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TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CONFLICT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

A dissertation submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree
Doctor of Psychology (Clinical)

from the

University of Wollongong

By

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B.A., PGrad. Dip. Psych.

School of Psychology
Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences

2008

CERTIFICATION

I, Lynne M. Smith, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Psychology (Clinical), in the School of Psychology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Lynne Smith

Date:

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CONFERENCE PUBLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

While much has been written about trait emotional intelligence (EI) in the last decade and while it would seem to have obvious conceptual relevance to romantic relationships, few studies have examined trait EI and its links to relationship satisfaction. The current project examined the influences of self-rated trait EI and couples' communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of heterosexual cohabiting couples. To date, no study has examined the influences of trait EI and communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of both partners. Two studies were conducted, and both used statistical modelling techniques to analyse actor and partner effects to gain a more complete understanding of couple processes. Study 1 used a cross-sectional approach to examine the variables, while Study 2 analysed the effects over a 12-month period. The studies found a number of interesting and important effects that help to provide a greater understanding of relationship satisfaction.

In Study 1, self-rated trait EI was found to be related to couples' communication patterns and relationship satisfaction, as expected. Importantly, an individual's self-rated trait EI was found to predict their relationship satisfaction. When examining an individual's estimates of their spouse's trait EI, two effects were found: individuals who tended to idealize their partner's trait EI reported greater satisfaction; and individuals high in trait EI tended to see their partners as similar to themselves in trait EI. In relation to the communication patterns, an individual's reports of the avoidance and withholding communication pattern was the strongest cross-sectional predictor of satisfaction. Furthermore, actor effects only were found for all variables, indicating that an individual's perceptions of their personality and the couple communication patterns were the strongest predictors of his or her satisfaction.

In Study 2, self-rated trait EI and the communication patterns were examined over a 12-month period to ascertain their effects on satisfaction over time. There was evidence that the effect of an individual’s self-reported trait EI on their satisfaction was stable over time. This suggests that once the effect of an individual’s trait EI on their satisfaction has been realized, the effect is constant and not predictive of changes in satisfaction. Again, actor effects were found suggesting that an individual’s self-rated trait EI had no effect on their partner’s satisfaction. However, when it came to communication patterns, women’s reports of the avoidance and withholding pattern of communication predicted declines in satisfaction for both men and women. This suggests the importance of women’s role in couple communication, and highlights the corrosive effects of avoidance on a couple’s satisfaction. Both studies are discussed in the light of past research and directions for future research are suggested.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Is couples' emotional intelligence related to their communication patterns and satisfaction? Which variable is a better predictor of couples' satisfaction: their emotional intelligence or their communication patterns? Does emotional intelligence predict couples' satisfaction over time? The present project examines the influences of couples' emotional intelligence and conflict communication patterns on relationship satisfaction. This is a worthwhile area of study because trait emotional intelligence (trait EI) has been identified as a personality trait (Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; van der Zee, Thijs, & Schakel, 2002) and, along with couples' communication processes, is likely to influence their relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Furthermore, trait EI and couples' communication are likely to influence relationship satisfaction over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). To date, however, no study has examined the interaction between couples' emotional intelligence, their conflict communication patterns, and their relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Satisfaction

Marriage has long been studied by researchers. Married individuals reportedly experience greater psychological well-being (Kim & McKenry, 2002; Williams, 2003) and report less health problems (Wickrama, Conger, Lorenz, & Matthews, 1995; Williams & Umberson, 2004), than do unmarried individuals. However, the benefits experienced by married individuals are more a function of relationship satisfaction than

simply due to the state of marriage (Williams, 2003). While couples often enter marital relationships with optimism for the future, there is no guarantee of satisfaction.

Indeed, divorce is a case in point. Since 1981, the divorce rate in Australia has steadily increased (Australian Bureau of Statistics (A.B.S.), 2007a). In 2005, 109,000 marriages were registered but 52,400 divorces were granted (A.B.S., 2007a), suggesting that many marriages are less than satisfying. The effects of marital dissatisfaction, however, can be diverse. For instance, one study found that the most frequently cited cause of acute emotional distress was relationship problems, including, divorce, separation, and marriage strains (Swindle, Heller, Pescosolido, & Kikuzawa, 2000). Similarly, people in discordant marriages were overrepresented among individuals seeking mental health services, regardless of whether marital distress was their primary problem (Lin, Goering, Offord, Campbell, & Boyle, 1996). However, the effects of dissatisfaction do not end with the couple or mental health services. Reports of marital satisfaction have predicted child symptomatology, and mothers who were dissatisfied with their marriages were less involved with their children (Fishman & Meyers, 2000). Given the wide-ranging effects of marital dissatisfaction, identifying the factors that affect relationship satisfaction is an important goal for researchers as well as therapists working with dissatisfied couples.

Research on Relationship Satisfaction

Much of the research on marriage or close romantic relationships has focused on "relationship satisfaction" as the dependent variable, generally focusing on three domains: (a) background factors (family-of-origin effects, socio-cultural factors, and current contexts); (b) traits and behaviours (personality and negative behaviours); and

(c) couples' interaction processes (such as communication and conflict resolution) (Larson & Holman, 1994).

Early research focused on simple linear relationships between variables, generally in isolation; for instance, the association between satisfaction and background factors, satisfaction and single personality variables, or satisfaction and interaction processes (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). This research was usually undertaken with either self-reports from only one member of the couple or analysis of only one member of the couple (actor effects), which ignores the interdependence within the relationship and the corresponding effects of a partner's variables on the other partner (Kenny & Cook, 1999). While the research was helpful in directing research priorities – for instance Larson and Holman (1994) found that personality factors generally accounted for more variance than background factors in relation to satisfaction – it became increasingly apparent that the complexity of marital relationships demanded more complex research questions and analyses (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kenny & Cook, 1999).

