, grab a drink—the relatives are coming over".
74. M: That's how it is at my house.
75. F: You can wear your jeans and be comfortable. I mean sure, family at holidays, I think everyone drives each other a little crazy but...
76. M: It's always elegant at my house. You have to dress up.
77. F: At his house, he's handed clothes to wear and he's twenty-three but still at Christmas time is like "Okay". When I saw him, I was like, "Where did that shirt come from?" and it was something that they were like "You have to wear this, the relatives are coming over". It's just something that our parents are very, very different.
78. M: Mine are ultra-conservative and hers are more liberal. So it's kind of strange just how we've been brought up.
79. F: Yeah. And they've both had a big influence on us. His dad is still saying, "You know, you should consider the corporate aspect of restaurants". But he knows how to do this, he's opened two restaurants, knows there is a lot of money to be made, and he likes it but his parents still don't get it.
80. M: Well, my father made all of his money in the corporate world. And that's the only thing he really knows and the only way he can advise me in things. So I see his point though.
81. I: Your liberalism seemed to come through when you wrote about the responsibilities of a wife. You mentioned that you didn't want to be the 1950's housewife. Are you afraid of becoming a stay at home mom?
82. F: No, because I know that he doesn't expect me to do that. I'll be happier, even if I'm not working full time, if I was doing something, working part-time or something. Rather than feeling like the cleaning lady and the cook.
83. M: Even if I am making enough money to support us both I think that she still wants to volunteer...
84. F: Or work. Yeah, volunteer or work. I'm not into, sure I'll make dinner for us sometimes but we go out. We don't, he knows, he's not expecting me to cook every night, that's for sure. (Laughter). If so, speak up---this is your out. No, (Laughter).
85. I: What surprised you about each other's responses?

86. F: I...
87. M: Nothing really.
88. F: I don't think that I saw any surprises in there. I don't think that anything surprised me.
89. M: No, nothing really surprises me.
90. F: No, we know each other so well. No, there weren't any surprises in there.
91. I: Did anything make you uncomfortable to answer?
92. M: No, not really.
93. I: Do you have anything else to add?
94. F: Not really.
95. I: Well, thanks very much. Then, we're finished.

Appendix D
Couple D: Critical Incident Responses

Female D

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.

I met him through my first fiancée about nine or ten years ago. We would always talk and laugh together when a group of us went out. Although, I would have never guessed that five years after calling off my first wedding, I would be dating him. He came to my town for a conference for work and looked me up. We have been together since.

2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?

Two weeks after we started dating. I don't think either one of us had any intentions of dating anyone else at the same time. After talking, we found out that we liked each other for quite some time. It just never worked out due to living in a small town with my ex-fiancée.

3. Describe your worst fight.

I feel our worst fight is about making changes in our relationship. Getting married! It has been tough on him with me in school, and so he has been trying to save money by continuing to live at home. This is tough on both of us. Another factor is that I don't have one home. I live in my car because I commute fifty minutes to college daily. So sometimes I stay in town with a girlfriend, go to his house, or back home.

Male D

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.

She and I initially met through a friend. Actually, she was engaged to him at the time. They later broke up and we went out for lunch a few times. We didn't see each other for a year or two when she moved away. But, one summer, I had a continuing education class in her town and I called her up. We went out and we have been together ever since.

2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?

Actually, I always felt something toward her (funny feeling) seven or eight years ago when my friend was engaged to her. However, I believe I finally realized we were a mutually exclusive couple three to six months in to the dating when she helped me open up. No specific time or event happened.

3. Describe your worst fight.

She was having difficulties that she continued to blame on her father's behavior toward her. I finally told her she needed to get on with her life. She got mad and stormed out. We yelled at each other and finally worked it out.

