

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE: UNDERSTANDING GOAL DISCLOSURE AND
DEVELOPMENT IN MARRIAGE

A Thesis

by

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BA, George Mason University, 2012

BA, George Mason University, 2012

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

COMMUNICATION

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, Texas

May 2022

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May 2022

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how romantic couples become aware of each other's personal goals, and how they communicatively co-construct processes to develop collective goals in marriage.

Theories of interpersonal relationship development and goal communication were used to frame the research questions. Twenty-nine in-depth interviews were conducted with spouses to gain insight into their personal experience with goal disclosure and creation of collective goals. Results indicated that couples become aware of each other's personal goals through explicit and implicit communication, and by using future talk to test for relationship compatibility. Additionally, results showed that couples develop collective goals through goal appropriation and practical and intentional planning. Implications for relationship development and maintenance are discussed.

Keywords: Goal development; goal disclosure; marital communication; relationship maintenance; joint goal planning

DEDICATION

To the love of my life, my husband and friend, Luke.

To my family, for their *truly* unconditional love and support.

You are home to me.

And to all the people out there who believe in *forever* fighting hard to have good marriages.

This thesis is for You.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank God for His never-ending grace, favor, and mercy with me, and give Him all honor and glory. Without Him, I would never reach the goals I set.

Second, my sincere appreciation to the participants of this study for the vulnerability to share your story. I have profoundly enjoyed this experience thanks to the richness of your narratives. Thank you for the laughs, the tears, and the insight into your dreams and aspirations.

To my thesis chair, Dr. Stephanie Rollie Rodriguez. Thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge in interpersonal communication with me, and for the time and effort you invested in this study. To my thesis committee members, Dr. Michelle Maresh-Fuehrer and Dr. Diana Ivy, thank you for your support, input and involvement from day one. Special thanks to my colleagues and professors in the COMM Department, for helping me grow professionally. To my friends Venessa, Roxana, Lauren and Amy, I will always cherish being students together.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is always to my *familita*. Thank you for continually believing in me and picking me up after every fall. The love you pour out in my life allows me to believe I am more than capable of reaching every goal and every dream. You have all been my fuel and strength. Luke, I cannot imagine a better partner in this life. Thank you for choosing me each day, ‘together forever, and nothing can break us apart.’ Gracias a mi papá, por su legado, y por inculcar en mi el valor de la educación. A mi marecita, por enseñarme a soñar y creer en mi siempre. Los amo con todo el corazón. Sister, you’re simply the best. Tio Pedro, eres inigualable en esta vida. Abu, Tia Magda, Tia Lady, Tia Katy, Maria Rene, Jhosy, Silvia Brigitte, Isabellita, Leo, Abbie, Ivannita, el resto de mi Familia Cordova/Roca, and the Walker/Vitello Crew, especially Grandpa Frank, I love you all so much. Special thanks to my Corpus crew, and my life friends who have become family. Especially Tania, Shirley, Ilina and Sanil, I am *so* immensely thankful for you. I never knew friends were *really* forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT | iv |
| DEDICATION | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | vi |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | vii |
| CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW | 7 |
| Origin and Function of Goals | 7 |
| Decision Making and Goal Setting | 9 |
| Development of Self-Efficacy | 12 |
| How Environments Affect Perceptions of Self-Efficacy | 14 |
| Goal Hierarchy and its Effect on Behavior | 16 |
| Goals and Marriage | 17 |
| Social Penetration Theory..... | 19 |
| Stages Model of Relationship Development..... | 21 |
| Goals and Communication..... | 23 |
| Goals-Plans-Action Theory | 24 |
| Planning Theory | 26 |
| CHAPTER III: METHODS | 30 |
| Participants..... | 30 |
| Data Collection Procedures..... | 33 |
| Data Analysis | 34 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER IV: RESULTS..... | 37 |
| Types of Goals | 37 |
| Quality of Life..... | 38 |
| Financial Stability | 39 |
| Professional Development | 39 |
| Relationship Longevity | 40 |
| Children’s Fulfillment..... | 41 |
| Goal Sharing Processes | 42 |
| Explicit Goal Disclosure | 42 |
| Implicit Goal Disclosure | 44 |
| Future Talk..... | 45 |
| Goal Development Processes..... | 47 |
| Goal Appropriation | 48 |
| Purposeful Planning | 51 |
| Practical Planning | 56 |
| Dyadic Planning..... | 58 |
| CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION..... | 64 |
| Types of Goals | 65 |
| Goal Sharing Processes | 68 |
| Goal Development Processes..... | 70 |
| Academic Contributions | 73 |
| Practical Contributions..... | 75 |
| Limitations | 76 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Future Research | 77 |
| Conclusion | 78 |
| REFERENCES | 79 |
| APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY | 88 |
| APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE | 90 |
| APPENDIX C: GUIA DE ENTREVISTA | 92 |

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Why is it that people get married? In the movie *Shall We Dance*, Susan Sarandon's character, Beverly Clark, stated:

We need a witness to our lives. There's a billion people on the planet... I mean, what does any one life really mean? But in a marriage, you're promising to care about everything.

The good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things... all of it, all the time, every day. You're saying "Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it.

Your life will not go un-witnessed because I will be your witness" (Chelsom, 2004, 51:13).

Everything encompasses so much and so little at the same time. Care is needed to protect feelings, big dreams, aspirations, and the everyday monotony of the ordinary. The process of witnessing includes the challenges, setbacks, and disappointments, but also successes, surprises and victories. People want someone who cares about them and their story.

Individuals pursue marital relationships as a pathway to increased happiness. According to a recent Pew Research Center report (2020), 54% of Americans think that marriage is important to have a fulfilled life. The Ideal Model Standard, derived from Interdependence Theory, suggests that there are three main reasons couples get married: (1) warmth-trustworthiness, (2) vitality-attractiveness, and (3) status-resources (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Marriages serve two big purposes: social expectation for teamwork and an evolutionary outlook for procreation (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Romantic relationships are complex, and require constant calibration of needs, which when ineffectively communicated, can lead to conflict. The negotiation between what partners feel they deserve in their relationship, what they think they

are getting, and what they feel they could be potentially get elsewhere, can often negatively affect an individuals' marital investment (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Relationships are a constant cost-benefit analysis. This sometimes leads to the perception of the costs being greater than the benefits, which can lead to relationship dissolution (Rollie & Duck, 2006; Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014).

According to the American Psychology Association (2020), around 40% of first marriages are estimated to end in divorce. Although divorce rates have declined since 1980, when the U.S. divorce rate was at its highest, the marriage rate has also declined (Census, 2019; Census, 2020; Miller, 2013). Studies show that women and men get married later in life and with less frequency than they did in previous decades (Miller, 2013). The average age for first marriages in 2019 was 29.8 years old for men and 28 years old for women, compared to 26.8 and 25.1, respectively, in the year 2000 (Census, 2019; Miller, 2013).

When people choose partners, they look for someone who can help them achieve their relational and life goals (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Through the cost-analysis perspective, people aim to be in a relationship that maximizes rewards and minimizes costs (Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014). There are practical advantages associated in being surrounded by supportive people when trying to achieve goals. This belief guides individuals towards a more transactional approach in relationships (Wijers, 2020). Compatibility regarding future goals and aspirations is more important today when picking a spouse than romantic approaches have been historically (Gere et al., 2016; Hawkins et al., 2017).

A problem with the transactional approach to relationships is that the value of the relationship is based on the subjective perspective of each individual (Goldin, 2016). Studies show that one reason marriages fail is found in the perceptions that each partner has of their

marriage. According to marriage research conducted by The Gottman Institute, there is virtually no difference in the types of problems distressed couples discuss when seeking marital counseling (Gottman et al, 1976). Individuals in marriages that last understand that the problems they face do not need to diminish their marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1976; Gottman & Silver, 2015). The difference between distressed and nondistressed couples is often the severity with which they perceive their problems to be (Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1976; Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Moreover, research shows that ineffective communication is a significant factor in relationship dissolution (Rollie & Duck, 2006). It is through communication that people can fortify, adjust, or clarify their interpersonal relationships (Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014). If this process is not working effectively, then the ability to strengthen love, support, acceptance, and companionship, or to combat the division of disagreement, conflict, and negative feelings, diminishes significantly (Solomon & Vangelisti, 2014). Not partaking in meaningful conversations together and growing apart as a result are two factors that can contribute to marriage dissolution (Hawkins et al., 2012; Hawkins et al., 2017).

People develop romantic relationships based on mutual beliefs, shared interests, and common goals (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Holding et al., 2019). Spouses inevitably intertwine their lives and mutually impact each other's decision-making and life outcomes (Gere et al., 2016). Thus, one factor impacting marital dissolution can be the perception of not achieving goals together (Gere et al., 2016). Whether these goals are connected to the relationship or are self-oriented, when goals are in conflict, relationship quality and well-being are adversely affected (Holding et al., 2019). Furthermore, individuals who do not communicate about their goals, particularly ones that are important to them personally, are more

likely to perceive their relationship unfavorably. When there are incorrect assumptions about what the joint goals are, both goal coordination and ultimately goal progression are affected (Ungar et al., 2021). Communication is needed to achieve individual and mutual goals, and goals, themselves, are needed to instigate couples' communication (Coffelt & Hess, 2015; Dillard, 2015; Gere et al., 2016).

Little research has focused on the value of joint goal planning and its consequences for marital dyads. However, the limited research has found a correlation between lack of joint planning and relationship dissatisfaction (Gere et al., 2016; Ungar et al., 2019; Ungar et al., 2021). Even when accounting for relationship and individual characteristics, analyses show that lack of joint planning with the relationship partner increased divorce odds by 19% (Gere et al., 2016). The problem is a breakdown in communicative processes couples use in developing and talking about goals. We do not know how couples mutually convey their needs and aspirations or what methods they use throughout the relationship to demonstrate support for and understanding of each other's goals, if at all.

The goal of this study is to better understand the communication processes couples use to share and create individual and collective goals. Specifically, this study aims to investigate how couples use communication during interpersonal interactions to help each other become aware of and work to achieve individual and mutual goals. This is important for two reasons. First, research shows that when couples' goals are incongruent, individual and relationship well-being are affected (Holding et al., 2019). Second, the quality of the relationship affects the ability of the individuals to achieve their personal goals (Holding et al., 2019). When individuals are able to achieve their goals they have higher levels of competency, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Holding et al., 2019; Locke & Latham, 2006)

This study uses theories of relationship development as a framework for goal disclosure between romantic partners (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005; Taylor, 1968), and communication goal theories (Berger, 2008; Dillard, 2015) as a framework to understand the goal sharing and co-creation processes between marital dyads (Samp, 2009). Because no spouses' goals are perfectly aligned, spouses have to manage and negotiate their different individual goals and potentially opposing ideas about joint goals. Spouses' efforts at joint goal planning and achievement need to be better understood to better support marital communication knowledge. Practically, this research aims to identify patterns that create successful goal sharing in dyads and help improve discussions about goals and outcomes. To help spouses better understand, manage, and navigate goal hierarchies, this study will examine how couples develop personal goal awareness and create collective goals through interactive communicative processes.

In terms of scholarly contributions, this study aims to broaden the research on the communicative practices couples engage in when disclosing goals. Moreover, it aims to understand the prerequisites and structures required for goal co-creation. Ultimately, the objective is to gain a deeper understanding of communication about goals in marriages and to identify strategies that help couples be effective in goal achievement.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the premise of the study and the problem that the research addresses. Chapter Two provides an in-depth review of the current literature regarding goals, including information on instinctual goal formation and its developmental purpose in people's lives. It also explains how socialization is required to achieve and manage goals in a relational context, how communication plays a role in goal creation, and how communication, in itself, is a goal-driven exchange. Additionally, Chapter Two sheds light on the process behind how goals are initially communicatively disclosed within interpersonal

relationships to best understand the foundation of marital goal communication. Chapter Three describes the research design and explains the methods used to answer the research questions. Chapter Four provides the results of the data analysis that emerged from the interviews. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the results of the study, the practical implications for couples, academic contributions, and limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Origin and Function of Goals

People need goals to function because goals are what drives their behavior (Locke & Latham, 2006; 2013). Goals play an important role in an individual's cognitive and behavioral make-up (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Goals serve two main roles: organization and motivation. People have a biological need of following sequences to give direction to their lives (Locke & Latham, 2013). Locke and Latham (2013) describe life as a process of "goal produced action" and explain that "goals are the primary source of individuals' motivation" (p. 4). In short, goals are the motor behind humans' every action (Locke & Latham, 2006).

Some goals are instinctive in nature and do not require consciousness, such as those associated with physiological development, (e.g., the heart beating and pumping blood to the brain), other goals are instinctive from learned experiences but still conscious, such as seeking shelter from danger and gaining access to a water source (Locke & Latham, 2013). These goals are common to all humans. They serve as the foundational set of needs that drive goal setting, which is the primary mechanism through which people operate (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Other goals are sought out intentionally by individuals according to their perceived abilities, (e.g., getting a degree in higher education is driven by a belief in one's academic skills) (Locke & Latham, 2013). This is called self-efficacy, which is the degree to which one perceives oneself to be capable of achieving a goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goals differ from individual to individual. Practically, goals function as decisive motivators that help individuals make decisions strategically about partners, careers, and similar categories within a human life span (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009).

Within the field of psychology, scholars argue that goals are biological and not just practical. This means that if there were no discrepancies between people's realities and their goals, (i.e., if having goals were optional), individuals would still innately choose to create distance between their realities and their ideals to have something to work toward (Locke & Latham, 2013). Not only is a goal's purpose in peoples' lives to organize action, but its primary function is also to give meaning to the sequence of actions in human behavior and interactions (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). That is, goals are the reason people do what they do.

Goal attainment takes place in two ways. One is equifinality, which includes alternative ways to reach a goal, and happens when individuals have choices to achieve their desired outcome (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). The other one is multifinality, in which goals serve both as a step toward another goal, and as an objective in itself. This gives individuals options in trying to achieve their goals.