Indeed, with the advent of statistical procedures such as multilevel modelling, researchers have been able to integrate variables using data from both individuals in the dyad. These methods have also enabled researchers to examine several variables simultaneously, including both personality traits and interaction processes (such as communication), to ascertain their influences on relationship satisfaction. The techniques have also enabled more complex theories of marital development to be proposed and tested.

Karney and Bradbury's (1995) Model of Marital Development

One theory of marital development is Karney and Bradbury's (1995) Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model. The model arose from the researchers' meta-analysis of longitudinal research into how marriage quality changes over time. The VSA model of marriage proposes that enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events, and adaptive processes, combine to explain variations in marital quality and stability over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). "Enduring vulnerabilities" are defined as the stable characteristics of partners, such as personality, ethnicity, and family of origin experiences. Stressful events are the circumstances that couples experience during marriage, for instance, the death of a loved one, transition to parenthood, or job loss. Finally, adaptive processes are the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours that are involved in couples' interpersonal exchanges, such as communication and emotional expression (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007).

Of importance to the current project is the hypothesis from the VSA model that enduring vulnerabilities are *intra*personal variables that create a stable psychological context and have an enduring and constant effect on marital quality over time. It is theorised that enduring vulnerabilities are realized early in the marriage, and once realized, are not associated with changes in marital quality over time. For instance, because personality is stable over time (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), it creates a psychological environment that persists throughout the course of the relationship. Alternatively, adaptive processes (e.g. communication and interaction) are *inter*personal variables that develop with the marriage and are associated with changes in marital quality over time. Karney and Bradbury (1997) tested these aspects of the model in a newlywed sample and found that neuroticism predicted initial relationship dissatisfaction but remained stable over the course of the relationship, and was not

related to changes in satisfaction. However, marital interaction, which was not related to initial satisfaction, predicted changes in satisfaction over time. These results were later supported by Caughlin, Huston and Houts (2000).

The Current Project

Following from Karney and Bradbury's (1995) model and later (1997) study, the present study aims to examine the influences of couples' trait EI and conflict communication patterns on relationship satisfaction. Data from both individuals from each dyad will be examined to ascertain the influences of both partners' variables on each other's satisfaction. The first study will examine couples' trait EI and conflict communication patterns cross-sectionally to establish whether, and to what degree, trait EI and the communication patterns are related to relationship satisfaction. The second study will then examine the variables longitudinally over a 12-month period. Guided by Karney and Bradbury's (1995) model, the second study aims to establish if trait EI, as an example of an enduring vulnerability and acting as an intrapersonal variable, has a stable effect on satisfaction over time, and whether the communication patterns, as an interpersonal variable, are associated with changes in satisfaction.

However, before turning to the studies, Chapter 2 examines trait EI in the context of research into emotional intelligence, and particularly the development of two quite distinct constructs of emotional intelligence. Discussion then focuses on the construct validation of trait EI and its relevance to relationship satisfaction. Following the trait EI analysis, Chapter 3 examines the conflict communication patterns and their relevance to personality traits and relationship satisfaction. These chapters provide a discussion of the theoretical and empirical aspects of trait EI and the communication patterns, thereby providing an introduction and rationale for the two studies.

Chapter 2

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained the widespread attention of both individual difference researchers and the general public alike. Nearly two decades of research has resulted in a large body of literature, but still there is little agreement on the conceptualisation, measurement and utility of the construct (for an excellent review, see Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2008). It is argued that the field has given rise to two quite distinct constructs that have developed contemporaneously (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). *Ability EI* fits within the cognitive abilities realm, while *trait EI*, on which the current research is based, is viewed as a personality trait. These constructs are compared, before progressing to a discussion of the construct validity of trait EI and its relevance to a number of variables. Furthermore, despite the seeming relevance of trait EI to romantic relationships, few studies have examined the associations between the construct and relationship satisfaction. The chapter thus concludes with a review of current research into trait EI and relationship satisfaction, in order to provide an introduction to the studies which examine the effects of trait EI and communication patterns on couples' relationship satisfaction.

While emotional intelligence had been discussed in the scientific literature prior to 1990, a formal definition and construct did not appear until Salovey and Mayer proposed their model of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The historical links to emotional intelligence can be found in various theories. For instance, Thorndike's "social intelligence" is often discussed as being an early precursor to emotional intelligence (Landy, 2005). It was defined as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls — to act wisely in human relations"

(Thorndike, 1920, p. 228). Later, Gardner (1983) proposed a theory of multiple intelligences which contained, amongst others, *intra*personal intelligence, the ability to understand and regulates one's own feelings, and *inter*personal intelligence, the ability to understand the emotions and motivations of others.

It was not until 1995 that the concept of "emotional intelligence" gained widespread attention both in the scientific and popular literatures when *Time* magazine led with an article on "EQ" (Gibbs, 1995). The concept was based on Goleman's (1995) best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*. This conceptualization of emotional intelligence claimed that it might be a better predictor of success in life than IQ (Gibbs, 1995). It received a mixed welcome, however. Some in the scientific community argued that the claims were unfounded (Mayer, 2001), while others were concerned that the scientific community may be tempted to seriously explore what was viewed as little more than a fad (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998).