Couple D: Co-constructed Narrative

1. I: I've noticed that you are a bit older than some of the other participants and you both have jobs and have been in the work force. And both of you have or are beginning your Master's degrees.
2. F: Yes, I have been out in the work force.
3. I: What did you do?
4. F: Well, I worked with computers and software. Then, I was nanny for two years. And then I went to cosmetology school but I've never done that. I've always done that on the side. I like doing it but I don't want to do it full-time.
5. I: Were you a nanny when you met?
6. F: Yes, actually I was. We'd known each other, but then he decided to come to Alton and he called me up and I was nanny at that time.
7. I: You are working in Orchard Hills now?
8. M: No, actually I am working for a company that contracts services to long-term care facilities.
9. I: So you are not very far away for each other?
10. M: No. Actually I work in the Shelbyville area.
11. I: You have very different experiences listed for the worst things that have ever happened to you. It sounds like yours occurred when you were a bit younger. And yours involved other people beside yourself. Did it surprise you to hear that this was the worst thing that happened to one another?
12. M: No.
13. F: No, because we discussed both of these things before.
14. I: What about the best things?
15. F: Well, I think that I tell him all of the time that I think he's one of the best things. And moving to Alton, so he already knew that.
16. M: Yeah.
17. I: And were you surprised about the person giving him encouragement?
18. F: He's told me.
19. I: But were you thinking that was the best thing? Or were there other "best things" that you thought of?
20. F: I think I'm one of the best things, of course but he states that. No, I would say that's the one thing that he really tries to work on.
21. I: Tell me about when you met. You say it was ten years ago and you say it was seven years ago. Tell me about when you originally met.
22. F: I counted, when I wrote that I knew he would put something different. Because I counted the time that we were actually were probably introduced which, because at the time I was with my ex-fiancee, I was with him in '88 and '89. And I know that I'd met him, but as far as us forming a friendship it was at least, probably 89 or 90.
23. M: What did I say? Seven to eight?
24. I: Yeah.

25. M: I was just trying to, it's been a good while and I was just trying to think back. I was still in school at Eastern and I remember meeting you at the Lake.
26. F: MM.
27. I: Tell me about that.
28. M: Well, we just they'd go skiing. I'd go with some other guys...
29. F: One of whom was my boyfriend at the time and then...
30. M: Actually we're not real close; he's a friend but not real close.
31. F: No.
32. M: Actually, the other guy that I was good friends with was closer to him than I was. They're a year older than I am in high school. So I knew him but it wasn't like we were best friends or anything like that. We'd just go skiing in the summers because I happened to work with the other guy during the summers. And they both had boats and that's how I met her.
33. F: MM.
34. M: And I was just figuring that it was somewhere in the '89 and '90 area. Because I graduated it '91 from Eastern.
35. F: And I was supposed to get married in '90. Yeah.
36. M: It's about...
37. F: It's probably nine.
38. M: Yeah.
39. I: What lake was this?
40. M: Olney.
41. I: Is that where you are from?
42. M: No, St. Marie and Oakland.
43. I: Did you meet at all in high school then?
44. F: No. We did not meet until later.
45. I: You both note that there was a second meeting years later. And you say, "I always had a funny feeling towards her".
46. M: Yeah.
47. I: What does mean?
48. F: That's a spark. I meant the same thing but I didn't write it.
49. M: We just would always talk and there was just something kind of there. Of course she was engaged at that time.
50. I: So what happened at the time that you were thinking of her as your friend's fiancée?
51. M: Nothing.
52. I: How much time passed?
53. M: I would say...
54. F: We met again at Halloween.
55. M: Well, I would see her out. She came to Eastern partying with some friends one time, and I was gone. I think she stayed...

56. F: I actually stayed at your apartment.
57. M: She stayed at my apartment. Then, I think that's how we got to talking again. And then, I was seeing somebody else at the time, but not seriously. And I went to a wedding and I saw her at the wedding. And then I went to a wedding of my friend's and then I went to another one, just the reception, and I saw her there and was talking to her. I asked her about her ex-fiancee and she was with him that night. And I was shocked.
58. I: Because during that time...
59. M: Yeah because somewhere she'd got back with him. And he was right there when I asked her. And then, of course I graduated and got a job. And then shortly after that, when was it? Halloween, probably that?
60. F: Yeah.
61. M: Well, we got to talking.
62. F: Then a couple of years went by.
63. M: No, because that spring we went to lunch together a couple of times. Some time during that first year that I was working we went to lunch a couple, three times.
64. F: That was when I was twenty. Because I was still working at PSI then. That Halloween that we met I was living in Alton.
65. M: Okay. So then we went out before that. When she was working in Shelbyville and I was working in Shelbyville we went out for lunch. But it never felt right because she'd just been engaged not too long ago. And I knew the guy and had respect for him. So when never dated. But I guess it was that Halloween a year or so.
66. F: It was a year after the fact.
67. I: Well, tell me about Halloween because you have mentioned it several times.
68. F: Well actually that's the first time that we actually (Laughter) "got together".
69. M: This is what happened, I was in a bar, you know. And these people came in the bar all dressed up and one of them was her. And, of course, no one knew who she was and then but she was talking to people. And then she came over to me and whispered something in my ear. And I immediately knew who she was and I think that shocked her. But I could recognize her the voice. And then later on she came into another bar she came into another bar that we were in because we were just jumping around from bar to bar. But she'd taken her costume off and then we were dancing. And having a good time.
70. I: Was this before you moved to Alton?
71. F: Yeah.
72. M: But I'd called you a few times. But we never did go out.
73. F: Yeah we decided...