Goals drive the decisions individuals make in different aspects of their lives. Goals can be interpersonal, intrapersonal, abstract, objective, based on basic human needs, or optional (Locke & Latham, 2006). As life is "goal induced action," so is every aspect of people's movements (Locke & Latham, 2013). However, the biggest role of goals in human development is the drive for connection. Individuals seek to belong, understand, control, enhance, and trust their social surroundings and the people in them (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). As a result, they create goals to achieve these things.

The influence of goals on human behavior varies depending on the content and intensity of the goal at hand. The content of a goal is the objective being sought out or end result (e.g., lose 20 pounds); and the intensity is the level of effort to set the goal, which includes the place in the individual's goal hierarchy (e.g., priority of goals), and the extent to which individuals are

committed to that goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). This requires people to adjust their actions and performance for goal attainment (e.g., how difficult will it be for the individual to lose 20 lbs. considering their current weight, where it stands in their priorities, and how willing they are to stick to that goal to be brought to fruition) (Locke & Latham, 2013).

More difficult goals require higher performance, that is, more effort. A linear relationship exists between goal difficulty and performance (Locke & Latham, 2013). Just as a primary purpose of goals is to help people find meaning, different goals can, in themselves, represent different meanings to individuals. Without awareness of these prioritizations, people can undermine the relevance of a set of goals and create dissonance (cognitive tensions) for themselves and in their relationships (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009).

In sum, people need goals to organize their lives and to find motivation. They use goals as steppingstones to bigger goals, and goals serve as ultimate drivers. Different goals require different levels of effort and occupy different places in a person's achievement priorities.

Decision Making and Goal Setting

How do individuals set goals? Generally speaking, people set goals for themselves based on the purpose they serve (Locke & Latham, 2006). To explain the implication of goals on human behavior, Locke and Latham (2013) developed a theory for goal setting in which they explain the process individuals follow to set their goals and try to achieve them. This theory brings clarity to why people choose to pursue some goals versus others (i.e., goal hierarchy). Similarly, it describes what motivates people and how motivation varies from individual to individual (Locke & Latham, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Four tools shape the structure of goals: choice, effort, persistence, and strategy (Locke & Latham, 2013). Choice is how people decide they must achieve a goal. The decision can be

motivated without outside influence, as part of a group or a collective decision, or assigned by someone else for the person to achieve (Locke & Latham, 2013). Effort is based on the demands needed to achieve the goal; the higher the goal, the more effort it will require, and the higher the satisfaction individuals will experience once it is accomplished. Persistence refers to the time that people spend trying to achieve the goal; the harder the goal the more work is required. Finally, strategy is the knowledge and tactics utilized to complete the task. Depending on the complexity of a goal, individuals will develop cognitive plans to achieve their goals. These plans can be abstract (e.g., try your best) or specific (e.g., lose 20 lbs.) (Locke & Latham, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Additionally, factors that affect how goals are achieved are ability, performance feedback, goal commitment, task complexity, situational constraints/resources, and personality (Locke & Latham, 2013). Ability sets the level of the goal as people tend to aim to achieve goals within their knowledge and skill set. Feedback, or knowledge of the results, is the measure used to track and evaluate the progress of the goal (Locke & Latham, 2006; 2013). This feedback can be positive which inspires people to keep going on their path, or constructive to modify their direction (Locke & Latham, 2013). The performance of individuals trying to achieve a goal will not improve if the constructive feedback is not translated into action or change. Commitment is defined as the attachment or determination a person has to achieve a goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Task complexity refers to the difficulty of the goal at hand. It involves the extent to which goals focus on concrete, objective results. Situational constraints and resources include factors outside of a person's control that can create uncertainty.

Locke & Latham (2013) also identified three ways to regulate behavior to achieve goals: goal setting, outcome expectancies, and self- efficacy. These relate to how a people assess or

view the goal they are setting, their expectations of the results, and their belief in their ability to fulfill the performance of a task (Locke & Latham, 2013). The level of difficulty and effort also play a role not only in deciding what goals people set, but also on whether the goals are achieved. How individuals decide to frame their goals is split into two subcategories: challenges and threats, both of which influence goal performance. Challenges focus on gains from accomplishing the goal despite its difficulty, and threats focus on loss from the potential failure that not achieving the goal could bring. Both strategies work as face risk management (i.e., people protecting how they are perceived by others), and have consequences in goal pursuit. Challenges have been found to be more effective for goal attainment than threats. If an individual is successful in achieving their goal, the individual experiences enhanced well-being and feelings of success. Conversely, lack of goals and attainment can lead to detrimental perceptions of self and feelings of failure (Locke & Latham, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Group goals, when multiple people work together to achieve a goal, address the added complexity of group dynamics (Locke & Latham, 2006). When personal goals are incompatible with group goals, they can impact the group's performance. For example, if a person does not agree on the method used to achieve a goal in a group project because they have a contradicting idea, the performance of the group can be affected. Therefore, communication regarding a shared task is important to the success of the dyad or group (Locke & Latham, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017).

In short, goal setting behaviors explain how people think of themselves regarding their own capabilities. These, in turn, help define the usage of mechanisms that shape the structure of goals: choice, effort, persistence and strategy (Locke & Latham, 2006; 2013). This is useful for understanding the influence of goals in shaping people's behaviors. It explains how goals serve

different purposes and lead to different levels of fulfillment for people. Different goals require different strategies to achieve them. Higher, more difficult, goals imply higher levels of effort to achieve, and therefore, can provide higher levels of satisfaction once achieved. The satisfaction reached affects the way people see themselves and their capabilities.

Development of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, the notion of believing in one's ability to accomplish goals, is a learned process that starts in childhood, and continues through adolescence and into adulthood. It affects how people develop and evaluate personal goals (Bandura, 2010; Davies, 2011; Gatto, 2006). Socialization plays a key role (Bandura, 2000). Many operational patterns of adulthood emerge during childhood, including the drive for goal attainment (Davies, 2011). Children rely on a secure attachment to their parents to explore autonomy and behaviors to protect and soothe themselves, which allow the child to cope with independence (Davies, 2011).

Childhood is a key stage in which perceptions of self-efficacy contribute to the development of friends and social networks. These networks ultimately affect the interactions individuals develop with their families, educational achievement, and socioeconomic status (Bandura, 2000; Bandura et al., 2003). Research shows that children who possess higher, positive self-efficacy are more likely to exercise their ability to reach their goals (Gatto, 2006). Self-efficacy in children is developed through persuasive social influences, social modeling, and mastery experiences (Bandura et al., 2003). The most prominent social influences in children's lives are their parents, who help the child understand the world around them (Davies, 2011).

Adolescence adds an emotional component and involves the discovery of self in a more intricate social context (Davies, 2011). Puberty, along with growing independence, leads to major social, educational, and biological changes which impact behavior (Bandura et al., 2003;

Davies, 2011). During adolescence individuals use their internalized coping mechanisms and knowledge of how the world works from childhood and adapt them to their current environment. These processes are heavily influenced by socioemotional states, and affect self-esteem and emotional well-being, which influence an individuals' perceived abilities to achieve goals (Davies, 2011).

Socialization during adolescence prepares young people to undertake social and occupation responsibilities according to societal standards (Darling et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this developmental stage, parents play a key role in establishing clear rules and enforcing reasonable behavior through obedience to their parental authority (Darling et al., 2007). Parents help adolescents internalize the values of good behavior in society as they reach autonomy. Therefore, achieving self-regulation (autonomy) in adolescence is an essential achievement that supports goal functioning in adulthood (Bandura et al., 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006).

One of the premises of self-efficacy and goal setting is that social reinforcement is needed at each stage of human development. For example, in childhood, parents have the main role of constructing a positive environment for socializing their children. For teens, parents tend to play a similar role, but friends have a stronger influence in shaping perceptions of self-efficacy (Davies, 2011). In adulthood, however, autonomy is a central indicator of independence and successful development. Still, social support is crucial to maintaining positive perceptions of self-efficacy and influencing goal attainment (McClure & Lydon, 2018).

In sum, individuals develop and rely on members of their social networks to help them achieve healthy perceptions of self-efficacy from childhood to adulthood. As a person grows, their support comes from other individuals such as parents and friends. This is an important

factor to understand, because although a person's autonomy is a sign of maturity, people are conditioned to rely on members of their social environment throughout their life.

How Environments Affect Perceptions of Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, a person's evaluation of their ability to perform a task is the foundation for motivation in the pursuit of goals and dreams (Locke & Latham, 2013). It gives an individual a sense of what they can aim to achieve and an indication of whether they can achieve it. Self-efficacy influences self-management, as it directly affects how they think, feel, do, and project aspects of their lives. The beliefs people hold of their efficacy decide

whether they think in an enabling or debilitating manner, how much effort they invest in selected endeavors, how they persevere in the face of difficulties, how resilient they are to adversity, how vulnerable they are to stress and depression, and what types of choices they make at important decisional points that set the course of their life paths. (Bandura et al., 2003, p. 769)

As noted previously, self-efficacy is derived from a person's perception of self and is shaped by one's environment and social upbringing (Bandura, 2000). Individuals also have agency in selecting, creating, and transforming their environment (Bandura, 2000). Agency is the intentional power, or influence, a person's actions have over the course of events (Bandura, 2012). Bandura (2000) describes three types of agency: personal, proxy, and collective. Personal agency is the control that individuals have over their choices. When individuals rely on someone else with more authority or perceived power over their situation to intervene on their behalf, they rely on proxy agency. Finally, when people need to come together to accomplish a task as a group because they cannot accomplish it on their own, they use collective agency (Bandura, 2000).

Collective agency, which includes dyads, is important to understand because people do not live autonomous lives, and many goals are feasible only through interdependent efforts (Bandura, 2000a). For collective agency to be efficient, group members need to be able to work well together. Oftentimes groups will have talented individuals who do not perform well as a unit. This might be due to negative beliefs about the group's future, use of resources, effort in the group, staying power, attitude toward opposition, or vulnerability to discouragement (Bandura, 2000).

Additionally, three types of environments affect how a person perceives their own capability: imposed, selected, and constructed (Bandura, 2012). An imposed environment is one that was established for the individual without their input. Individuals have agency in how they react to it and how they understand it (e.g., childhood and its ramifications in a person's upbringing). Selected environments are ones that are already established that individuals choose (e.g., work setting). Constructed environments are one that people create for themselves according to their goals and aspirations (e.g., friend group) (Bandura, 2012).

These environmental factors are important to consider because they highlight how impressionable one's own motivation, performance level, and ability can be, which ultimately affect individuals' emotional states and thought processes (Bandura, 2012, Ryan & Deci, 2017). This emphasizes that people have the agency to select or construct an environment that will foster goal attainment (Bandura, 2012). More specifically, individuals are motivated to surround themselves with people that help them believe in their capacity to accomplish things, as well as facilitate the fruition of their goals (Bandura, 2003, 2012). That is, people choose to be surrounded by people who increase their perception of self-efficacy. Therefore, choosing the

correct relationships also serves as a goal individuals aim to prioritize in the order of their goal pursuits. The next section provides more insight into the organization of goals.

Goal Hierarchy and its Effect on Behavior

Not all goals are equal. Although connection with others is a driving factor in decision-making, other factors also influence the way people categorize their needs. Hierarchy plays an important role in structuring the system individuals use to guide their behavior. Prioritizing goals is important not only in the decision-making process of goal pursuit, but also in shaping how people interact with each other (Bay & Daniel, 2003). Although the literature thus far has emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation, volition is not always a factor when it comes to actions; sometimes people do things not because they want to, but because they have to (Bay & Daniel, 2003). The question is how do individuals decide what to focus on?

Goal hierarchies are organized into two main categories: higher-level goals and lower-level goals. According to Bay & Daniel (2003), “Lower-level goals are intended to set the stage for higher level goals” (p. 669). For example, the goal of saving \$500 dollars a month is a step toward the higher goal of getting a down payment for a house. Goal fluidity suggests that goals can change depending on life stage, societal context, and goal level (Bay & Daniel, 2003). For example, if a couple is planning a family vacation for the whole family, but then a pandemic emerges, goal fluidity would suggest a staycation. This can be a response to factors outside of the person’s control, which cause shifts in the desired goal and result in forming a new goal (Carver & Sheier, 2000).

Two main behavioral drivers affect goal achievement: volitional behavior and goal-directed behavior. Volitional behavior, based on intrinsic motivation, tends to be under the control of the decision-maker, while goal-oriented behavior is more influenced by sources and

actions outside the individual's control (Bay & Daniel, 2003) The distinction between volitional behavior and goal-oriented behavior is the application of goals as a conductor for self-control. For instance, in the example of saving \$500 a month, volitionally a person might want to spend a portion of the money for recreational purposes, but a goal-directed behavior would be to save that money to get a new car.

In short, people behave according to the goals they are trying to achieve. Some of these goals are volitional, and some of them are necessary to achieve other goals. These goals all work in conjunction with each other to create a better version of the self. Goal hierarchy says that people will create actions based on the importance that their goals hold in relation to their idealized version of their future self (Bay & Daniel, 2003). This is important because if a goal is not important to a person, they will not prioritize it. However, people tend to prioritize relationships which serve as a primary goal of relatedness. This is especially true in a romantic context, which the next section addresses.

Goals and Marriage

Relationships and goal attainment go hand in hand. For people to thrive and to feel well psychologically, they need to feel connected to others (Holding et al., 2019). Relationship motivation theory explains that people have an intrinsic need for connection which is critical for their success (Holding et al., 2019). Regardless of how independent, autonomous, or self-sufficient individuals are, they tend to pursue collective goals with people they feel connected to (Aron & Aron, 2016; Dun, 2008). For example, individuals with close friends are not only more likely to achieve their goals, but they also develop closer, more loyal relationships with those friends (Chua et al., 2015).

This process is particularly relevant to the marital dyad. People have the freedom to choose with whom they want to develop close relationships. The influence romantic partners have on each other either increases or decreases the willingness to pursue set goals. Depending on the value a spouse places on a goal, or the perception of attainability they have to achieve it, it will inevitably affect the other spouse's concept of that goal (Holding et al., 2019). Therefore, as it pertains to goals and marriage, it is inevitable for two interdependent parties, such as spouses, to not be a part of the process in which goals come to fruition. That is, marital dyads not only have as a common goal to sustain and develop their romantic relationship, but their romantic relationship affects the sustainability and development of their individual goals (Holding et al., 2019).