Ability EI Versus Trait EI

Regardless of the mixed responses, the construct of emotional intelligence fuelled much research in the scientific community, with the result that two distinct constructs of emotional intelligence developed: ability EI and trait EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Petrides and Furnham (2003, p. 39) argue that broadly construed, emotional intelligence refers to the fact "that individuals differ in the extent to which they attend to, process, and utilize affect-laden information of an intrapersonal (e.g. managing one's own emotions) or interpersonal (e.g. managing others' emotions) nature". While ability EI and trait EI have developed side-by-side, the models have been viewed as complementary (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000) and there remains some overlap in the sampling domains utilized by the two different models (Petrides &

Furnham, 2001). However, the two constructs are different conceptually, methodologically, and empirically. Ability EI is seen as entailing emotion-related cognitive abilities and is conceived of as an "intelligence", while trait EI entails emotion-related self-reported perceptions and dispositions and is seen as a personality trait. The two different constructs use different measurement methodologies, both of which have corresponding issues, and respective researchers have sought to demonstrate that each construct fits within its respective realm. While the current project focuses on trait EI, the following discussion compares both constructs in order to review the "emotional intelligence" literature.

An earlier formulation of the two types of emotional intelligence, which focused on the different sampling domains as a point of differentiation, called the different formulations "ability" models and "mixed" models (Mayer, 2001). Ability models, which were predominantly conceptualized by Mayer and Salovey (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), involved the "ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1990, p. 189). Mixed models, which were initially conceptualized by researchers such as Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (2001), combined a variety of skills, abilities and personality traits, such as social skills, problem-solving, empathy, and optimism. Petrides and Furnham (2000), however, were the first researchers to make explicit the point that the different measurement methodologies used to operationalize the construct of emotional intelligence will necessarily result in different outcomes. In fact, to underline the point, only low correlations have been found between measures of ability EI and trait EI (O'Connor & Little, 2003). As a cognitive ability, ability EI needs to be implemented through maximal-performance tests that assess an individual's actual ability to perceive, facilitate, understand, and

manage emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). These tests work much like existing intelligence tests that measure an individual's maximum performance in relation to objective criteria. (For a review of these tests, see Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008.) For instance, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test Version 2 (MSCEIT V2), which is discussed below, is an ability EI test that measures maximum performance. It operationalizes "perceiving emotions" through a "Faces" test that asks respondents to identify the emotions in different faces (Mayer et al., 2004).

Table 2.1

Trait EI facets and sample items

Facets	Sample items
Adaptability	Generally, I'm able to adapt to new environments.
Assertiveness	I tend to back down even if I know I'm right.
Emotion perception	Many times I can't figure out what emotion I'm feeling.
Emotion expression	Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me.
Emotion management	I don't seem to have any power at all over others' feelings.
Emotion regulation	I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions.
Impulsiveness (low)	I tend to change my mind frequently.
Relationship skills	I find it difficult to bond well even with those close to me.
Self-esteem	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
Self-motivation	On the whole, I'm a highly motivated person.
Social competence	I can deal effectively with people.
Stress management	Others admire me for being relaxed.
Trait empathy	I often find it difficult to see things from another's viewpoint.
Trait happiness	On the whole, I am pleased with my life.
Trait optimism	I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life.

Alternatively, as a personality construct, trait EI involves an individual's self-reported emotion-related perceptions and dispositions, and is operationalized using self-report questionnaires (Bar-On, 2001; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper et al., 1998). Self-report trait measures call on

semantic emotion knowledge to generate beliefs about one's typical (as opposed to maximum) performance (see, example, Robinson and Clore's (2002) accessibility model of emotional self-report). For instance, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form (TEIQue-SF) employed in this study (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) asks individuals to rate items on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from Completely Disagree (1) to Completely Agree (7)). Items include statements such as "Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me" and "Many times, I can't figure out what emotion I'm feeling". Table 2.1 above contains a list of the facets (and sample items) of the TEIQue-SF (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) that have been drawn from a comprehensive content analysis of existing trait EI sampling domains (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

Both types of measurement methodologies have their problems. Ability EI requires that answers to items either be correct or incorrect. However, some researchers have argued that there are aspects of emotional intelligence that are not accessible to performance-based tests (Davies et al., 1998; Petrides, Furnham, & Frederickson, 2004; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2001). Petrides et al. (2004) argue that the intrapersonal aspects of emotional intelligence are only accessible to the individual because of their inherent subjectivity. For instance, in the Pictures component of the MSCEIT V2 instrument mentioned above, participants are asked to identify the emotions conveyed by landscapes and designs (Mayer et al., 2004). Petrides et al. (2004) argue that there is no way of objectively determining the true emotional content of the pictures. To avoid such issues in scoring, Mayer, Salovey and colleagues (Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001) have employed both consensus scoring methods and expert scoring methods, and both methods calculate the respondent's answer scores based on the percentage of the group selecting the same answer (Mayer et al., 2004).

The two different scoring methods used in the MSCEIT V2 have yielded contradictory findings (Davies et al., 1998; Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001b), although Mayer et al. (2004) have reported "extremely high" correlations between the consensus and expert samples. Furthermore, the reliability of ability tests has been questioned throughout their various iterations (Davies et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2001b), although Mayer et al. (2004) argue that much progress has been made with each version of their ability tests. Alternatively, self-reporting of personality traits can be inaccurate for several reasons, including low self-understanding, social desirability concerns or deception. However, trait EI self-reports are easy to administer, have standard scoring procedures, and have demonstrated reliability (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Petrides & Furnham, 2001, 2003; Saklofske et al., 2003; van der Zee et al., 2002).