74. M: So then you moved to Alton. And we went out that night. If I remember correctly, she said, "I'm going to be home, give me a call if you want to go out". And the rest is history.
75. I: So he did call?
76. F: Yes.
77. I: And you been dating about three years?
78. F: Yes.
79. I: You two are not "engaged" but getting married in a few months. What's the rationale behind that?
80. M: Yeah, just no formal proposal yet. I mean I have an idea of when but I just haven't done it yet. Not formally popped the question yet.
81. I: You talk about loving one another by doing anything for each other, trusting each other, able to telling each other anything, and can't imagine life without this person. Is that what you've thought about when your partner may have said, "I love you" throughout the relationship?
82. M & F: Yeah.
83. I: Before the "I love you's" came a point when you realized that maybe you shouldn't be seeing anyone else. When did you decide or talk about becoming an exclusive couple?
84. F: I don't think that we talked about it. We just, I just naturally assumed. I think that it was just understood. But it's like...
85. M: I don't know. We talked about it one time, about you know, commitment. And that was probably about three months into the relationship, I'd say.
86. F: Yeah.
87. M: About commitment and stuff.
88. I: Was that because you were seeing other people prior to that?
89. M & F: No.
90. M: For me that's not any big deal.
91. F: No, me either.
92. I: You mentioned that you were engaged before many times throughout this discussion. That you were engaged but did not get married. Do you think that this has effected this relationship?
93. F: Yes, definitely. It's effected our relationship because in a small town people don't want to let things go. And since we have been dating he's had to put up with a lot. Maybe not a lot, but to me it's unnecessary-- comments and just different things like that. Which it's really sad but we survived it.
94. M: I think that it bothers me maybe more than it bothers you. But once again, it's been a long time but yet...
95. F: But he's married and has a kid, you know...
96. M: But like she said, we went golfing one night and he was with a

- common friend. And the friend was like “Hey, are you still going out with the ex?” And that was inappropriate. And I think that he was already married at that time.
97. F: And then he made another comment about “That’s a pretty tough job...” Just stupid comments.
98. M: But anyway...
99. I: Most of it is directed at you?
100. F: Yes, but not by him, not Chris, my ex-fiancee.
101. M: Not him.
102. F: By like his cousins and other people.
103. M: Just recently she got to meet him wife.
104. F: Yes, it was quite interesting.
105. M: Which was quite an experience. And the first thing she said to her was “So, your Chris’s ex”.
106. F: And she goes “I’ve been wanting to talk to you for a long time” and I said “Me too”. And then she said, “Well, with you being Chris’s ex and all”. And I was like it has been eight years and you’re married to him. Why would you say that? (Laughter).
107. M: But that’s kind of just a small example...
108. F: I thinks that’s her personal feelings about...But I think that’s helpful. And I feel really good about it now.
109. M: Yeah, and now I play golf with him a few times a year and we don’t have any problems.
110. F: No, because he’s not like that.
111. I: I see. You each mentioned a different occasion for your worst fight. Would you classify these as the two worst fights that you’ve had?
112. M: Well, hers is really more of an on-going discussion.
113. F: But that was definitely... I just totally forgot about that one.
114. M: I think everything was vented. And I thought that I was understanding until she reacted but yet...
115. F: It was a topic that was hard to figure out.
116. I: And that is something that has not been a problem since?
117. M: Not really.
118. I: When you talk about this living situation and you mention its effect on your relationship as a factor in your decision to get married.
119. F: Well, it is not the only reason... (Laughter). I mean I knew that it influences us but it is not the only reason. I mean it is tough with me going to school and staying at three places. I don’t stay in the same place more than twice. And it is just mentally exhausting plus school is draining. I want to be with him. And I want to go to school. You know, I feel like I should be seeing my parents because I actually live there. It is just a catch twenty-two. I spread myself to thin.
120. I: When did the situation arise?