The idea that two people are better than one is not solely based on a romantic ideal, but on research that demonstrates the strength of the collective compared to the individual. The self-expansion model argues that individuals have a fundamental need to expand their abilities, perspectives, and resources (Hadden & Girme, 2020). This model describes how individuals assimilate their partner's skill set in order to expand their self-concept (Aron & Aron, 2016; Hadden & Girme, 2020). That is, merging to the identity of the partner helps the individual with competence, agency, and growth, because people will be able to benefit from traits and characteristics that they would not have on their own. Similarly, individuals tend to allocate their own resources to their partner as if it were to themselves (Hadden & Girme, 2020).

People are attracted to others who they think will enhance their abilities whether through complimentary differences or mutual similarities (Dun, 2008). Self-expansion occurs in two ways: individual self-expansion and shared self-expansion (Fivecoat et al., 2014). Within the context of a relationship, shared self-expansion encompasses activities and experiences that

promote learning that include both people. Meanwhile, individual self-expansion refers to one person engaging in activities that promote their own individual learning (Fivecoat et al., 2014).

Though it may seem that individual self-expansion may be a threat to interdependence, studies show that support from one's partner toward achieving that goal positively affects relationship satisfaction as well as feelings of self-efficacy in achieving their goals, especially in stressful settings (Fivecoat et al., 2014). This research is relevant because it highlights the benefit of mutual encouragement in working together to benefit the relationship as well as individual selves. Even if couples are pursuing activities that essentially separate them due to varying interests as a result of self-expansion, what unifies them is the support they can provide to each other to achieve individual goals. This means that individuals are interested in relationships with others who also value their own merits, and who can help them achieve their goals. Thus, we know that mutual support is important for relationship satisfaction, what we do not know is role that communication plays in these processes.

Communication scholars have focused on the role of self-disclosure in the process of strangers getting to know each other. Relationship development theories like social penetration theory and the stage model of relationship specifically suggest that relationship development takes place through the process of gradual, interactive, and fluid communication exchanges (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015). Each is explained below.

Social Penetration Theory

One theory that explains the way that self-disclosure takes place in relationships is social penetration theory (SPT) by Taylor and Altman (1987). Social penetration “refers to the reciprocal behaviors that occur between individuals in the development of an interpersonal relationship” (Taylor, 1968, p. 79). They use an onion model to describe the process through

which people gradually get to know each other because of the different layers it encompasses (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015). SPT explains that self-disclosure takes place in stages and increases gradually (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015). As time passes and intimacy is gained, more depth of knowledge about the other is gained reciprocally in the relationship (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015; Taylor, 1968). Self-disclosure takes place in two dimensions, breadth (the quantity of interaction and exchange of information), and depth (the degree of intimacy in the exchange) (Taylor, 1968; Taylor & Altman, 1987). A positive correlation tends to occur in the depth and breadth of disclosure as people get to know each other.

The SPT's 'onion' model has four layers: the surface, the periphery, the intermediate, and the central layers (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015). The first layer, the surface, is defined by the things others can see about another person, such as height, race, etc. The peripheral layer includes self-disclosure about a person's characteristics and attributes such as name, hometown, or major in college. The intermediate layer includes information that individuals share infrequently with others, such as dreams, goals and aspirations. Finally, the central layer contains information that is very private to the person such as secrets from childhood that very few people know (Taylor & Altman, 1987). Moreover, SPT suggests that self-disclosure increases as the relationship becomes more intimate (Beebe et al., 2019).

Finally, social penetration theory explains the importance of disclosure for people, and how individuals become aware of information about each other. It is important to understand that only the closest relationships ever get access to a person's inner layers, and that even then, there are always things that are left to be discovered. Although the theory does not explicitly address the process of sharing information about an individual's goals with another person, it does suggest that the process of disclosing information can help build intimacy. It also points to the

fact that individuals may not disclose their goals immediately as a relationship develops, but that they may be revealed over time. Furthermore, the theory suggest that individuals are more likely to share information with people that they trust, which further builds intimacy (Beebe et al., 2019).

Stages Model of Relationship Development

Another model that explains self-disclosure in relationships is the stage model of relational development developed by Knapp and Vangelisti (2005). It explains how interpersonal communication changes as relationships increase or decrease intimacy (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). This model is based on some of the following assumptions about relationships: (a) relationships are not static and each stage “contains groundwork for the following stage,” (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005, p. 151); (b) movement may be forward in which individuals increase intimacy; (c) movement may be backward as individuals reduce intimacy; (d) communication is an irreversible and unrepeatable process, which means people cannot go back to where they were; (e) movement may be rapid or slow and tends to be faster in early stages (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005).

The coming together stages are: (a) initiating, (b) experimenting, (c) intensifying, (d) integrating, and (e) bonding (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). In the initiating stage, individuals observe others to see if they recognize stereotypes, assess attraction toward the person, and try to present themselves in a likeable manner (i.e., “hi, how are you doing?”). In the experimenting stage, people reciprocally exchange information to discover similarities and try to find integrating topics like common interests or experiences. This stage can also be referred as ‘small talk’ (e.g., “you graduated from Virginia, so did I!”). Most relationships do not go past this point. Intensifying is when closeness is intensified, and individuals consider themselves to have a

relationship. It involves active engagement and more extensive disclosure of personal information. Additionally, in the intensifying stage, the use of plural becomes more regular, and the transmission of nonverbal messages becomes more streamlined between the two people (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005).

Integrating occurs when two people reach a point of fusion and engage in ‘coupling’ (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). In this stage there is a sense of uniqueness and the merging of two as one in social circles. Verbal and nonverbal behavior is more streamlined. Finally, in the bonding stage, individuals often publicly engage in a formal commitment of the relationship e.g., through engagement, partnership, or marriage. Communication in this stage is based on the expectations of the contract agreed upon by both individuals, which is a constant topic of conversation and is open to interpretation and negotiation throughout the relationship (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005).

Although the focus of this model is mostly based on coming together, the coming apart stages are worth noting because as people stop disclosing aspects of themselves, romantic relationships can suffer negative consequences such as dissolution. These stages include: differentiating, e.g. “I don’t want to have dinner with your friends;” circumscribing, e.g., “When would you like to have lunch?”; stagnating, e.g., “What do we have to talk about?”; avoiding, e.g., “I am working late; I don’t think I’ll make it home for dinner.”; and finally, terminating, e.g., “It’s over, don’t call me again.” (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005).

It is important to note that while stages are not always followed in order, and individuals can move up and down from any previous stage, they are predictable and indicate how most romantic relationships develop and expand to from initiating to bonding. Like social penetration theory, the model is useful to see how communication, self-disclosure, and intimacy are

connected. Both describe the importance of sharing information in developing intimacy. What we do not know is how the process of disclosing personal goals occurs as relationships develop.

In summary, people “construct, reconstruct, and deconstruct their relationships through verbal and nonverbal communication” (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015, p. 536). Although social penetration theory and the relational development model do not focus specifically on the process of disclosing personal goals when getting to know each other in a romantic setting, it is likely one way that individuals assess similarity and compatibility. Hence, this study aims to learn more about the communication of goals in marriage. We know that people look for desirable traits that benefit their relational ideals, and that they are willing to communicate to disclose about themselves as they see the relationship progress. This study seeks to learn how individuals in marital relationships learn about each other’s individual goals. This leads to the first question:

RQ1: How do marital couples become aware of each other’s personal goals?

Goals and Communication

Most communication that takes place between people is goal oriented (Samp, 2009). That is why communication research covers many different aspects of how people communicate their goals. Though goals are initially cognitive occurrences, without a form of communication, it is unlikely they will come to fruition (Samp, 2009). Mainly, when it comes to the specificity of goal-driven communicative interactions, communication scholars have focused on the message production process. This process, which explains how and why people produce their messages, shows how language is used to influence and to communicate people’s desires, or goals. Two communication theories that explain the relationship between goals and communication are goals-plans-action (GPA) theory (Dillard, 2015) and planning theory (Berger, 2008). Both theories explain the planning processes that take place to bring thought into action (Samp, 2009).

Goals-Plans-Action Theory

Goals-plans-action theory (GPA) explains the way people make plans to take action on their goals (Dillard, 2008, 2015). Messages are tools for reaching a desired outcome. Goals-plans-action theory focuses on the intentionality behind message creation. In this theory, individuals are thought to be aware of the choices they make regarding the messages they create and have an understanding of the possible outcomes of said messages (Dillard, 2008, 2015). This means, that when people share a message, unless they have lack of personal insight or are willfully deceitful, they have already evaluated the consequences of potential outcomes.

GPA groups goals into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary goals are influence goals, which serve as the main reason behind communication exchanges (Dillard, 2015). Seven types of primary goals emerge: to gain assistance, to give assistance, to share an activity, to change orientation, to change relationships, to obtain permission, and to enforce rights and obligations (Dillard, 2015; Palomares, 2014). Primary goals serve a ‘guidance function’ that help people understand what their interaction is about and create expectations regarding how the exchange must start in order to be aligned with their desired outcome. Goals help people determine the aspects of a perceived situation to consider prior to an exchange. For example, in the primary goal of gaining assistance, if Spouse A wants to use the other’s car to go shopping, Spouse A will look at the situation and analyze Spouse B’s emotional state as well as other circumstantial clues before formulating a message. Based on the assessment of the situation, Spouse A may ask “Can I use your car to go shopping?” Since the main goal of this interaction is to gain assistance, the statement ends with a means to get help.

GPA describes five secondary goals: identity goals, conversation management goals, relational resource goals, personal resource goals, and affect management goals (Dillard, 2008,

2015). They arise in the planning of primary goals and raise concerns about the possible consequences and processes used to reach primary goals. “It is the desire to achieve the primary goal that brings about the consideration of one or more secondary goals” (Dillard, 2015, p. 66). These goals focus on other outcomes that may need to be managed in achieving a primary goal and often shape the strategies used to reach the primary goal. In the example above of gaining assistance, Spouse A asking for Spouse’s B car may seem like a practical statement regarding the need for transportation, however, the secondary goal may revolve around a deeper relational resource goal such as maintaining a positive relationship or an identity goal such as being seen as a reliable person. Thus, these secondary goals are likely to influence the means by which Spouse A requests to use Spouse’s B car.

The theory considers the relationship between primary and secondary goals and whether a degree of compatibility exists between the two (Dillard, 2015; Palomares, 2014) Three possible outcomes result from the relationship between primary and secondary goals: incompatible, irrelevant and compatible. Incompatible goals occur when the primary goal is not compatible with the desired secondary goals (e.g., ending a relationship when you want to stay friends). Irrelevant goals occur when the two goals are unrelated to each other or when incompatibility does not matter, (e.g., in an emergency, secondary goals of politeness may be irrelevant). Compatibility occurs when primary goals align with secondary goals (Dillard, 2015; Palomares, 2014).

The 'plans' portion of this theory involves identifying the best verbal and nonverbal behaviors to reach desired primary and secondary goals (Coffelt & Hess, 2015; Dillard, 2015). Plans occur on two levels: (a) what should be done, that is, the strategy-level, and (b) how it should get done, that is, the tactic-level. Individuals draw on relevant memory structures to

determine if they can implement a plan from the past that worked well or if they can revise a plan they have used before to meet their needs in this situation. If an individual does not have relevant previous experience, he or she may need to create a new plan to try to reach the goals. The theory explains that Spouse A would consider previous interactions with Spouse B along with desired goals to identify the best way (plan) to ask to use the car.

Finally, actions are the actual behaviors and messages that are uttered to achieve the goals. Using the previous example, actions occur when Spouse A picks up the phone and calls Spouse B and states, “Hey sweetie, could I use your car this Sunday while you watch the game with the boys?” Actions are divided into four dimensions: explicitness, which is how clear the message is; dominance, which is how much influence the source has; argument, which is the rationalization of the action, or the ‘why;’ and control over outcomes, which is how much control the source has over what follows (Dillard, 2015).

Goals-plans-action theory helps us understand the motives behind the communicative approaches individuals use to achieve specific outcomes. It emphasizes that individuals are driven to achieve goals and are thoughtful about how to achieve them. Communication plays a central role. Individuals construct messages in a specific way to best achieve their goals.

Planning Theory

Planning theory explains how an individual’s language and behavior is activated by the goals they wish to achieve and guided by knowledge structures, or plans (Berger, 2008). The aim of this theory is to explain how the plans in individuals’ minds influence communication processes. That is, “whenever people communicate with each other, plans and planning processes are in play” (Berger, 2008, p.90). A difference between planning theory and GPA is that goals-plans-action theory focuses on a narrower means of message production, while

planning theory looks at the wider lens of using communicative exchanges to achieve overarching goals (Samp, 2009).

Plans are organized according to a hierarchy that represents a cognitive sequence of actions toward achievement of a desired goal. Plans consider not only individual actions and discourse, but also the actions required by others needed for the plan to come to full fruition (Berger, 2008). The theory focuses on seven propositions: (a) humans seek to satisfy goals to survive, (b) individuals' need to think grows out of the need to satisfy goals, (c) people use language to achieve goals (inform, persuade, problem solve, relate), (d) goals represent desired end states (plans are cognitive, goals motivate action, plans guide action), (e) knowledge about goals is hierarchal (abstract goals are at the top), (f) plans are organized, retrieved, and used according to need, and (g) knowledge of goals and plans are vital to understanding discourse and actions of others (Berger, 2008). What this means is that people are not only wired for goals, but their interpersonal communication and strategies with others are constantly and consciously affected by their goals.