Another demarcation between ability EI and trait EI involves demonstrating the construct validity of the two different conceptualisations. Ability EI is conceived of as a cognitive ability so researchers have needed to demonstrate that ability EI is appropriately related to intelligence through moderate to strong correlations with existing intelligence constructs and is unrelated to personality (Davies et al., 1998; Mayer, 2001). While a number of intelligence researchers have argued that ability EI conceptually fits in the intelligence domain (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2001; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Schaie, 2001), some researchers have found ability EI to be only weakly related to intelligence (Roberts et al., 2001b) or unrelated to intelligence (Ciarrochi et al., 2000; Davies et al., 1998). Furthermore, some studies have found ability EI to be related to personality variables (Ciarrochi et al., 2000; Davies et al., 1998). Alternatively, trait EI researchers have needed to demonstrate that trait EI

contributes meaningfully to the domain of personality. As the current project employs trait EI, a detailed discussion of its construct validation follows.

Trait EI and Personality

Given that trait EI is conceptualized as fitting within a personality framework, researchers have examined how trait EI relates to commonly employed personality taxonomies such as the Eysenckian model and Costa and McCrae's Five Factor Model (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Petrides & Furnham, 2001, 2003; Petrides, Pérez-González, & Furnham, 2007b; Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007c; Saklofske et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 1998; van der Zee et al., 2002). The Eysenckian model, or the Giant Three, contains extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism, while the Five Factor Model (or Big Five) contains the dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism (or emotional stability), agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness/intellect.

In order to show that trait EI is a useful psychological construct, researchers have needed to demonstrate that trait EI has discriminant and incremental validity compared to the personality dimensions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). In terms of providing evidence for discriminant validity, researchers have needed to be able to distinguish trait EI from personality dimensions to show that it is a separate construct (Petrides et al., 2007c). In this respect, trait EI should be correlated with existing personality dimensions, but not too highly as to be redundant, and should be unrelated to intelligence. In terms of demonstrating incremental validity, researchers have needed to show that trait EI can predict important real-life criteria over and above the effects of the existing personality dimensions (Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c). In other words, trait EI needs to explain a significant amount of the variance in an outcome variable above and beyond existing personality dimensions.

In an early study, Davies et al. (1998) reported that self-report measures of emotional intelligence were too highly correlated with personality dimensions and concluded that they offered nothing new to the emotional intelligence debate. In order to counter this claim, a number of studies have sought to demonstrate the discriminant validity of trait EI in relation to the Giant Three and Big Five. One of the first studies to examine the relationship between self-reported emotional intelligence and the Big Five (Schutte et al., 1998) found that trait EI was correlated with Openness, but no other personality dimensions of the Big Five. However, later studies have found consistent patterns of association. In several studies explicitly designed to explore the discriminant validity of trait EI, the construct was isolated both in Eysenckian factor space and in Costa and McCrae's Five Factor Model, as a lower-order composite construct (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c). Further studies have found relationships between trait EI and all of the Big Five dimensions (Saklofske et al., 2003; van der Zee et al., 2002). Thus a number of studies have demonstrated that trait EI can be isolated in existing personality taxonomies.

The relationship between trait EI and alexithymia has also been of interest to researchers (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Saklofske et al., 2003). Alexithymia is the inability to identify and describe emotions, and so is conceptually related to trait EI. Theoretically, it is assumed that people high in trait EI would be low in alexithymia because they would be postulated to be good at identifying and describing their feelings. In building support for the construct validity of trait EI, investigators have demonstrated the convergent validity of trait EI by showing that it is negatively related to alexithymia (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Saklofske et al., 2003).

The studies examining trait EI and personality dimensions have also examined the relationship between trait EI and intelligence. Demonstrating the discriminant

validity of trait EI with intelligence is another important aspect of building evidence for the construct validity of trait EI. Theoretically, trait EI should be orthogonally related to intelligence; that is, there should be no or only small correlations between trait EI and intelligence. Studies investigating the relationship of trait EI to intelligence have found that trait EI is not related to cognitive ability (Mikolajczak, Luminet, Leroy, & Roy, 2007; Schutte et al., 1998) or academic intelligence (van der Zee et al., 2002), is weakly related to academic intelligence (Barchard, 2003), or is weakly related to crystallized intelligence (Davies et al., 1998).

Researchers have also needed to demonstrate the incremental validity of trait EI over personality dimensions. In order to do this, researchers have needed to demonstrate that trait EI can predict real-life outcomes when controlling for existing personality variables. In this vein, when controlling for personality, trait EI has been shown to be positively correlated with happiness (Petrides & Furnham, 2003), life satisfaction (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002; Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c; Saklofske et al., 2003), social success (van der Zee et al., 2002), and size of social network (Austin et al., 2005). Furthermore, the incremental validity of trait EI in the context of alexithymia was demonstrated by predicting self-reported mental and somatic stress symptoms over and above alexithymia (Mikolajczak, Luminet, & Menil, 2006).

Other studies focusing on incremental validity in the context of existing personality dimensions have found that trait EI is associated with providing managerial support (coaching, listening, sensitivity and sociability), and leadership (van der Zee & Wabeke, 2004). Trait EI has also been negatively correlated with loneliness (Saklofske et al., 2003) and rumination (Petrides et al., 2007c). It has also been associated with frequent use of adaptive coping styles and infrequent use of maladaptive coping styles

(Petrides et al., 2007b). Clinically, it has been shown to be negatively related to depression and eight out of nine personality disorders (Petrides et al., 2007b). In experimental studies, the predictive validity of trait EI has been demonstrated by predicting skill at identifying emotional expressions and mood management behaviour in adolescents (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001), recognition of facial expressions (Austin, 2004; Petrides & Furnham, 2003), and sensitivity to mood induction tasks (Petrides & Furnham, 2003).