121. F: I think when I started going to Eastern, but recently it has gotten worse. This semester four of my six courses are all group work and I have had a meeting at ten o'clock at night because that's when my group could meet. So I'm there.
122. M: But you are probably a little bit more, when she has an idea she wants it done and sits down to do it. Is that what you're talking about? Wouldn't you say the fights and how long that's been going on? About wanting to get married?
123. F: Yes, I'm the type of person that "Let's make a decision". And now, I've really felt like I'm so indecisive, because I've expected him to make decisions and he doesn't so I felt like it's kept me from making decisions. Does that make sense?
124. M: Well...
125. F: Well, the thing is I don't want to make a decision because I want to wait and see if we are going to get married or not because I need to start looking for an apartment in town because I can't keep living like this. Especially trying to get my Master's. I need stability.
126. M: But it's not like I have a lot of trouble of making decisions with my job or those types of things it's more...
127. F: With life.
128. M: With relationships more than anything. And since I don't make decisions with that, or haven't in a long time, she says she views me as unable to make decisions.
129. F: And I know that's probably unfair but I think those are the things that are going through my head.
130. M: And that makes the decisions harder.
131. F: And I'm like "Just give me an answer". Because he won't tell me yes or no. Just tell me.
132. I: So you've solved this problem by planning to get married in the near future.
133. M & F: Yes.
134. I: At that point where will you be living? And together or separate?
135. F: Well, together. I thought that was why we're getting married.
136. M: Yeah. I mean I don't want to drive back and forth to see each other. (Laughter).
137. F: No, I think that...What if we just saw each other on weekends? It would be like usual. (Laughter).
138. M: I think that we are still discussing the actual location.
139. F: Yes, we are looking at two different locations around here.
140. I: So the commute wouldn't exist for either of you?
141. M: Right.
142. F: Well, some commuting but only like twenty minutes, not an hour.
143. I: When you're having problems you both replied that you talk things

- out. And you said that she usually does most of the talking?
144. M: Most of the time she usually wants to start the talking about things...
145. F: About our relationship?
146. I: Yeah and in general.
147. F: Well, then not even that. Because we are very good about asking each other "How was your day?" and tell me what's going on. And he tells me stories and I tell him about my friends at school. I think that it's pretty equal.
148. I: Your goals are very similar but in a different order. You mentioned "planning for the future". What does that include?
149. M: Most of the other things mentioned.
150. I: You also mentioned building a house. Is that something that you've planned?
151. F: We were actually started this spring but then he had a major job change.
152. M: And at that time I didn't know where I was going to be and then it would've been stupid to build a home there and then be sent an hour the other way. So then, that kind of went out...
153. F: But that was a good thing.
154. M: It was a good thing.
155. I: This last section talks about how you communicate and changes. Did it surprise you to find out that she wishes that you made more decisions?
156. F: No, it shouldn't surprise him at all.
157. I: You've talked about it before? When she initiates conversations?
158. M: Yeah. Changes to be made.
159. I: You mentioned walking and eating habits.
160. F: Those are things that have always been going on ever since we started going out but that I've worked on. And there are always more things but like my emotions have leveled out a lot since we started dating. But maybe that's just a woman thing. (Laughter).
161. I: But then you mentioned emotional balance and some other things. So in certain situations he's assertive?
162. F: Yes, at times but as far as taking action and making decisions in our lives...he doesn't let people walk on him. But as far as with us he doesn't. Like with "Let's get married" or "Let's move here". You know, making, being more aggressive might be better for him because he's afraid of making the wrong decision. But I know that's part of his personality too.
163. I: But neither of you were surprised when you found out the other wanted you to make these changes?
164. M: Well, finding out that she wants me to make decisions wasn't as hard as making them.
165. F: Well, but as far as some of these things, it was hard because I felt like

he was putting me down and part of that was a self-esteem issue. But as I changed, and I would tell him to help me change these things but it's hard because it's a discipline thing. And you have to be so consistent. So if my grammar was incorrect and he'd correct me I was like "Oh". It was long suffering. It's like "I'm going to get this right. I'm going to get this right". But it was worth it.

- 166. I: Would you say the same for you?
- 167. M: Yeah.
- 168. I: Anything that you were confused or responses that surprised you?
- 169. M: No.
- 170. F: Not for me.
- 171. I: Do either of you have any questions? Or anything that you want to add?
- 172. M: What did she say love was?
- 173. I: She said, "I can't imagine my life without this person".
- 174. M: Was that, didn't you have three words or something?
- 175. I: Let's see.
- 176. M: Said "What you thought love meant"?
- 177. I: No, there is one question that asks "What you expect to give and get"?
- 178. F: And I put unconditional love.
- 179. I: Would you each like of copy of this survey?
- 180. F: Oh yeah. That'd be neat for later, like at an anniversary.
- 181. I: Well, I will send that with the finished paper. And thanks again for helping me.