The theory describes the difference between plans and planning. Plans represent goal-directed actions; planning requires a process to assess the situation and fluidity to adjust moving forward toward the end goal (Berger, 2008). An important concept in shaping goal planning is plan complexity, which has two main components: contingencies and specificity. The contingencies include the multilayer steps that are required to bring a plan to fruition and simulate different means to get a goal accomplished (Berger, 2008; Samp, 2009). Specificity refers to the level of specific steps available to accomplish a goal, which varies depending on the plan (Samp, 2009). For example, a 'reward' can be abstract, or it can have specific characteristics such as a material good, or verbal praise (Berger, 2008). People have an easier

time creating contingencies for more concrete plans versus more abstract plans. This is explained through the hierarchy principle which states that it takes less cognitive effort to create plans for specific concrete actions (e.g., pick up the dog from the groomer at 2 PM), than for abstract ones (e.g., become more socially aware of racial injustice).

Performance skills are as important as effective plans in carrying out the message. If the communicator's ability for performance is lacking, the goal will not be attained regardless of how effective the message was (Berger, 2008). If the content of the message is good, but the delivery is poor, the message will not reach its intended effect regardless of the efficiency of the message content. As a result, the behavioral goal may not be reached. People must have strong, effective plans (message content), as well as adequate performance skills (message delivery), to carry out successful discourse of their communicative goals (Berger, 2008).

Planning theory also highlights the benefit of group planning. This theory encourages individuals to incorporate others' goals into their own plans, like anticipating conversational moves, to avoid plan failure and figure out effective contingencies. In fact, one of the limitations of this theory is that the unit of analysis is the individual even though when people interact socially, they are engaging in interactive planning (Berger, 2008).

Research shows that couples who plan joint goals have higher relationship satisfaction and longer longevity (Ungar et al., 2018). Regardless of the individual goals that each person in the marriage has, creating and accomplishing goals as a marital unit is an important part of their marriage identity and helps build cohesiveness (Ungar et al., 2018). Although we know the importance of joint goal planning, what we do not know is the communicative processes couples use to create these goals. It is in the best interest of a married couple to formulate mutual goals, but how do they engage in this process? The literature says that influence is mutual in marital

dyads and that communication is the process through which these behavioral goals are translated into awareness, development, and support of goals in their marriage. Although we know why couples communicate to get closer relationally, what we do not know is how couples communicate to get closer to their goals. This leads to the second research question:

RQ2: How do couples develop collective goals?

CHAPTER III

Methods

This research involved the use of in-depth interviews to address the research questions. The rationale behind using in-depth interviews with open-ended questions was to give the participants the freedom to describe their experiences without being restricted by standardized answers. This study aimed to provide participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives of their realities (Jensen, 2012). Through these in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to gain insight into the meaning of spouses' experiences (Kvale, 1996), and to understand how communication has shaped their disclosure and creation of individual and collective goals. Spouses were interviewed individually, rather than as a couple, to provide them with freedom of expression, lessen outside influence, increase candor, and give the interviewer the opportunity to connect interpersonally with each participant (Kvale, 1996).

Participants

Twenty-nine in-depth interviews were conducted with spouses. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. To participate in the study, participants needed to meet several criteria. First, participants needed to be a female or male individual in a heteronormative, legally binding marriage. In the context of this research, joint goal planning is often used as a marriage retention strategy. This criterion is based on research that shows that heterosexual and homosexual couples use distinctly differing strategies when retaining and attracting marital partners as mates (Howard & Perilloux, 2017; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008).

Additionally, the criteria for participation included a minimum age of 25 years, linguistic fluency in either English or Spanish, and to be married for at least three years. Individuals under 25 years old were excluded from this study because neurological cognitive development does not

take place in the frontal lobe of the brain until this age, on average (Davies, 2011). The frontal lobe is the area that oversees inhibiting irrational or compulsive behavior and supports thoughtful, intentional, and consistent decision-making (Davies, 2011). The goal of this study is to investigate the communication process of individuals who are consciously and cognitively aware of the rationale behind their decision-making as a contributor to their marital interactions.

The criterion that participants be married for at least three years was set to give the marriage ample time to develop communicative patterns and to give spouses the ability to reflect on their individual and collective goal processes from creation to fruition. Research shows that married couples achieve a good level of functionality and happiness after three years of marriage, at which point they have surpassed the “honeymoon” stage (Tao, 2018). This provides a better opportunity to capture common interactions within established marital dynamics (Tao, 2018).

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and snowball sampling using the researcher’s social media outlets. Specifically, a personal post was published on the researcher’s Facebook timeline and business page, “Milk and Canela” a relationship blog page, and in groups such as “Navy Officers’ Spouses Club,” “NAS Corpus Christi,” “VT-28 OSC (Officer Spouses Club),” which are all social support groups for military families and spouses. Additionally, it was posted in “Women Empowered (WE) Mentor Program,” and “TedxColePark,” which are local community groups focused on leadership, and “the Dissertation Coach,” which includes graduate students from around the world. Finally, the post was published on the researcher’s Instagram stories and Snapchat stories.

The majority (n=24) of the participants were women, five were men. Most (n=15) participants were between 35-44 years of age. All but one participant identified as White (n=28),

the other person identified as Asian. Of the individuals who identified as White, nine identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. All participants were educated at least at a high school level, with the majority (n=21) having completed a bachelor's degree or higher, including (n=6) Master's degree, and (n=2) doctoral degrees. Most participants (n=26) were on their first marriage and three were on their second. The sample included one participant in the process of initiating a divorce. Many participants (n=13) fell in the \$100-150k household income bracket, followed by the \$50-100K category (n=7), the remaining were in the \$10K-50k (n=2), \$150-300k (n=2), over \$300k (n=2), and below \$10k (n=1), two participants did not disclose. It is important to note that some participants were international and therefore income brackets were not limited to U.S. currencies. Over half of the participants (n=16) were employed to some level, including full-time workers (n=8), self-employed (n=4), part-time (n=1), and active-duty military (n=3). Additionally, many participants were homemakers (n=6), and were retired (n=4). The shortest length of time a couple dated before getting married was three months, and the longest time a couple dated was 10 years. Participants were married for 14 years on average, with the least time married being four years, and the most time married being 44 years.

Because the results of qualitative research are not generalizable to a larger population, it is important to have an in-depth understanding of the people whose views and experiences are represented in the results. Thus, the purpose of collecting broad demographic data was to provide context for each participant's experiences and to provide a general understanding of the sample as a whole. Many goals discussed in the interviews are shaped by and focused on education, employment, and income.

Data Collection Procedures

Once approval from the institutional review board was received, the researcher posted a request for participants in the channels noted above. When participants demonstrated interest in the study, they were sent an email with the IRB-approved information sheet, which included the purpose of the study, the methods of collection, and the disclaimers. Once participants agreed to partake in the research, they were sent a brief survey on Qualtrics that included the informed consent information and the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) collected information about age, race, ethnicity, education level, employment status, and household income. It included a few questions about the participant's marriage such how long they were married and how long they dated before marrying.

Once a participant completed the Qualtrics survey, an interview was set up to take place via Zoom. This platform was chosen to connect to remotely located participants, and to accommodate ongoing global challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of data collection. Participants were asked to find a quiet, solitary space, away from distractions, where they felt comfortable talking about intimate subjects. Prior to the interview, participants were read the participation disclosure and were asked to provide verbal confirmation of understanding and acceptance. Interviews were then recorded using Zoom, and later transcribed and analyzed. Most interviews were conducted in English, except for five interviews which took place in Spanish. These interviews were translated by the researcher during the transcription process. All interviews were edited to remove all identifying information, such as names and places, about the participants and their families. Each participant and the spouse discussed in the interview were assigned pseudonyms.

The interviews followed a pre-constructed interview guide (Appendix B) or *guía de entrevista* (Appendix C). Participants were given space to answer the prompts according to their own interpretations and to describe their experiences with minimal interruptions (Kvale, 1996). Participants shared information about their marriage and family structure, the construction of their relationship goals, the evolution from the dating stage into the marriage context, and how goals shape their behavior and interactions on a daily and long-term basis. Participants were asked to describe how they became aware of their spouses' goals and what the processes looked like in creating collective goals as a dyad. They were also asked about the frequency with which they discuss goals, the setting in which the disclosure took place, and how they communicated and perceived support from their spouses. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and ranged from 17 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. Each interview was transcribed using Microsoft Word. A total of 276 pages of transcripts served as the data for analysis.

Data Analysis

Based on grounded theory, this study used a thematic analysis to answer the research questions through codes obtained from the data collected during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher followed these six steps: (a) gained familiarity with the data, (b) created coding categories and subcategories, (c) generated themes, (d) reviewed themes, (e) labeled themes, and (f) identified examples (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). In addition, the researcher consulted with a trained researcher, the study's supervisor, and conducted member checking, to validate the credibility of the results.

First, while transcribing each interview, and translating the interviews conducted in Spanish into English, the researcher took notes in a separate notebook about the experiences provided by interviewees that related to the research questions. After the transcriptions were

finalized, the interview scripts were re-read multiple times to help the researcher become familiar with the answers given by the participants. The researcher highlighted sections that seemed relevant to the study on the computer. When the answers provided in the highlighted parts were compared to the notes that emerged during the transcriptions, four overarching themes were created. These highlighted sections were then color-coordinated according to each theme. The green category included ways in which couples became aware of each other's goals. The yellow category covered ways in which couples communicated understanding of these goals. The blue category grouped ways in which spouses created collective goals, and last, the fuchsia category covered how spouses communicated understanding of their collective goals.

Then, each color category was individually analyzed for repeated themes. The researcher wrote down in a separate list the codes that appeared within each category according to their color and made annotations of the script and page number of each example under the respective color of each coded theme. Several themes emerged regarding methods of goal disclosure as well as environments in which disclosure occurred. Next, the codes were grouped and organized according to major themes and subthemes representing the experiences of goal disclosure and creation of collective goals as perceived by the researcher. These themes included the types of goals that were disclosed and created.

A key part of this process was making constant comparisons between participants' answers to identify larger themes to make meaning of the participants' experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Jensen, 2012). Equally important was collaboration with the supervising advisor, a trained senior researcher, to validate the accuracy of the thematic analysis in these codes and to review the themes created (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The interviewer reviewed the observations and interpretations of the data collected by providing the advisor detailed notes following the

interviews to create the initial code book. The interviewer and the advisor discussed emerging themes throughout the whole process until final themes were identified and reported. These themes are shared and described in the next section.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this study is to understand how couples learn about each other's goals and how they communicate to develop collective goals. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section addresses the types of goals that participants disclose and create. The second section discusses processes pertaining to couples' disclosure of goals, and the third section focuses on how goals are communicatively developed and managed in the dyad.

Types of Goals

Participants shared a variety of individual and collective goals. The goals described in the interviews included practical and ideal wants, as well as immediate and distant desires. First, participants often noted a distinction between short-term goals and long-term goals. When participants were asked about their goals, they noted goals that were immediate and those that would take many years and/or steps to achieve. Short-term goals included practical things like working out a certain number of times during the week, and long-term goals included aspects like where to retire.

Many participants continually used the short-term and long-term categories when explaining the difference between the goals they are working on and goals that remained in the pipeline. For example, Matthew shared this insight when discussing how often conversations about goals take place between him and his wife, Sasha:

Most days, probably, I mean, because goals vary, right? You've got short term goals, you've got long term goals, you've got goals in between- middle term goals, if you will. So, day-to-day basis, for short term goals. Probably every other day, something gets discussed as far as like, some chores around the house or got to run an errand, right? Like

those are all kind of those are goal-oriented tasks. There's that, but as far as big term, long-term goals, still frequently enough.

Similarly, Hope, explained how she differentiates goals. She said: "I think having pipe dreams, and also having realistic goals is the difference."

Participants shared a wide range of personal and collective goals. Participants' goals typically fell in one of five overarching categories: (1) quality of life, (2) financial stability, (3) professional development, (4) relationship longevity, and (5) children's fulfilment. Each is described below.

Quality of Life

Most of the participants met their spouses when they were college students, recent graduates, or young professionals. As a result, their early goals were often reflective of the quality of life they aspired to achieve. Quality of life goals include the general ideas that participants had about what a "good" life entailed. For example, Jeffrey explained:

The goal of having a stable family that had a wife and children of some sorts, the first and easiest, and then second would be a kind of work goal of having a career and being able to have that work life balance both in a career and with family.

Within the scope of a good life, individuals disclosed goals of "being successful." Success, despite the subjective nature, usually related to their idea of a good quality of life. For example, Tamara shared her experience:

We talked about [success] because I think it's a common conversation. Because, again, everybody wants to live, in terms of having a good life. Which can be different from one person to the other. But at the end of the day, you want a good life together. Even if that's having an ice cream a day for me, and a different car every year for my husband.

For participants, a good quality of life also entailed abstract ideas like “finding purpose,” “being happy,” and “following a calling.” Participants also talked about wanting spiritual growth, emotional contentment, healthy living, and aiming to being a “good person.”

Financial Stability

Participants talked about reaching a level of financial independence with sound investments, good retirement plans, and money goals. Many disclosed their real estate plans, desired salaries, luxury items they wanted to buy in the future, and extensive world traveling plans, all of which related to the level of financial freedom they plan to achieve. For example, in reference to the level of wealth her husband aspires to Shannon stated, “It’s just something that I’ve known for a long time that he would like to have a good amount of money so that he can buy whatever he wants to buy.” Additionally, for many participants, financial stability included providing for their families and making sure that they were taken care of. For example, Yoko explained:

We just want to work so that we can have a good future, a nice house a nice car and travel. Make sure that we can provide for the kids, pay for their colleges and buy them an apartment for when they want to go to the city to study.

Professional Development

When thinking about goals, some participants initially considered and described only career goals. Many thought the line of questioning was related to their career aspirations involving tangible milestones, such as obtaining a specific job or certain professional status. For example, Ferrah, shared she had very set career goals:

I remember when I was in high school my goal was to never be married, and to be a successful woman. Then, my goal was to be in the military and be a colonel by the time I was 50.

For most participants, achieving managerial and directive positions at work, or retiring with distinction were important goals for their professional development. For the participants without linear work trajectories, such as entrepreneurs, achieving respect and permanency in their fields were desired goals. For example, April explained, “One of my big goals is I want to be a successful photographer, [technically] I am a successful photographer, already... but I want to maintain success... and stay successful.”