Thus, in less than a decade, researchers have built a considerable body of evidence to support the construct validity of trait EI. The construct has been shown to fit within existing personality taxonomies but has been able to be distinguished from existing personality dimensions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c; Saklofske et al., 2003; van der Zee et al., 2002). Trait EI has also been demonstrated to be related to similar constructs, such as alexithymia (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Saklofske et al., 2003), but either weakly or unrelated to intelligence (Barchard, 2003; Davies et al., 1998; van der Zee et al., 2002). Furthermore, trait EI has been shown to predict real-life variables over and above the existing personality dimensions (Austin et al., 2005; Palmer et al., 2002; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c; Saklofske et al., 2003).

In further researching trait EI, Petrides and Furnham (2001) have recommended that, because trait EI is a lower-order construct, a global trait EI score should be used in future studies. They argue that investigation of the trait EI construct is still in its infancy and changes are likely to be made in the facets of the construct. Thus, using a global trait EI score means that there will be less variability across studies when changes are made to facets. They also argue that the global trait EI score will more readily lend itself

to complex analyses and experimental investigations. For these reasons, this study will explore trait EI as a global dimension.

Trait EI and Relationship Satisfaction

While it would seem that romantic relationships are a context where EI would be important, only a few studies have examined the connections between EI and relationship satisfaction (Bracket, Warner, & Bosco, 2005; Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson et al., 2001). There is evidence to suggest that people with high ability EI are generally more satisfied with their social relationships (Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003), but of the two studies that have examined relationship satisfaction in couples, only Schutte et al. (2001) examined relationship satisfaction within the context of trait EI. Within the literature generally, some of the facets of trait EI (see Table 2.1) have been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction in couples. For instance, couples' reports of empathy (Cramer, 2003; Davis & Oathout, 1987), self-esteem (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988), ability to perceive emotions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), ability to express emotions (Huston & Houts, 1998), and ability to manage emotions (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995), have been demonstrated to result in increased satisfaction. These findings suggest that trait EI should be related to relationship satisfaction. Indeed, Fitness (2006), in relation to ability EI, has argued that successful long-term marriages may develop a character of their own that may be described as "emotionally intelligent".

In relation to ability EI, Bracket et al. (2005) found that it was associated with a number of relationship qualities using the MSCEIT V1 measure. The researchers recruited a sample of 86 undergraduate couples who had been together for at least three months and who had a mean age of 20.3 years. The researchers particularly looked at a

number of relationship outcomes where both individuals in the dyad self-reported high ability EI scores versus couples where both individuals self-reported low scores in ability EI. The outcome variables included: support, which assessed perceived availability of social support from the partner; depth, which assessed how important, positive, and secure the relationship was perceived to be; and conflict, which denoted the degree to which the relationship was perceived to be ambivalent or conflicted.

The researchers found that couples in which both partners were low in ability EI reported significantly lower relationship outcomes. However, they found that couples where both partners were high in ability EI did not report significantly higher relationship satisfaction than couples where only one individual in the relationship reported high ability EI. This suggests that relationships may only need one partner high in ability EI to have a beneficial influence on the relationship. They also found few significant correlations between participants' ability EI scores and their partners' outcome variables. Female ability EI scores were not significantly related to any of the relationship quality outcomes for male partners, and there was only a small correlation between men's ability EI scores and women's relationship satisfaction. The researchers concluded that there was little evidence that self-reported high ability EI was associated with dating partners' positive evaluations of their relationships. While this study lends some support to the association between ability EI and relationship satisfaction, the study may not provide a good indication of expected outcomes when examining trait EI given the low correlations between the constructs (O'Connor & Little, 2003). Furthermore, the study used a relatively young sample and the results from an older sample may be different. For instance, it has been argued that in long-term successful marriages, spouses low in ability EI may acquire skills over time (Fitness, 2006).

Similarly, Petrides, Furnham, and Mavroveli (2007a) have argued that trait EI generally increases with age.

As for studies that have explicitly examined trait EI, only one study to date has examined relationship satisfaction. Schutte et al. (2001) asked married participants to rate both their own and their spouse's trait EI. Participants with higher self-reported trait EI reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction than those participants with lower self-rated trait EI. Furthermore, those participants who rated their partners higher in trait EI also self-reported higher scores for relationship satisfaction. Schutte et al. (2001) then summed the trait EI scores for each participant and their spouse, and found that couples with higher self-reported composite trait EI scores reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction.

However, a limitation of the study is that it looked at only one individual in the relationship who provided both a self-rating and a partner rating. While agreement on personality and affective variables has been demonstrated between target-spouse and partner ratings of target-spouse (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000a), the extent of the agreement in this sample could not be ascertained given that only one partner reported on each dyad member. Furthermore, the scales used by Schutte et al. (2001) to measure trait EI in the study have been criticized by Petrides and Furnham (2000) as not being able to demonstrate a general trait EI factor – even though the scale was developed to provide a global score – and thus they have cautioned further use of the scales for research purposes. Nevertheless, this study provides tentative support for a positive association between trait EI and relationship satisfaction.

Stability of Trait EI

To date, few studies have examined the longitudinal effects of trait EI. Given that it is conceptualised as a personality trait, theoretically it is assumed to be relatively stable over time (Petrides et al., 2007a). However, there are a number of indices for measuring stability of personality (De Fruyt, Bartels, Van Leeuwen, De Clercq, Decuyper et al., 2006; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Personality stability can be tracked by mean-level changes, individual differences in changes, structural consistency, ipsative stability or rank-order consistency (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). Longitudinal research has often focused on rank-order stability, using test-retest correlations to measure stability (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). While this research has provided important data, more recently some have argued that data modelling is required to gain a more complete picture of the stability and change in personality across the lifespan (Fraley & Roberts, 2005). This section of the thesis examines the indices for measuring personality stability, before discussing the utility of rank-order indexes, and the contribution of rank-order stability to understanding the stability of personality. This introduction therefore, provides a rationale for examining trait EI over a 12-month period.