Appendix E
Couple E: Critical Incident Responses

Female E

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
We met in a class while working on our Master's.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
Quite early in the relationship because I have played around for a few years and I knew that he was special.
3. Describe your worst fight.
We fought over his controlling behavior. When he doesn't get his own way, he sometimes gets grouchy.

Male E

1. Describe how you and your significant other met.
We met during summer session '97. My roommate and I taught her and two others how to use e-mail.
2. At what point did you realize that you were a mutually exclusive couple?
We never really said "We're going steady" or anything like that. It sort of evolved and at some point, I knew she was the only one I wanted to be with.
3. Describe your worst fight.
I'd rather not-because I was at fault.

Couple E: Co-constructed Narrative

1. I: Thanks for helping me out with this study. How did you feel as you were answering these questions?
2. M: Not bad, I mean some of them were a little awkward but nothing that we couldn't handle.
3. F: Yeah, I didn't feel as though they were.
4. I: Awkward as invasive or unsure how to respond to?
5. M: Unsure and yeah, unsure.
6. F: I just laughed at a couple, that's all that I did.
7. I: How did you feel as you were reading the other's response?
8. M: How did I feel? It made me aware. Like when we got to the "List the five reasons why". I could only come up with like three and for me that was enough.
9. F: Five reasons why what?
10. M: Why to get married.
11. F: Oh, okay.
12. M: And I mean those are the only reasons I need. But then I was like "Oh,

- do I need five reasons?" (Laughter).
13. I: What were your thoughts when you saw that he had only three reasons?
14. F: It didn't phase me.
15. I: Well, it's an arbitrary number that I came up with.
16. F: You mean that there aren't five reasons and if you don't have them then no you aren't allowed to be married. You better call the priest tonight. (Laughter).
17. I: Tell me about the first time that you met each other.
18. M: Class. The very, very first time? Class with Dr. Andrews. And actually right after class, me and Bob took you and...
19. F: And some girl who quit...
20. M: Ann and Tom.
21. F: Because we were learning how to do the e-mail. Because I had no clue. Because when I came in here I had worked at such a small company. So him and Bob both helped us out.
22. I: What were you thinking about him at that point?
23. F: Nothing really. (Laughter).
24. M: We just kind of started hanging out, didn't we?
25. F: Yeah, we just...
26. M: I mean, I thought that she was cute. But
27. I: When did you become interested in each other?
28. M: I don't know. When did we become like, we went out on dates.
29. F: No.
30. M: They weren't really even dates, we went out with everyone.
31. F: We went out all together.
32. M: And then finally once, we like went out together and then after that.
33. F: He called me a bunch of times before that though and I wasn't interested.
34. M: I called you...
35. F: Because I had just gotten out of a relationship and I like didn't want to date anyone ever again. That's just the way it was. I wasn't interested in dating anyone. I just wanted to go to school, get my Master's, get my Ph.D. I don't want to be involved in any relationship. And he was persistent.
36. M: I invited you to the concert.
37. F: Yeah. He invited me to the U2 concert. And I was like "No, I'm not interested". And then he kept calling me so I was finally I was like.
38. M: I didn't call...
39. F: You did, you did. Ask Kim, you called all of the time. (Laughter).
40. M: Well, for your house that might be calling a lot—if I called once a week.
41. F: But he was rude to me the first couple of times.