Relationship Longevity

A lasting relationship was a goal described by most participants in this study. Before they were married, the goal was to find a loving, long-term partner, and after they were married, the goal was to make the marriage work. For example, Ferrah, who was in her second marriage, shared her desire to not get divorced:

So, one of our goals was to never get divorced. That was a goal. We both had been married before. I said, I can't survive another divorce. I was very leery about getting married in the first place. And so, I said, this *has* to be a goal-that we never divorce.

For Ferrah, success in her marriage was connected to the longevity of the relationship. When reflecting on the contrast of her priorities she stated, “I don't even know back then if I knew what that meant. I mean, being *successful* now has a whole different meaning for me than it did then.” Additionally, participants were intentional about being “happily married.” For Carolina, just getting married was not enough. She shared:

Also [a goal was] eradicating dysfunction from my own family because I would also share that my parents were divorced and I didn't like having grown up without my dad as a result of that divorce----- so if we did get married it was going to be forever, and it was going to be a good marriage, and it was going to be a good home for our children.

Children's Fulfillment

For spouses with children, their happiness, stability, and well-being became a central focus for collective and individual goals. In fact, children's academic, spiritual, emotional and personal fulfilment were a recurring theme of goals for all participants who had them. Even for those who did not have children, many were either engaged in future planning conversations, or they noted that it was a constant point of communication for day-to-day interactions. One of the participants, Crystal, shared how children changed her priorities:

I was very selfish... Since we've had kids, [I've] just grown and matured, and I don't know, just trying to encourage him and be supportive.... [and] to keep the kids alive... That's one other mutual goal that we have. I mean, I always think about that.

Similarly, Kala, shared that her planning is more specific now that their children are older. She said:

With the kids and them being teenagers now, it's kind of the goals are changing into what are we having for them to get them set up for their futures. And we talk about where do we want to be? And how are we going to get there? How are we going to provide for them for college? And, you know, the goals are different. It's not just about what inspires me at the moment.

Milady, a participant married for over 20 years also noted a focus on children. She explained, “everything revolves around goals that are constructive for our kid’s well-being and regarding their future.”

In summary the types of goals participants discussed in their interviews revolved around the idea of who they want to be within the different roles they play in their life. Some goals are easily achieved and actively pursued daily, larger goals take more time and preparation and are pursued over a longer period of time. Whether as a spouse, a professional, or a parent, goals were geared toward individuals achieving their personal potential and creating the type of life they dream of for themselves and their families.

Goal Sharing Processes

This section addresses how sharing one’s personal goals occurs in relationships. It focuses on addressing RQ 1: How do marital couples become aware of each other’s goals? Sharing goals was particularly important in the dating process and helped participants determine whether they were compatible with the person they were dating. Goal sharing occurred through three processes: explicit disclosure, implicit disclosure, and future talk.

Explicit Goal Disclosure

Explicit disclosure occurred when participants directly revealed or asked their significant others to reveal information about themselves. One way participants said they explicitly revealed themselves was by incorporating facts about their life experiences in the conversations. For example, one of the participants, Dianne, shared an instance of this that led her to believe they shared common goals:

I worked with Jack, almost exclusively, and we became friends. And even before we started dating, I had told him that I wanted to be a teacher, and he had a scholarship to

[university X] through [military program]. And, even before getting together, we both shared with each other his goal... he actually wanted to go through the [training program] and be a [military specialty], and I wanted to be a teacher. And his dad was a teacher, and his brother was a teacher, so we talked about that.

Dianne explained that she wanted to be a teacher, and her husband Jack shared that his dad and his brother were both teachers. To Dianne this meant that Jack understood what the teaching profession entailed, and that due to his close ties with teaching from close members in his family, Jack would also appreciate her desire to teach. Hope also recalled how she felt the likelihood of a potential long-term relationship with her now husband through disclosure in the courtship period. She stated, “Both our parents are still together, both had two siblings, we had so many commonalities. And we talked a lot about, ‘oh, you’re like that, too? Well, that’s how I wanna be!’ ‘Oh yeah, me too,’ you know?”

In some cases, explicitness was directed by one individual. For example, Carolina explained that during the time she met her husband, she had experienced the loss of her father and that event served as a turning point for her in terms of how she approached her future interactions. She explained:

It was important to have conversations that were meaningful and decisive in regard to where the future was going. Because I did not want to waste my time with somebody that I didn't think was conducive to my life goals. And for him, he was not as intentional in that regard, but he's someone that's really easy to talk to. So, he was always just very open and vulnerable about me asking questions, and him telling me all his personal goals. So, I would ask “what do you want to do with your life?” And then he would tell me what he wanted to do with his life.

Similarly, many participants shared that face-to-face conversations, and verbal communication in general, were the means of how they became aware of their spouses' goals.

Implicit Goal Disclosure

Implicit disclosure occurred when participants derived information based on observations or deduced it from anecdotes shared by their significant others or members of their social network. For example, Carolina shared an anecdote about how she knew marriage was important for her husband Caleb:

We had a lot of family interactions with each other's families when we were dating.... I knew marriage was important to him [not] necessarily because he said it, but because his mom said, whenever he was little, he had told them, "I can't wait till I have somebody to be married to so that I can sleep with them at night." [she laughs]. Because he was scared to sleep alone. He wanted to have somebody with him all the time, like his parents had each other. So he told his parents that he couldn't wait till he was an adult that could get married so that he would have somebody to sleep with every night, too.

Although Caleb did not specifically disclose that one of his goals was marriage, Carolina had discerned the goal based her understanding of the story shared by his mom.

Another participant, Ashley, shared she knew they had some goals in common because they enjoyed the activities associated with the goals together. For example, she stated, "I would say that [learning about his desire to] travel specifically wasn't so much conversations...but rather organic experiences when you are enjoying some of the things together. And if it's clear that that's a priority for the other person."

Most participants shared, at one point or another, that they just "knew" what their significant other's goals were without ever explicitly addressing some of them. Margaret

explained that for her it was just “a gut feeling.” For others, such as Shannon, for example, talking about goals “wasn’t a big deal” because they both deduced the logical steps that followed their life timeline. She explained that because they were already working toward goals, there was no need to discuss them:

I guess I never really said it was a goal because at that point that goal was in full motion and there was no turning back. Like, that goal was going to be complete no matter what. I was so close to meeting that goal. He knew I was in school, and he knew that I was gonna graduate in a few months.

Participants’ perceptions of the events and activities associated with perceived shared goals created expectations about the behaviors and activities they would share with their significant others. If these were not shared, they did not see a future in the relationship.

Future Talk

A third process that individuals engaged in for sharing potential goals with each other is future talk. In this process, individuals discussed or alluded to hypothetical future plans that included each other. Future talk helped build a collective identity because plans included the other person to bring them to fruition. For example, Katherine remembered the conversations that took place regarding her and her husband’s professional development, as they were dating and graduated college at the time of a recession. When Jason’s talk about his job started to include providing for her, it impacted Katherine’s vision for their future. Jason shared that even though flying was his desire, “the airlines were not hiring” because of the economy, so Jason took a job as a military pilot instead. Katherine then knew this inclusion was a turning point in their relationship. She shared:

Our goals were similar.... he was like “so you know, once we get married if we end up having a kid right away, I know that I make enough money to where you could stay at home.” And he knew that was something that I wanted, to be able to stay at home.

Future talk served as an invitation into joint goal planning, which symbolized a potential future together. For individuals, these conversations served as implicit agreements of what they were willing to offer in the relationship. For example, Alejandra, shared that when she and her husband started dating, they were “not so young.” From the beginning she was straightforward about the goals she had of having a family and getting married, but they lived in different countries. When the dating negotiation took place, future talk was used to provide options into what each counterpart would contribute to the relationship. Alejandra shared:

I was almost 26 when I met him, so it wasn't the same thing as meeting at 18. I told him how it was going to be.... [I] said I was willing to stay in [country X], and that the change from seeking employment in [country Y] or in [country X] was the same to me. I could realize my professional goals, and my life in [country X]. But staying in [country X] implied that he knew who I was, what I wanted to do, and that he would be in agreement with it. We talked a lot about the future so there wouldn't be any surprises later.

Some participants used future talk to check for goal compatibility. Dylan, for example, expressed this during the dating phase with his wife. He shared:

In the dating and getting to know each other realm there's the initial shock and awe of mutual, “oh, I want this many kids” and, you know, like talking through that, and then, the dreamer goals of, “someday we're going to move here,” or “I want to try this,” to see if those things align or not.

Hence, individuals stated that they used goal sharing as measures to see if their goals mutually aligned, or if they could build a future together. Goal sharing took place as people specifically disclosed or sought out information about each other, derived information from observation or experiences, and engaged in joint future planning.

In summary, goal sharing processes refer to the ways in which individuals shared and/or learned about their spouse's goals, primarily in the dating process. First, in explicit goal disclosure individuals directly stated or asked about goals to check for compatibility. Second, implicit disclosure occurred when individuals decoded surreptitiously transmitted information about goals and plans. Finally, future talk involved engaging in talk about hypothetical joint goals that could become part of the couple's future. Although goal sharing processes were particularly important during dating, they continued to occur long into the marriage and were connected to the development of shared goals, which are discussed in the next section.

Goal Development Processes

The themes discussed in this section address RQ2: How do couples develop collective goals? The development of collective goals took place in two phases, the dating phase and the marriage phase. As noted above, the dating phase functioned as an exploratory time to figure out compatibility and potential for joint planning, while the married phase assumed these characteristics were present. Once individuals had a sense of compatibility, couples began to develop collective goals, which often included aspects of a vision for their marriage. Thus, collective goals in marriage often began during the dating period and continued, were revised, or dropped during marriage. Goals were also developed in response to external initiatives, and even from ordinary talk among individuals. The next section describes four sub-themes associated

with goal development: goal appropriation, purposeful planning, practical planning, and mundane talk.

Goal Appropriation

Participants shared that many of their individual goals were determined prior to meeting their spouses, and simply adjusted or evolved during the marriage. After marriage, most participants explained that all goals, whether personal or collective, were deemed as mutual and disclosed with the expectation of receiving some level of shared investment, support, and involvement. Thus, once established as an entity, couples assumed that their goals involved each other to some extent. This shift in ownership regarding individual goals, whether organically or decisively, was goal appropriation. Goal appropriation meant that individuals no longer referred to their goals as only their own or as only pertaining to their partners, but rather, all goals were perceived to belong to the collective, regardless of whom they directly benefitted. Matthew, for instance, explained how this worked with his wife:

It's like goals become the same. Her goals by nature of being her goals are my goals, and my goals by nature being my goals are her goals. So, each of our individual goals is our collective goals. There's not really a distinction there, just a matter of who puts in the brain power.

Goal appropriation began to take place during the dating period. However, because individual and collective goals became intertwined, when initially asked about the personal goals they had before marriage, many participants answered the question by describing collective goals that pertained to their marriage. Once the researcher specified to consider all goals, participants were able to look back and identify goals they had before they met their spouses, but generally, they continued the conversation by describing goals formed with or connected to their

spouses. For example, Hope, who like many participants struggled dividing her personal goals from collective goals, explained why she felt this was the case:

I know we have not been married a long time, but I feel like we have been married enough to where it's kind of like... we are definitely separate people, but I feel like we're the married couple, and that our lives are so intertwined at this point, that it seems like everything is that ripple effect. And it feels like everything is affected by other things... If it's his personal goal, we work on it, or if it is my personal goal, we work on it as a couple.

Javier clarified that there was no separation between his and his wives' goals from the moment they were dating. He said, "It's just that in this situation there weren't any individual goals that were independent of each other. We dated for 10 years, since we were 15 years old. Every single goal was planned as a mutual goal." Later in the interview Javier shared an example of how goal appropriation worked for them. He said:

Because I believe that at one point those goals transfer between each person, even if they are only for one person. For example, I want to gain a habit of reading. And if I feel the support from my spouse to achieve that goal, then she must also feel that the goal is hers, and at that point we leave behind the idea of his and hers, and they become ours. It is my goal that you, too, have the habit of reading. It is also my goal that you are formed how you want to. If it's mine, it's yours, and together we work on it.

Jeffrey, also explained that even though he could share personal goals, they were not really his own: "So, the personal goals... it's almost to a point where there are no personal goals, per se, everything is a shared goal for us to do together." In another example, Leticia knew that some of

their goals were personal before, but now they were collective because of the active role her spouse shared in planning them. She explained:

Now, it's a shared goal. It's funny how before we were married, we would have individual [goals]. And now, because we share so much together, it's all shared goals. So now it's things that we want to do together. We talk about it, and we game plan and we figure out how to make these dreams happen.

Some participants expressed concern that they did not seem to have personal goals because all of their goals were connected to their spouse and/or their family. This was a particularly sensitive point for female spouses that felt like their jobs within the home structure such as taking care of children, precluded them from having personal goals, particularly professional ones. Abby explained:

As I filled this demographic questionnaire out, the employment thing, being a military spouse is a sensitive topic.--- In that regard, I guess we've been so focused on his achievements, and providing for the family, than my goals... also because I'm not very clear with them, have kind of been in the back burner.

Similarly, Jessica, disclosed the sense of insecurity she felt having her goals be secondary to her spouse's, Justin, and how that could affect how outsiders perceived her own value as an individual:

The questions really made me stop and think that I haven't had a goal that didn't include Justin in twenty years. You're asking me, and I'm like "Gosh, does that sound bad?"— And I'm going to start crying--- but it's not that I don't have personal goals, but as far as we go, my goals in life are: How can I support my children? How can I support my husband? What can I do for my family to be happy and healthy? ... And it's how people

would look at it, because I don't feel bad that my personal goals all involve Justin. I love Justin, and I love me. But if someone was looking at it from the outside, they could think, "oh my gosh, this lady has no personal goals of her own, how sad."

Like Jessica, almost all participants of this study struggled to identify the line between their personal goals and their collective goals because many of them merged during the dating and marriage process.