Personality researchers have focused on four types of personality change. Mean-level (or normative or absolute) change refers to changes in the average trait level of a population. These changes are theorised to result from maturational and historical processes across the lifespan that are shared by a population (Robins et al., 2001). In measuring this type of change, mean-level differences are examined in specific traits over time. For instance, a meta-analysis of studies indicated that people show increases in social dominance (a facet of extraversion), conscientiousness, and emotional stability with age, and these changes occur mostly between the ages of 20 to 40 (Roberts,

Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Furthermore, in early life, there are increases in social vitality and openness to experience, and then decreases in the same domains in old age. In relation to trait EI, it has been argued that trait EI should increase with age as individuals become less emotional and better socialized, and this argument is consistent with current knowledge of personality dimensions, although it has not been tested (Petrides et al., 2007a).

Individual differences in change refers to the magnitude of increase or decrease exhibited by each individual over the duration of the study on any given trait (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001a). Furthermore, individual differences in change can be and often are unrelated to population indices of change. In the past, these types of changes have been measured by the Reliable Change Index, which assesses the amount of change that occurs against the amount of change that could be expected given that measures are not perfectly reliable (Roberts et al., 2001a). In the last decade or so, researchers have used growth modelling with multiple waves of data to make more precise estimates of change (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). For example, Mroczek and Spiro (2003) estimated growth curves for extraversion and neuroticism for 1600 older men. They found that there were significant individual differences in both the level and rate of changes in neuroticism and extraversion, even though many men were well characterised by the overall trajectories for both traits. They also concluded that these types of changes can occur in old age.

A third type of stability is structural stability, which refers to the consistency of correlational patterns among a set of variables across time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Structural equation modelling can be used to measure the degree to which the intercorrelations among personality dimensions are stable over time. For instance, Robins et al. (2001) examined structural stability in a college sample and found that the

interrelations among the Big Five personality dimensions remained highly stable over a four-year period, reflecting a high level of structural stability. The researchers concluded that although college is a time of considerable identity construction and reformation, it does not seem to entail a dramatic change in the structure of personality traits.

Ipsative (or morphogenic or person-centred) stability refers to continuity at the individual level, such that the relative ordering of traits within an individual over time stays the same (Robins et al., 2001). It focuses on multiple dimensions within an individual rather than on a single dimension across persons. Thus, ipsative change is relative only to the individual being assessed, not to the sample, and reflects how much an individual's personality configuration changes rather than how much any given trait changes (Roberts et al., 2001a). This type of stability is usually measured by profile similarity, which quantifies the degree to which two profiles differ in their elevation, scatter and shape (De Fruyt et al., 2006). Recent studies have found moderate levels of ipsative stability (De Fruyt et al., 2006; Robins et al., 2001).

Rank-order (or differential) stability is the most commonly indexed type of stability. It refers to the consistency of individual differences within a sample of individuals over time, so that an individual's relative ranking is maintained over time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Rank-order stability is theoretically and statistically different from mean-level stability. For example, the ranking of individuals on a given trait could change substantially over time but without any aggregate (mean-level) increases or decreases in the sample (Robins et al., 2001). Rank-order stability is typically indexed by a correlation coefficient (or test-retest correlation) between two scores across two points in time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Many longitudinal studies have examined rank-order stability, leading to Roberts and DelVecchio's (2000) meta-review of studies.

More recently, Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005) summarised the main findings on rank-order stability compiled by Fraley and Roberts (2005) and Roberts and DelVecchio (2000). Caspi et al. (2005) concluded that test-retest correlations are moderate in magnitude from childhood to adulthood. These correlations increase with age, having (from the studies) increased from .41 in childhood to .55 at age 30, and then reaching a plateau around .70 between the ages of 50 and 70. As a general rule, they argued, rank-order stability decreases as the time between observations increases. They also concluded that rank-order stability does not vary markedly across the Big Five traits, self-reports versus observer ratings, or by sex. Undoubtedly, these general findings are fundamental to understanding rank-order stability. However, it has been argued that in order to understand the mechanisms driving patterns of stability, measurements need to be taken across more than two points (see Fraley and Roberts (2005) for their model of continuity of personality).

In summary, research examining the stability of personality has made important contributions to our understanding of personality over the lifespan. Two extreme views of personality provide examples of some of the theories regarding the stability of personality (Caspi et al., 2005). Arguing from an essentialist perspective, personality traits are thought to be fixed and unchanging after the age of 30 (McCrae & Costa, 1994). Alternatively, another school of thought sees personality stability as very low, and argues that personality is largely the result of contextual influences (Lewis, 2001). Research to date on the various types of stability, and especially rank-order stability, however, suggests that the truth lies somewhere in the middle: while personality is changeable well into old age, it is also relatively stable (Caspi et al., 2005).

In relation to trait EI, the examination of its stability is in its infancy. Given that it is conceptualised as a personality trait, theoretically trait EI is assumed to be relatively

stable over time (Petrides et al., 2007a). Two studies to date have examined the rank-order stability of trait EI, and both employed samples of young adults. Tett, Fox and Wang (2005) examined test-retest correlations over four to six weeks for their unnamed trait EI instrument and reported a median correlation of .76. The second study examined Bar-On's EQ-i:Short and found stability of .56 over three years (Parker, Saklofske, Wood, Eastabrook, & Taylor, 2005). Following from the conclusions outlined by Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005), rank-order stability increases with age, but decreases as the interval between measurement increases. Thus, a moderate to high test-retest correlation would be expected for trait EI over a 12-month period for a sample of older adults.