42. M: The first time she called.
43. F: He was like on the other line and he was like “I got to go, I can’t talk to you now”. And hung up on me. And I was calling to find out about class, something about an assignment. I was actually calling his roommate. I wasn’t even calling him.
44. I: When was your first date then?
45. F: Cody’s.
46. M: That was a disaster.
47. F: He got sick.
48. M: I got really sick. I had catfish.
49. F: He had food poisoning.
50. I: So how did it begin?
51. M: Well, you picked me up. You came over to the house and then we decided who should drive. And we took your car because it was nicer at the time.
52. F: I think you drove. Yeah, I let you drive my car.
53. M: After that time, I knew that this girl was special. She didn’t like leave. She came and stayed with me and made sure that I was okay.
54. I: You were immediately sick after dinner?
55. M: We went to Cody’s, had dinner, we were supposed to go to the movies. By the time, we got to the theater I was like, “I don’t feel good, I just need to go home”. Actually, you got a movie.
56. F: I picked up a movie and we watched a movie.
57. M: Jackie Chan. (Laughter). And I was like “Wow, that’s kind of nice”.
58. I: At what point did you move from group dates to mutually exclusive dating?
59. F: It just kind of happened. We’d hung out together all summer and it just happened. I mean we weren’t dating anybody else, that I know of. (Laughter).
60. M: Yeah, there was never a conversation like “You want to go steady?”
61. F: No. (Laughter).
62. I: Occasionally, there might have been times that you have not gotten along this well. What would you say was one of your worst fights?
63. M: I’d rather not say.
64. I: Or a significant fight?
65. M: I’d rather not say.
66. F: Go ahead.
67. M: No, because I was at fault then. (Laughter).
68. I: Okay, perhaps not your worst fight, if that’s too sensitive to talk about. How about just a fight that you may have had throughout your relationship?
69. M: God, there have been a lot. I mean it’s not like...
70. F: There have been a lot? Is that what you said?

71. M: We do fight a lot but we get over it. And mostly it's like small arguments.
72. F: We don't really fight.
73. M: It's not like we're hating each other.
74. F: We like to argue about stuff. It's more like arguing too argue. Fun arguing. But um, then the biggest thing is he gets a little controlling sometimes. And you put that on your thing.
75. M: I am sometimes.
76. F: I mean he is. He does and I think it's just a family thing. He inherited it.
77. M: I like things my way sometimes.
78. F: And sometimes I'm like, "No, you can't have it your way".
79. M: I mean I stay open about it though.
80. F: No, when you get all mad...
81. M: Yeah, otherwise you wouldn't...
82. F: Okay, *Planet Hollywood*. Do I need to say it?
83. M: Oh shit. (Laughter).
84. F: I had planned this weekend with my sister and her friend...
85. M: All right. That's enough...(Laughter).
86. F: To go see Rent. And we had this planned long before I met him actually, because it was so many months in advance. And we went to see Rent and he came down and ended up getting a ticket and was able to come see it with us. It was fun. Then we went out for dinner and we were all together, me, my sister, and her friend, so we going to the friend's to stay overnight. Then we were going some place else in the morning and then we were leaving. Because it was *our* weekend. It was the *girls'* weekend. And he got, he goes, "Well, why can't you come over and stay at my house and then they can come get you or I'll drop you off tomorrow morning?" I'm like, "No, that's not the way this works, we're doing this together." He got furious and wouldn't eat his dinner, ruined the whole dinner for everybody else.
87. M: I was pouting.
88. F: He was pouting. He was being grouchy. "Oh, I'm sick now." Glaring at me the whole dinner. Because he didn't get his own way. That's probably one of our worst fights because of that, because he was so controlling about that.
89. I: Is that how you think it happened too?
90. M: Yeah. That's pretty much how it happened. (Laughter).
91. I: How did you get over that?
92. M: I don't know. We just kind of talked about it.
93. F: You admitted that you were being controlling. I think that was the biggest thing. Because if you wouldn't have admitted it, I don't think that we'd still be together. Because that really bothers me, since my

- father is a very controlling figure. He's really bad about it. And I could never live with somebody who was like that.
94. M: Yeah. And one of the things that I've told her is to let me know when I'm being like that. Sometimes I don't see it, you know?
95. F: He just tries—he's persistent. And it works for him sometimes so "Why not keep doing it?" To me though, it's controlling. So...
96. M: See, but sometimes you're confusing persistence with controlling...
97. F: Yeah, but sometimes I'm not. (Laughter).
98. M: No, but sometimes you are.
99. I: What surprised you the most about the other's response here? As you were reading, did anything enlighten you?
100. M: Nothing really.
101. F: No, the only thing that I was laughing about was like the part that said, "Well, she knows I'm not going to be happy in Alton."
102. M: Well, you *do* know.
103. F: This is, this is another thing. He's pessimistic about the whole thing.
104. M: You're right, I could be lying but...
105. F: I mean, you know....
106. I: Did anything surprise you?
107. M: No, I don't think so. What surprised me was that we did think alike on a lot of the answers. It was like almost word for word.
108. I: Did anything make you feel uncomfortable along the way? Each other's responses, or completing the form, or thinking about new things?
109. F: You want to go ahead and do this?
110. M: Yeah. Um... No, not really.