Purposeful Planning

Oftentimes goal creation was induced by external influences that triggered a purposeful planning process. Many participants described turning points and events that primed goal creation based on people's personal experiences and upbringing. This goal development process was deemed as purposeful planning. Two main sub-themes emerged in the data. The first one was purposeful planning that came from directives, and the second was purposeful planning that came from modeling.

Directives. Some individuals used the beginning of a new calendar year, birthdays, anniversaries, or the participation in a specific event to initiate, or guide, goal creation. These invitations to initiate specific goal creation were described as directives. For example, Javier explained that on a yearly basis his church would set up an event where each family got a pamphlet designed to help couples reflect on the past year and make goals for the year to come. He explained, "Even before we were married, we would take the little pamphlet that is divided into spiritual areas, economic areas, personal areas, marital areas, and familial areas, we would fill out that pamphlet and declare it for the upcoming year."

Other participants used turning-points, such as life-changing events to initiate goal planning. These events included getting married, graduating, having children, retirement, and

major promotions. For example, Abby shared that prior to getting married, she and her husband, Kyle, attended a marriage retreat that initiated a conversation about children in their future. She shared:

We did a marriage retreat before we got married, and one of the activities they had you do was that you stand back-to-back, and you answer a bunch of questions. And I feel like it was by show of hands... One of the specific questions was “how many children?” and I remember turning around and we both had four.

Many of these directives were events that emerged in individual’s lives that required specific attention to create goals and set guidelines for the future.

Modeling. Another theme that emerged as central to goal creation was modeling in which goals were derived from behaviors or outcomes from individuals outside of the marriage. Most participants noted that they created some goals because they identified things in their own lives, or other people’s lives, that they wanted to emulate or eradicate from their own experience. For example, participants shared their goals to prevent divorce, avoid financial instability, avoid abusive relationships, gain familial support, or create educational opportunities. All the participants had created goals based on goals achieved by someone else or goals that avoided repeating negative behaviors of others. For example, Kristen, explained that in the beginning of their relationship she could not identify concrete goals because their main goal was just to make it through and not repeat their parents’ mistakes. She said, “If I’m just being completely honest, we didn’t have any goals. We got married super young. So just functioning daily, because we both grew up in bad homes. We were just trying to move forward.”

One topic that came up frequently was domestic labor distribution and the responsibility of financial contributions. For example, Hope shared that they had a traditional gender-based

male/female role dynamics. That is, John was the main provider and Hope took care of the home and children. She explained why she felt strongly about bringing the topic to the table by sharing her sister's situation:

My sister stays home, she has a special needs daughter, and I always feel like, [her husband] kinds of keeps her home, because he works, and she doesn't... But it feels like almost an unhealthy situation, where one person is deciding for the other, and that's not fair. If you want to work you should work, if you want to do something else, you should do that.

Similarly, Abby, spoke about how the income goal for her and her husband, Kyle, came from the model set by both of their parents' marriages. Kyle's dad's failure in his business created apprehension in Kyle about Abby's goal of owning a business. She shared:

We're doing fine financially, [but] is there pressure to work? Yes, 'cause we both come from dual income families, and that's always been the precedent... But the unsupportive piece of it, is his dad tried to do [sales] and it's always been a "my dad stunk at it. it was never successful, you were like my dad, you will never be successful."

Family experiences also shaped interpersonal goals in marriage. Sulema shared that she realized that her and her husband's conflicting work schedules were not aligned with her expectations based on her upbringing. Although this goal was not directly discussed with her husband, she thought he had the same perceptions because of their shared ethnicity. She explained, "[I had this expectation] definitely because of the way I was raised. I mean I was raised in a Hispanic household, where the ideal is for the mom and dad to always be together." Similarly, Dianne explained that for her it was important that her husband actively listened to her because she did not have that growing up in a large family. She stated:

I didn't have a lot of that. When I was younger, [my parents] would be listening, but, you know, being busy, “tadaa, tadaa,” they wouldn't necessarily make eye contact like I wanted. [As] a kid, they weren't going to sit, and intently listen to me.

In addition to avoidance of negative traits, participants also shared their desire to incorporate positive aspects they saw during their upbringing. Tamara, for example, shared that when looking for a husband she wanted someone who could share the dynamic her parents had: “One thing that I that I wanted for sure, from seeing my parents, was to be with someone that was always cordial to me. Like, opening the door, or [other] little details.” Margaret, a nurse, also shared that she was influenced by how independent her mom and mother-in-law were when setting goals for herself as a woman, wife, and a mother. She explained:

My mother would defer to my father some, but she was still pretty independent for her day. She was the only mom in the neighborhood that worked outside the home. And she did it because she wanted to. She was an OB nurse... She worked every Saturday and every other Sunday for years. And I remember complaining to my dad, one time, I was about 12, because I was having to help look after the little kids... And I was griping [about how] nobody else's mom [worked]. And he... got in my face and said, “let me tell you something, when your mother goes to work, she's a much more interesting person.” And that was the end of the discussion... but as I got a little older I [got] it. So, I think it has something to do with the way we relate, you know, both having reasonably independent mothers.

Members of the participants' social networks also served as models that shaped goal creation. For example, Carolina explained that she used her social circle for guidance when it came to setting healthy living goals because it was a struggle in her family. She said:

When it comes to getting in shape, I think that's been the hardest thing. I wish that [my husband] had more of a drive to instill in both of us as a standard. So, comparatively I have some friends whose husbands are very, very, adamant about health. Especially because of their jobs, where they have to stay in shape. So, it's sort of a standard for the home. However, for me, growing up I also saw my mom have trouble with her weight long enough, and my dad did hold the standard at our house of health. That didn't mean anything for my mom 'cause she still struggled.

Shannon shared that her husband often wanted to talk about career goals after observing his friend's career trajectory. She said:

He brings these things up and talks about them. He talks about his friend that works in that field, and he'll tell me that "he makes this much, so I think the first year I wouldn't make that much. I would take a pay cut from what we are used to right now for the first couple of years." That kind of thing.

Lizzy, who has been married for more than 40 years explained that for her, having a career was important during a time when more traditional roles were in place. Conversations within her friends' circle led to discussions with her husband about equitable labor distribution. She shared:

I think most women you talk to they feel that they have the share of most of the domestic stuff, along with their full-time job. And that's a tough one. You know, the guys don't know necessarily what to do. I'll come home and he'll have vacuumed, or done the laundry, folding clothes, doing things like that. Those are things that I really appreciate, because then I'm not dealing with them on my only day, or two days off, on Saturday and Sunday.

In summary, modeling shaped goal creation by inciting individuals to recreate and imitate behaviors and dynamics they idealized in their surrounding social circles, or to avoid repeating pre-established patterns that they perceived negatively. This affinity or rejection toward others' behavior served as a framework that helped shape goals that were used as part of purposeful planning in the relationship.

Practical Planning

Participants described the process of breaking down large goals into manageable steps or sub-goals. Practical planning referred to goal-based day-to-day communication shared by spouses. Participants described the way they organized their schedules to navigate appointments, dinner menus, travel plans, budgeting, and role distribution in children management to achieve larger goals tied to family and household functioning. Essentially, practical planning was the micro aspect of goal behavior necessary to bring macro goals to fruition.

A part of practical planning many participants shared, was that they created small goals to help them achieve their bigger goals. For example, Tamara noted that a big goal in her marriage was health, so she and her husband came up with a challenge to help them be healthy. She said:

For example, we did a challenge last month because we both like to stay on track with our fitness, and we had stopped, which is not like us. So, the winner was going to get a pair of tennis shoes, whichever they wanted. We talked about how our goals were not the same because his were bulking up and mine toning down. So, we set the goal to be comparable. He set to work out three times on weekdays and once on the weekend, and I said I would do a 30-minute workout every day. And we were set to keep track of each other to see who wins.

Crystal discussed how one of her goals was to be a good mom, and she shared how she and her husband developed a plan to get her son the resources he needed. She said:

One goal that we have right now is getting kids taking care of, you know, my middle one is quiet. He's having a lot of issues in school, like behavioral issues. So, it's getting him assessed first for, autism, and possibly, a behavioral problem. So, you know, that's something that I think we're communicating a lot about, just kind of see where we're at, and trying to come up with what we can do to help them, and where we need to go.

Many participants who had children discussed planning schedules to cover childcare and activities. Additionally, they talked about incorporation of the kids into the conversations about goals to account for their point of view in their plan of action. For example, Jeffrey shared:

Even the little basic things, how can we do better as parents? We're dealing with one of those right now. Of pulling the kids from their current soccer club because we don't see the opportunities and they're not allowing [our oldest] to heighten her skills. So, we've talked about that a ton this week. Are we're going to allow them to switch to a different soccer club? Is that just us being parents going, "no, no, no, I want my kid to do this?" or is it us providing an opportunity to allow both kids to accelerate their game, if they so choose, or just stay the same. And bringing them into that conversation, as well.

Some participants described creating tools to track and create accountability to help meet larger individual and/or collective goals. For example, April shared that staying accountable was easier when they could see their goals on their yearly vision board to keep track. April explained that she and her spouse wrote down their goals:

That's how I feel like we have the most success in getting things that we want. On our goals' list [there are] things like that... because we do talk about it almost daily. We go

over it and we discuss how it pertains to our life. Or how we want to put those steps into action. I have my bulletin board. Up there I have my goals.

Participants used the smaller steps methods of goal creation to keep each other accountable and engage in the ongoing goal achievement process. Leticia, for example, explained that her vision board was a way to keep her husband involved in her personal goals as they progress through her list together. She said:

I literally put all of my goals on a vision board, and my vision board is right by the restroom in our master bedroom. So, he sees my goals as much as I see my goals, and it's basically like a to do list... it's a vision board of what I want us to accomplish. Whether with my businesses, or my health journey, our travel plans, everything is on this board.

In general, practical planning occurred when participants discussed and focused on the steps they practically followed to accomplish their overarching goals.

Dyadic Planning

A fourth theme or process that emerged in the data related to creation is that goal development and action takes place when spouses engaged in daily conversation and use each other to instigate planning. It is different from previous processes in that it exclusively uses the other spouse for planning without including other people or outside triggers. Sometimes the communication that takes place is purposeful and serves to help keep individuals on track or to help figure out the steps necessary to complete an individual or collective goal. Other times talk involves sharing and co-construct fantasies, dreams, and idealized goals that are unlikely to come to fruition. Dyadic planning took place in two ways: sounding-board talk and mundane talk.

Sounding Board Talk. Dyadic planning occurs when individuals communicate with their spouses to get help to solidify ideas, create action plans, and problem-solve obstacles

related to their goals. Participants shared that they relied on their spouses to help with brainstorming and figuring out how to execute specific goals. In sounding board talk, participants explained that spouses help them complete their goals by guiding and supporting the steps needed to achieve them. For example, when Emily moved to a new place, she wanted a social circle, so they created the goal to meet new people. Her husband did the research and she gathered new friends from his efforts. She shared:

We'll come up with an idea and then we just work on ways of making it. Let's say it was meeting people or joining a club. We work on it together, talking about it, and throw ideas to each other. Leonard just loves to dive into the Internet and looks up information [for the things] we are seeking to do. [Since] he was traveling all the time, [he suggested] I volunteer at the hospital to meet new people. So, I was kind of the one who went out to find the friends for both of us together [since] I was home without him. Then we joined together... we each do our part.

Ashley explained that her husband helped her figure out and evaluate the next steps necessary to reach her personal goal of furthering her education. He helped her manage her apprehension when it came time to apply to grad school. She shared:

When I was applying for grad school I hemmed and hawed over whether or not I should apply. "Should I wait? Should I be more competitive?" And he was like, "No, just do it. Apply. Do it now that you're here." We sat down and talked about it over several different days, and he helped me flesh out why I was being so hesitant. It was mostly just based on fear of rejection and not about not being ready to apply. He just kind of walked through with me, "if you don't submit an application, the answer's no. And if you do

submit an application and they say no, well, it's not any different than if you didn't submit it.” So that was good logic for me. “You're right I should just make it.”

Participants explained that they used their spouses as sounding boards in the process of developing goals to come up with concrete goals or strategies to achieve them. Participants shared that they enjoyed being able to “bounce off” ideas and get their spouse’s perspective to help bring their goals to fruition. For example, Matthew shared that for him this exchange was “being able to get together and talk about all of those goals, mostly enabling, helping, trying to be another set of hands, or another mind, and a pair of eyes on those goals that we're trying to attain.” In short, using the spouse as a sounding board and as a planning partner help participants work towards their individual and group goals.

Mundane Talk. In the process of engaging in daily, mundane conversations, participants often chat about their dream and desires. Unlike directives, modeling, or practical planning, individuals are not intentional about communicating about or creating specific goals. But rather, in mundane talk, communication is the goal, which can lead to disclosure and creation of goals with no specific timeline or need for immediate action. This goal communication takes place in settings where spouses get together to simply talk with each other.

Participants shared that they often set time aside to chat about life and connect with each other. For example, Anthony spoke about how he and his wife, Cornelia, set aside time away from their kids and sit in their rooms with a drink and just talk. He said:

We just have talks amongst ourselves, and then kind of one thing leads to another.

Discussions are our thing. We love whiskey drinks. It is what we what we do so. We sit, share a whiskey, and talk about our days, plans, and goals.

Similarly, Emily shared that after more than 40 years of marriage she and her husband, Leonard, continue to hold evening conversations to catch up with each other:

At home around the kitchen table, maybe in a lounge chair... depending on time of year, or a patio chair, or you know it's just sitting in the evening with time together to talk about what we really want to do.

Dinner time was a common time to engage in mundane talk about life and goals. Abby shared how her family has made it into a nightly routine, "We visit as a family for dinner every night, and I guess we reconnect there." Shannon, too, used their dinner routine as time to talk without distractions. She stated, "Most of the time I feel like our conversations are at the dinner table. Because that's when there is no TV on, there is no phones. That's when it's just me and him."