Longitudinal Impact of Trait EI

The longitudinal associations between trait EI and relationship satisfaction are unknown, however, looking at other personality dimensions may indicate possible connections. For instance, when looking at the effects of personality on changes in relationship satisfaction, neuroticism (or trait anxiety) has received the most attention because of its clear association with relationship dissatisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). However, the results from longitudinal studies have been conflicting. Kelly and Conley (1987), for example, found that high neuroticism prior to marriage was predictive of dissatisfaction and divorce over 45 years. Similarly, in a recent study, Fisher and McNulty (2008) found that women's neuroticism predicted declines in their satisfaction over the first year of marriage. However, other studies have found that while neuroticism predicted initial levels of dissatisfaction, it was stable over time and was not associated with changes in satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Indeed, Karney and Bradbury (1995) have argued that personality creates the stable psychological context of relationships or "enduring vulnerabilities",

and that other interpersonal processes, such as communication, come to interact with satisfaction over time.

Conclusion

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that trait EI is a valid personality construct with demonstrable discriminant, criterion and incremental validity. While only one study (Schutte et al., 2001) has examined the association between trait EI and relationship satisfaction for romantic partners, there is tentative evidence to suggest that trait EI will be positively related to couples' relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, based on longitudinal studies of neuroticism and relationship satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997), there is evidence that suggests that the effect of trait EI on satisfaction will be stable over time and therefore will not be associated with changes in satisfaction over 12 months. Furthermore, in line with Karney and Bradbury's (1995) Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation theory of marital development, the influence of couples' communication patterns on their satisfaction will also be examined in order to ascertain the relative importance of trait EI and communication patterns to couples' relationship satisfaction. Thus, a discussion of communication in the context of relationship satisfaction now follows.

Chapter 3

CONFLICT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Communication has long been a focus of marital researchers and many studies have found an association between communication and relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Noller & White, 1990). Research on couples' communication has often focused on conflict or problem-solving, initially examining positive and negative behaviours, and then moving to the reciprocity of those behaviours, and to conflict patterns (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The progression in the study of marital conflict has been driven by different theories, such as behavioural theory, as well as research (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The present thesis will focus on conflict communication patterns because these patterns have been informed by current theory of marital communication (Caughlin & Huston, 2002). There is evidence that communication patterns are associated with outcomes such as marital quality and divorce (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 2000), and these patterns can be validly and reliably measured by self-report (Hahlweg, Kaiser, Christensen, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, & Groth, 2000).

The attention focused on relationship conflict by researchers has been driven by a number of factors. There is clear evidence that conflict is associated with relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Couples' conflict has also been implicated in psychological symptoms (Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2007) and physical health problems (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Children's behaviour too, is known to be affected by conflict, and has been associated with increases in internalizing (e.g. depression and anxiety) and externalizing (aggression and delinquency) behaviours (Cummings & Davies, 2002). Finally, problematic communication is the most often

cited reason for couples seeking marital therapy (Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004). For these reasons, couples' conflict has dominated the literature on marital functioning.

Conflict is defined as those marital interactions in which the partners have incompatible goals (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). The goals might be specific and articulated, or more general or unconscious. Conflict arises when one partner pursues, or talks about pursuing, a goal which clashes with the goals the other partner holds (Bradbury et al., 2001). Thus, marital conflicts can be about anything, ranging from physical and personal characteristics to beliefs and values. There is clear evidence that couples employ patterns of interaction when they attempt to resolve relationship problems or conflict (Christensen, 1987). These patterns involve interdependent behaviours, some of which involve active and constructive negotiation of differences, whereas others reflect a general tendency to avoid conflict and/or enact behaviours that undermine the union (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). These patterns are also associated with couples' reports of satisfaction, and have been shown to predict changes in satisfaction over time (Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994). This chapter reviews the literature on communication patterns and their associations with personality and satisfaction, in order to provide an introduction and rationale to Studies 1 and 2.

Early research examining marital communication was dominated by behavioural theory and particularly the social learning perspective which posits that marital satisfaction reflects the extent to which the partner's behaviour is rewarding rather than punishing. This research usually examined data on the frequency of positive versus negative behaviours, and consistently found that positive behaviours were associated with satisfaction while negative behaviours were correlated with dissatisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). More recently, researchers have focused on a family systems

perspective that views marital interaction as a communication system of interdependent patterns of interaction (Caughlin & Huston, 2002).

Some patterns of interaction reflect active and constructive negotiation of differences and promote conflict resolution, whereas other interaction patterns hinder conflict resolution (Burleson et al., 2000). A number of different patterns of interaction have been demonstrated when assessing couples' communication during problem-solving (Christensen, 1987; Gottman, 1994). The present study focuses on three types of patterns identified by Christensen and Sullaway (1984): (a) mutual constructive communication patterns; (b) mutual avoidance and withholding patterns; and (c) demand–withdraw patterns (Bodenmann, Kaiser, Hahlweg, & Fehm-Wolfsdorf, 1998; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Hahlweg et al., 2000; Noller & White, 1990).

Mutual Constructive Communication

Mutual constructive communication occurs where partners openly discuss issues, express their feelings positively, and work towards mutually agreeable solutions to problems (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). This type of conflict pattern tends to be viewed as positive and functional, because it promotes intimacy, and is more likely to lead to problem resolution, and to reduce stress (Noller et al., 1994). Couples who employ a pattern of constructive and validating communication report more affection and commitment and less aggression than couples who use more dysfunctional patterns (Bodenmann et al., 1998). The use of this pattern is also associated with less partner discrepancies over desired closeness and independence, and it clearly differentiates non-distressed from distressed couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Furthermore, mutual constructive communication is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and couples who employ this pattern report higher levels of satisfaction than couples who use

more dysfunctional communication patterns (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996; Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Given that couples who employ this pattern tend to be happy, non-distressed, and functional, few studies focus on this pattern of communication.