Individuals use these ordinary conversations to casually co-construct potential plans and shared dreams. Participants noted that it is fun to talk about things just for the sake of sharing with each other. For example, Ashley explained:

A lot of our conversations do happen over meals, or while we're driving to and from doing things on the weekends. We try to have a date night at least once twice a week where we go out and those are usually an hour, or two hours, of conversation, and it often is steered in that direction... where we are talking about dreams and goals that we have most of. Because we enjoy talking about it, it's it's fun to dream with your partner and strategize with your partner.

Similarly, April explained that she loves sharing her goals with her spouse no matter how far-fetch they seem. She explained:

We talk about just about everything and how we can get there... I mean I have crazy goals! Like I'm going to write a children's book one day, I don't know how I'm going to

do it, I don't know where I'm gonna do it, but I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna write that children's book one day. And we've looked up, potential illustrators for my book... that has not existed yet. We just were just daydreaming about all of these ideas and things.

For most participants mundane talk involved talking about dreams for their day-to-day life, that would be “nice” to have but did not require immediate attention. For example, Lizzy shared some of the dreams she and her husband have discussed throughout the years. She said:

You know, certain things like that you talk about and tease each other over whatever. But I don't know if you really call it a goal. But it's like a dream, you know, still is a dream of ours to have a nice, summer sports car that we could drive around with the roof off. But, you know, you have to think do we want three cars? Yeah, you know, a lot of times it's a changing of back and forth. Like I want an awning on our back deck. That's a big thing that I've wanted for a long time. Tim likes the sun and he wants something permanent, which would be more expensive than us having the cloth on it. So we've been talking about this for a couple of years now.

Similarly, Emily shared that a goal of hers is to travel more, which has been an ongoing conversation for years. It is something she will bring up to her husband whenever she has the chance. She explained:

It's funny because my overriding one that I use as my example of traveling is... it hasn't been all that scribbled about because he traveled so much with work. I always said, “well we're giving you a break between your travel with work before we start taking off.”

Overall, mundane talk occurs in a context of freedom where ideas emerged for potential future goals. However, these conversations do not typically turn into a specific plan with an intended, achievable outcome that the couple intentionally works toward.

In summary, the processes of goal development are communication driven and produced through different methods of planning. Some of the steps are practical and tangible, focused on tackling precise goals, such as practical and purposeful planning. Others are instinctively bids for connection that serve to create intimacy and a sense of camaraderie and teamwork as individuals help each other tackle goals or co-create visions for their future.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to seek deeper understanding of the communicative processes that take place during goal disclosure and the development of collective goals in marital dyads. Previous research shows that joint goal planning increases the probability of couples staying married (Gere et al., 2016). Research has also found that good communication is a key factor in marital satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). Hence, the goal of this research was to contribute to the understudied area of marital goal communication by investigating the ways couples' discussions and disclosures shape joint goal planning.

The data revealed several findings. First, the study uncovered that the myriad of goals couples share individually and collectively are grouped into short-term and long-term categories that are consistent with previous research on why people get married, which is to try to satisfy their basic needs with a partner (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Maslow, 1943). Second, individuals are initially attracted to the idea of marriage to each other based on perceptions of compatibility they gather using explicit and implicit disclosure of personal goals and the use of future talk as a means of testing out mutual possibilities. These findings provide additional insight on the role of goals in relationship formation processes (Duck, 1973; Duck & Spencer, 1972; Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2014). Third, this study discovered that the main way couples develop collective goals is through mutual goal appropriation, a process of adopting each other's goals as their own. Additionally, goals were developed by purposeful planning, practical planning, and dyadic planning which can serve as different applications of the planning theory of communication (Berger, 2008; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Each of these findings is discussed in greater detail below.

Types of Goals

The results of this study were consistent with previous research that indicates that not all goals are equal, and that people tackle objectives that require immediate attention first (Bay & Daniel, 2003). All participants discussed having goal hierarchies that shaped how they communicated goals with their spouses and how they developed plans to bring them to fruition. Long-term goals were discussed with less urgency and participants discussed alternatives of how to achieve them. This process is consistent with the idea of equifinality in goal research, which means that people can use different methods to reach their desired outcomes (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). Understanding how couples organize goals tells us about the perceived level of urgency and/or ease associated with working to achieve them.

Participants communicated about five different types of goals with their partners: quality of life, financial stability, professional development, relationship longevity, and children's fulfillment. These categories overlap with Maslow's (1943) research on human motivation and the hierarchy of needs in safety, belonging, and self-actualization. These necessities are experienced by all people, not just in the context of marriage. However, this study focused on how members of the marital dyad communicated about working to meet these needs collectively.

One goal discussed by participants was the aim of improving their quality of life. Participants shared that this was an individual goal they had prior to marriage and worked together to reach this goal once they were married. This means that participants used goal disclosures prior to marriage to see how their spouses would add to their quality of life during marriage. Several studies show that life satisfaction increases when individuals are surrounded by a supportive social network, with particular emphasis on the effect of a spouse's influence in

health, life longevity, and happiness (Gottman, 1976; Gottman & Silver, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2017; Lavner et al., 2016; Tao, 2018).

Second, financial stability, was a goal presented by most participants in different variations during the interviews. These results are aligned with research on power and dominance since resources that give people agency and influence are usually correlated to financial success (Guerrero et al., 2011). This is relevant because even though participants shared that financial stability was a goal prior to marriage, within the context of marriage, financial stability included long-term goals such as children's college expenses and ongoing access to healthcare. These larger, long-term goals required disclosure and discussion of other ongoing goals that affect their development. Similarly, participants talked about investments in real estate, career changes, and other financial opportunities for which they relied on each other to make decisions. Interpersonal research confirms these methods and explains that in the pursuit of power, individuals use each other in the decision-making progress to determine how to allocate resources such as time and money (Guerrero et al., 2011; Palomares, 2014).

Third, participants shared that they had goals tied to professional development. In accordance with self-actualization research, people have a desire to fulfill their full potential, which includes their academic and professional pursuits, as they tend to be intertwined with their purpose (Maslow, 1943). Furthermore, participants shared they rely on each other for guidance about creating and meeting career goals. People are more likely to achieve their professional development goals, especially educational and job pursuits, when surrounded by meaningful people who support their ability to obtain them (Locke & Latham, 2013; McClure & Lydon, 2018). More specifically, studies found that being in a dyadic relationship positively affects

individuals' autonomous motivation, and therefore, the progress of goals as a couple and alone (Holding et al., 2019).

Last, participants focused on relationship longevity and children's fulfilment. For most participants, marriage itself was a goal intentionally pursued. This need to belong has been extensively covered in academic research as a foundational human need (Maslow, 1943; McClure & Lydon, 2018). Additionally, many participants shared that the longevity of their marital relationship was a crucial goal for them, especially as it applied to the legacy for their children. The desire for marriage stability and a functioning family unit were addressed repeatedly throughout the interviews. Communicatively, these relationship maintenance motivations align with the concept of secondary goals, more specifically, the relational resource goals from goals-plans action theory (GPA) (Dillard, 2015). The theory notes that relational resource goals are used to manage relationships, which influence verbal and nonverbal exchanges between members of the dyad. Individuals gain benefits from the relationship itself, which is a manifestation of the values and goals the individual holds (Dillard, 2008, 2015). This means that participants choose to maintain these relationships and create collective goals to sustain them based on the values that marriage and the family unit represent to them.

An observation worth noting is that although participants talked about both short- and long-term goals, the goal categories were most reflective of larger, long-term goals. Participants were less likely to spend a lot of time talking about mundane daily goals (like getting to school on time) even though that helps reach the long-term goals (like being a good parent). Instead, they focused on overarching life goals that were works in progress, still in the future, or would take a lifetime to achieve. This observation aligns with cognitive goal processing research that explains that humans consciously decide to put distance between their current selves and their

goals to have something to work for (Locke & Latham, 2013). By focusing on larger goals participants were able to explain their current motivations and give insight into the cognitive organization that takes place to drive their behavior. That is, individuals use bigger goals to give meaning to their smaller daily actions.

Goal Sharing Processes

The study sought to understand how individuals become aware of their spouses' goals. Results showed that spouses use explicit and implicit means of disclosure, as well as future talk to disclose their goals, which also served to assess relational compatibility. The findings align with the relationship development theories that indicate that disclosure of information happens in stages and help create interpersonal closeness. This research indicates that disclosure of goals is an important part of this process. More specifically, the experiences participants shared regarding how they disclosed their personal goals overlap with initiating, experimenting and integrating relationship stages of the coming together process as described by Knapp & Vangelisti's (2005) research.

Most participants shared that the interactions through which they met and learned about each other's goals occurred face-to-face using verbal communication. These findings are consistent with other communication research on disclosure and relationship development such as Knapp and Vangelisti's (2005) model of relationship development which states that dyadic relationships are mostly built on verbal, face-to-face interactions.

The study found that participants used explicit means to gather information about each other's goals. They asked direct questions about the other person's goals and reciprocally shared information about themselves. This finding is aligned with communication research on self-disclosure and uncertainty reduction which claims that people risk disclosing things about

themselves in order to connect with others and develop relationships. One way they do this by asking questions to get information about each other (Guerrero et al., 2011).

Another way participants learned about each other was through implicit disclosure. The study found that individuals derived information about each other's goals from storytelling, observation, and deductions based on related information. According to uncertainty reduction theory, these nonobtrusive observations are passive strategies used during initial encounters to manage mutual uncertainty (Berger, 1986; Guerrero et al., 2011). Participants were able to draw conclusions based on shared experiences and implicit learning that came from members of their social network. Participants shared that they reached a point where they intuitively knew that their goals were compatible with their spouses. Studies show that people are attracted to those with whom they share similarities because they feel a sense of familiarity (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Duck, 1973; Duck & Spencer, 1972).

Last, participants engaged in future talk. Future talk took place when individuals speculated plans with each other to test out whether the other would engage in mutual planning and whether their goals for themselves, their marriage, and perhaps, a family, were congruent. That is, they stated a goal and waited to see if the other would accept or include themselves in the plan to test for compatibility. Uncertainty reduction theory classifies these strategies into two categories: interactive strategies and secret tests (Berger, 1986; Guerrero et al., 2011). These methods are used to encourage disclosure in initial relationship stages and are similar in that they both use direct interaction to learn about the other person, whether through questions or discussions of uncertain topics (Berger, 1986; Gere et al., 2011). These communication processes are important in early stages of relationship development because they influence whether participants choose to go forward in the pursuit of the relationship, and consequently joint goal

planning. These findings also are in line with research that explains the relationship between similarity and attraction, which states that people are attracted to those with whom they share similar values, interests, and goals, and that sharing values and goals increases liking (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Goal Development Processes

The second research question focused on how spouses developed collective goals. Participants shared four processes they participate in to develop collective goals: goal appropriation, purposeful planning, practical planning, and dyadic planning. These are based on communicative exchanges that assume goals, create goals, direct goals, and discuss goals.

The study found that goal appropriation is the central way married individuals develop collective goals. Goal appropriation took place when individuals took ownership of the other person's goals to perceive them as their own. Participants shared that once they saw themselves as a collective entity, the way they approached mutual goals was as if personal goals were collective goals. Participants wanted to demonstrate support for their spouse. This likely occurs in the integration stage of the relationship development model (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). This is important because for many participants integration took place prior to getting married, which meant that joint goal development started once the perception of compatibility was established.

Results of this research also identified purposeful planning, practical planning, and dyadic planning as processes geared toward goal development. These three processes were used to explain day-to-day communicative interactions that guide goal formation and enactment for marital dyads. First, purposeful planning involved factors that instigate communication among marital partners to engage in goal formation. Participants shared that they used events such as new year's resolutions, birthdays, church events, anniversaries and other milestones mark new

beginnings or turning points in peoples' lives. This is a time when marital partners engage in reflective communication about where they are and where they want to be. Research on goal achievement has found that goals are contagious and when shared with people who pursue them together, they are more likely to come to fruition (Chua et al., 2015). This explains why people set resolutions as collective entities to stay accountable and encouraged. Other research also supports this notion by illustrating the importance of environmental influences on personal desire to pursue goals (Locke & Latham, 2013).

Second, practical planning was described by participants as the intentional creation of goals that guided their behavior to create the life they desired. One way participants discussed this practical approach was through directives, or the day-to-day processes needed to strategize goal achievement. In a way, this process takes place post goal development because it focuses on the procedural means of making goals come to fruition once they have been established. Participants used artifacts and organizational tools such as calendars, lists, and vision boards to maintain focus on their goals. The planning theory of communication describes the cognitive plans people make to try and achieve their goals. In practical planning, the decision to use these tools facilitates behaviors that help individuals achieve their goals (Berger, 2008; Braithwaite & Schrod, 2021). These findings are useful because they provide additional insight into methods of goal production.

Another way participants discussed the practical planning process was through modeling. Here participants spoke about how family or friend experiences influenced and directed their collective goal formation by showcasing aspects they wanted to imitate or avoid within their own relationships or families. These findings are in line with developmental research that states that individuals are affected by their environments as they seek to form their identity of self (Lock &

Latham, 1990). This finding explains how individuals' past experiences dictate what they search for and what they hope to accomplish as part of a marital dyad.

Last, the study found that many goals are created while engaging in dyadic planning. This refers to ongoing interactions with their spouse that shape goal formation and enactment. One of them, sounding board talk, refers to participants' intentional use of each other's input to construct new goals. Specifically, they use each other to brainstorm new professional and financial opportunities, assess the feasibility of bringing their dreams to fruition, analyze cost-benefit analyses for new ventures, and most importantly, to reflect on their goal outcomes. Research on dyadic goal processes shows that individuals perceive their spouses as instrumental in goal achievement (Chua et al., 2015). Hence, by discussing goal possibilities and alternatives with each other, participants were not only able to provide feedback about individual and collective goals, but they also established an agreement for joint goal achievement. This is useful to understand goal fruition because spouses are more likely to pursue a goal that they created jointly (Chua et al., 2015).

Finally, goal communication emerged through couples' mundane talk. Mundane talk is the informal, friendly, and open communication that happens between couples with the purpose of engaging in communication and not much else. These findings align with the notion that communication is a goal in itself (Samp, 2009). In this process, couples take advantage of ordinary circumstances and unplanned conversations that emerge when together, e.g., in the car, making meals, or laying in bed, to talk about dreams and possibilities that have no formal planning behind them. Participants shared that these conversations inspired goal creation because they talked about the "what if?" which then put hypothetical planning in place, followed by real action into materializing possibilities.

Future talk also occurred intentionally. Participants shared that they actively made time and set up spaces such as date nights, or night caps away from daily distractions such as work and kids to just talk about “everything.” These findings connect to social penetration theory since individuals who are part of the stable stage level of self-disclosure have access to all kinds of information about the other person. To stay in this stage, individuals must continue to participate in communication exchanges that promote familiarity and closeness (Mongeau & Henningsen, 2015; Taylor & Altman, 1968). By engaging in mundane talk on a regular basis, whether through setting aside specific time to talk or engaging in talk that occurs through simply being together, participants communicated about goals in a casual way that helped promote familiarity, closeness, and a sense of shared future.

Academic Contributions

This research increases our understanding about goal communication in marital relationships. This responds to the call to action by Ungar et al. (2019) and Holding et al. (2019) to delve deeper into research regarding the benefits of joint goal planning in interpersonal dynamics, more specifically, in marriage and its effect of marital sustainability and satisfaction. This study conceptualizes marital goal planning as a set of processes that occur within relationships. Though planning theory focuses on the cognitive processes that occur in goal planning, it has yet to be expanded to understand planning processes in marital dynamics (Berger, 2008). Hence, this research provides insight into the cognitive and practical processes that take place to support goal achievement.

Another contribution of this study is in the context of relationship maintenance. Goal disclosure and development in the marital dyad can build on relationship maintenance research. Several definitions of maintenance have been used to explain this process. The first definition is

“maintenance communication protects the relationship to keep it in existence” (Canary & Yum, 2015, p.1). The results of this study found that couples use goal development, and correspondingly, goal disclosure, to have something to work toward long-term as their relationship evolves through different stages to include the longevity of the relationship as a primary goal. It also found that the disclosure of the goals as plans, and the disclosure of the planning for goals are both ongoing and instrumental to the marriage identity, which supports the notion of communication as relationship protection.

A second definition of relationship maintenance focuses on “preserving the status quo” (Canary & Yum, 2015, p.1) which is supported by the finding of practical planning which involves using tools and directives to meet established goals. This study showed that couples use goal disclosure to fulfill day-to-day responsibilities, which help maintain the status quo of their marriage. The third definition, “maintenance involves keeping a relationship in a satisfactory condition” (Canary & Yum, 2015, p.1) is connected to participants’ desire for “quality of life” and “relationship longevity” goals that drove goal development. Individuals shared that it was important to them to stay in the relationship long-term, and that the expectation was to have a good life together. This means that part of their ideal regarding life quality involved maintaining relationship satisfaction.

Finally, in the communication discipline, goals research has focused primarily on message production processes (Samp, 2009). That is, scholars have looked at how people use verbal and nonverbal communication to achieve their goals (Dillard, 2008, 2015). This study focused on the wider picture of communicative processes in marital goal disclosure and development. Instead of examining how an individual communicates to achieve a goal, it focused on how individuals in romantic relationship engage in communication to co-construct

goals. Hence, it contributes to the ongoing academic pursuit of translating behavioral processes into communicative understanding to further the discipline.

Practical Contributions

This study found that talk that involves goal disclosure and development is an important communication process in marriages. This research suggests that couples interested in marital success should engage in discussions about goals and work together to create strategies to achieve them. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of joint goal planning, especially as experienced in goal appropriation, to understand how dyads work to bring individual goals together as well as creating joint goals. This will help create a unified marital identity.

In terms of relationship maintenance, the study found that individuals who felt like they could rely on their spouses to create, plan, protect, and achieve their goals, were more likely to include them in goal planning. These participants were committed to sharing and discussing goals with their spouses not only because they felt like their contributions were useful in their goal pursuit processes, but because sharing with their spouse and making goals a collective effort increased the overall enjoyment of goal pursuit processes. Practically, this finding is useful in helping couples sustain their marriages. Not only does spousal inclusion assist in goal planning strategies, but it also increases the enjoyment and desire to achieve goals together, which in turn, may increase relationship satisfaction and longevity.

Pragmatically, findings can be used to inspire couples to engage in consistent disclosure and sharing by creating opportunities for face-to-face, uninterrupted exchanges. This requires intentionality in the prioritization of spouses' marital communication as a goal in their day-to-day planning. In the interviews conducted, participants realized that as life gets busy, and they get caught up in daily routines, they lose focus of the big picture and place their goals to the side. In

order to prevent frustration derived from unfulfilled goals, individuals should make time on recurring basis to check with each other on their goal progression and make necessary adjustments.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. One is the lack of diversity in participants. Due to purposive and snowball sampling from the researcher's social network, individuals were like-minded in their ideas of marriage and gender-role dynamics. Similarly, the researcher's social circle is composed of a large active-duty military and military spouses. Inherently, this skewed the audience toward military-heavy participation, which is a somewhat unique group.

Another strong demographic limitation was the lack of racial diversity. Except for one Asian descent participant, all participants were White, although about one-third of them were of Latino or Hispanic origin. The demographics were also similar based on income and education. All participants were educated at least at a high school level, and most participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, including two with PhDs. As a result, saturation may have been reached faster than if the participants were more diverse in backgrounds and experiences.

A limitation pertaining to the breadth of this study relates to the criteria required for participation. Participants were limited to those who identified as heterosexual individuals, married over 3 years, and older than 25 years of age. In terms of the diversity of marital constructs, the study is limited to the experience of this group. Furthermore, because all the participants were married, one could surmise that they were successful at talking about goals and finding compatibility. Future research should include participants that either never married or who divorced to see how discussion about goals, lack of goal compatibility, or inability to co-construct mutually supported goals may have contributed to the relational outcome.

Finally, participants were interviewed individually and not as a couple. Although this was meant to give them more freedom disclosing their experiences, the answers are limited to the individual experience as opposed to the dyad. It would be interesting to see how each member of the dyad describes their experiences. Future research could examine how couples talk about their goals and goal creation processes as a unit to see the way perceptions of their goals may be similar or different.

Future Research

Although the purpose of this research was to delve into the communicative processes of goal disclosure and development, this was not a linguistic analysis. Therefore, it does not provide insight into the specific ways that goals were communicated. It would be interesting to capture and study the specific statements that individuals use in the process of communicating about goals. Future research could capture naturally-occurring conversation that would tell us more about specific communication processes and the co-construction of shared goals, in particular.

This work can also be expanded by further investigating how couples view the importance of different goals, and how that affects what goals they choose to prioritize. For example, this study found that most participants aim to have a marriage that lasts as ‘relationship longevity’ was one of the categories of goals they discussed. It would be interesting to see how often the priority of a “lasting marriage” superseded other types of conflict in the marriage. That is, how often spouses negotiate the idea of a long-term goal of sustainability in their marital affairs during marital dissatisfaction. This would be useful in assisting research on marital dissolution.

Last, future research could focus on the role of supportive communication as defined by MacGeorge et al. in the goal sharing and development process to see how it facilitates goal

production and achievement (2011). Supportive communication covers the many ways in which spouses rely on each other during times of stress to gain assistance and aid in coping (MacGeorge et al., 2011). Identifying the most effective means to provide support during challenging aspects of goal completion would be useful for helping spouses in their goal driven pursuits.

Conclusion

This study investigated the processes of goal disclosure that took place between marital dyads from before they were married to their current day-to-day exchanges. It also explored the developmental processes that helped create goals which are geared to assist individuals with relationship maintenance. Though goals had previously been studied considerably in the psychology field, and to some extent in communication, its application to marital communication had not been studied. This research was able to describe the importance of marital goal communication as a strategic means of support in relationship development and maintenance. These findings reinforce the claim that two are, in fact, better than one when it comes to developing goals both communicatively and relationally.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1) What is your gender?

A) Female

B) Male

2) What is your age?

A) 25-34 years old

B) 35-44 years old

C) 45-54 years old

D) 55-64 years old

E) 65 years old or older

3) Are you Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

A) Yes

B) No

4) How would you describe yourself? Please specify select all that apply

A) White

B) Black or African American

C) American Indian or Alaska Native

D) Asian

E) Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian

F) Other

5) What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

A) Some high school, no diploma

B) High school graduate, diploma degree or the equivalent

C) Some college credit, no degree

D) Trade/technical/vocational training

E) Associate degree

F) Bachelor's degree

G) Master's degree

H) Professional degree

I) Doctorate degree

6) Are you currently...?

A) Employed full time

- B) Employed part time
- C) Self-employed
- D) Out of work and looking for work
- E) Out of work but not currently looking for work
- F) Homemaker
- G) Student
- H) Military
- I) Retired
- J) Unable to work
- K) Other _____

7) Please specify your household income bracket

- A) Below \$10,000
- B) \$10,000 – \$50,000
- C) \$50,000 – \$100,000
- D) \$100,000 – \$150,000
- E) \$150,000 – \$300,000
- F) Over \$300,000

8) Marital Status

- A) First marriage
- B) Second marriage
- C) Third marriage
- D) Other _____

9) For your current marriage, how long did you date before getting married?

10) How long have you and your (current) spouse been married?

_____ years

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Prior to beginning this interview, I want to reiterate your voluntary participation in this research.

You may leave at any time, and not finish if you desire.

Your information will be kept confidential. I will de-identify all pertaining information that could identify you. Do you have a preferred name you'd like to use?

Have you read the information sheet provided to you?

Do you have any questions regarding the information we just reviewed?

Do I have consent to continue this interview?

Part 1: Individual Goals

- 1) Tell me about a goal or two that you've had before you were married?
 - a. Tell me about the ways you have communicated this or other personal goals to your spouse?
 - b. How frequently do you talk to your spouse about your personal goals?
 - c. What are some ways your spouse has shown support of those goals? How does your spouse help you stay on track for your goals?
 - d. Are there goals you haven't shared with your significant other? (why not)?
 - i. Are there goals you wish you had shared with your significant other?
 - e. Are there goals that you feel like your spouse doesn't support?
 - f. Is there anything you wish your spouse would do differently to support your personal goals?

- 2) Can you think of one or two goals your partner had before you were married?
 - a. How did you first become aware of your spouse's personal goal(s)?
 - b. What do you do or say to show support for your spouses' specific goals?
 - c. Do you think your spouse is satisfied with that response?
 - d. Do you think there are personal goals that your spouse has not shared with you?
Why/why not?
 - e. How do you help your spouse stay on track for their goals?

Part II: Mutual Goals

- 3) Tell me about a goal that you and your spouse created together?
 - a. What was the process of developing your mutual goal?
 - b. What other kinds of mutual goals do you have?
 - c. How often do you communicate about your mutual goals?
- 4) In what ways do you work together to achieve those collective goals?
 - a. How is the process similar or different from the ways you support each other's personal goals?
 - b. What do you wish was different about how you try to achieve those goals?
- 5) Overall, how important is it to you that your spouse supports your goals?
 - a. How do you think support of your goals (or lack thereof) influences your personal happiness?
 - b. How do you think support of your goals (or lack thereof) influences your satisfaction?

APPENDIX C

GUIA DE ENTREVISTA

Antes de empezar la entrevista, quiero reiterar que la participación en esta investigación es voluntaria. Puede salirle en cualquier momento, y no terminarla si así no desea.

Su información se mantendrá confidencial. Yo de-identificaré todos los aspectos pertenecientes a cualquier dato que lo pueda identificar. ¿Tiene algún nombre que desee usar?

¿Ha leído toda la información que le hemos proveído?

¿Tiene alguna pregunta acerca del permiso que firmo antes de que empecemos la entrevista?

¿Tengo su autorización para continuar esta entrevista?

Parte 1: Metas Individuales

- 1) ¿Cuénteme acerca de una o dos metas que tiene desde antes de haberse Casado?
 - A) ¿Cuénteme un poco acerca de las maneras en que le ha comunicado esta u otras metas a su esposo?
 - B) ¿Con que frecuencia discuten sus metas personales con su pareja?
 - C) ¿Cuales son algunas de las formas en que su esposo a demostrado apoyo para esas metas Como le ayuda su esposo a permanece en camino a alcanzar esas metas?
 - D) ¿Hay metas que todavía no hayas compartido con tu esposo/a? (¿Por que no?)
 - i. ¿Hay metas que le hubiese gustado haber compartido con su esposo?

- E) ¿Hay metas que siente que su esposo no apoye?
 - F) ¿Hay alguna cosa que desearía que su esposo haga diferente para apoyar sus metas personales?
- 2) Puedes contarme acerca de una o dos metas que tu esposo/a haya tenido antes de casarse?
- a) Como te enteraste acerca de las metas personales de tu esposo/a?
 - b) Que es lo que haces o dices para mostrar apoyo por las metas específicas de tu esposo/a?
 - c) Piensas que tu esposo este satisfecho/a con esa respuesta?
 - d) Piensas que hay metas personales que tu esposo/a todavía no ha compartido contigo?
¿Por que, o por que no?
 - e) Como ayudas tu a tu esposo/a con sus metas?

Parte 2: Metas Mutuas

- 3) Cuénteme acerca de una meta que usted y su esposo/a hayan creado juntos?
- a) ¿Cual fue el proceso de desarrollar la meta en común?
 - b) ¿Que otros tipos de metas en común tienen?
 - c) ¿Como se comunican acerca de sus metas en común?
- 4) ¿En que formas trabajan juntos para alcanzar esas metas colectivas?
- a) ¿Como es proceso similar al apoyo de las metas personales?
 - b) ¿Que le gustaría que fuera diferente de la forma en la que alcanzan sus metas?
- 5) Generalmente, ¿que importante es para usted que su esposo apoye sus metas?
- a) ¿Como piensa que el apoyo de sus metas (o la falta) influencia su felicidad personal?
 - b) ¿Como piensa que el apoyo (o la falta) influencia su satisfacción?