Mutual Avoidance and Withholding

The mutual avoidance and withholding communication pattern is characterized by both individuals in the relationship avoiding discussion of problems, and hence, avoiding conflict (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). The dominant view among marital researchers is that conflict engagement is more constructive than avoidance (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). However, it has been argued that while avoidance might be detrimental to relationships because it impedes the resolution of problems, it may also be beneficial as it reduces negative behaviours (Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999). There is also evidence that the effects of avoidance on relationship quality depend on the content that is avoided and the context in which the avoidance occurs (Buysse, De Clercq, Verhofstadt, Heene, Roeyers et al., 2000). Thus the relationship between avoidance and relationship quality is complex.

In some cases, avoidance appears to provide some benefits but also has costs. Those who engage in a pattern of avoidance report less negative behaviour, such as disgust and contempt, compared to couples who engage positively in conflict, but they also report less positive behaviours (Gottman, 1993). This led Gottman (1993) to argue that, while avoidance promotes calm interaction, it results in emotional distance. Avoidance also tends to reduce the frequency of blame and criticism, although fewer relationship issues are resolved (Gill et al., 1999). Couples who avoid also appear to be stable (Holman & Jarvis, 2003), as well as older, and tend to have been together for a long time (Bodenmann et al., 1998). But, avoidance has been associated with a

discrepancy between desired closeness and independence, and has distinguished distressed from non-distressed couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

Content and context are also important when examining the effect of avoidance on relationship quality. Research suggests that when avoidance occurs in relation to issues that are highly conflictive or threatening, then avoidance can be positive (Buysse & Ickes, 1999; Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995). It has also been argued that avoiding discussion of problems for which there is no solution may be helpful to the relationship (Gill et al., 1999). Alternatively, avoidance that occurs in relation to more trivial and less threatening relationship issues can be negative (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). In relation to context, Smith and colleagues (Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990) found that disengagement (silence and withdrawal) in the context of high levels of positivity about the marriage can be functional. These studies suggest that avoidance, *per se*, may not simply result in dissatisfaction.

There is also conflicting evidence about the long-term effects of avoidance. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that avoidance predicted decreases in satisfaction over a three-year period and suggested that couples who habitually avoid may not develop a sense of being able to work through their problems. However, Gottman and colleagues (Driver, Tabares, Shapiro, Nahm, & Gottman, 2003) later argued for a functional and stable pattern of avoidance where the couples are satisfied. The researchers suggested that these couples emphasize the positive aspects of the marriage while ignoring conflicts. Research has supported this couple type, although the conflict avoiders were not as satisfied as the couples whose communication was seen as overwhelmingly validating (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Thus, it appears that while there is evidence for a stable and functional group of avoiders, generally the

evidence suggests that avoidance is related to lower levels of satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 1998; Noller et al., 1994; Noller & White, 1990).

The Demand–Withdraw Pattern

The demand–withdraw pattern of interaction is probably the most researched conflict communication pattern because of its corrosive effect on relationships (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Gottman & Levenson, 1999). The pattern, also known as the pursuer–distancer pattern, occurs when one partner attempts to engage the other in discussion of an issue by criticising, complaining or suggesting change, while the other partner tries to end the discussion or avoid the topic by changing the subject, remaining silent or walking away (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). Demanding tends to elicit withdrawal which then tends to elicit more demands, and thus, the behaviours are interdependent (Caughlin & Huston, 2002). Research on this communication pattern indicates that it is a strong predictor of divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

In examining the demand–withdraw pattern, researchers have focused on a number of issues. Many studies, for instance, have employed both self-report and observational methodologies (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993), to lend support to their findings. The pattern has also been associated with gender roles, division of labour, violence, desire for closeness, and independence (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). The pattern's cultural ubiquity is suggested by studies that have identified the pattern in European, Asian and Latin-American samples (Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim, & Santagata, 2006). Furthermore, the pattern has consistently been associated with

lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Noller & White, 1990).

The demand–withdraw pattern of conflict communication has also demonstrated consistent sex differences. The effect that women tend to be in the demanding role while men withdraw has been demonstrated in both dating couples (Sullaway & Christensen, 1983; Vogel, Wester, & Heesacker, 1999), and married and cohabiting couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). A number of explanations have been offered for sex differences in the demand–withdraw pattern. Christensen (1987) postulated that socialization experiences accounted for the differences. He argued that women are socialized to pursue intimacy and are encouraged to develop their identity in the context of relationships, whereas men are socialized to be independent and derive their identity from separation. Therefore, conflicts in marital and cohabiting relationships inevitably arise regarding emotional intimacy due to women seeking intimacy and men seeking autonomy (Christensen, 1987; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002).

Other researchers have argued that individual differences explain sex differences in the demand–withdraw pattern of interaction. Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) examined whether self-influence or relational influence best explained the pattern. Self-influence posits that an individual's characteristics affect their own communication behaviours, whereas a relational influence model predicts that individual differences affect the interpersonal climate of the relationship. The researchers found that self-influence affected desire for closeness in that the partner who desired closeness tended to demand but not withdraw. However, a relational model accounted for personality effects because partners who were relatively neurotic tended to have relationships in which demand–withdraw was frequent for both members of the dyad. Conversely, individuals who were high in agreeableness tended to be in relationships where

demand–withdraw was infrequent; that is, both partners tended not to demand or withdraw. The researchers concluded that both the self-influence model and the relational influence model explained the pattern.

Another view, the conflict structure view, is the most examined explanation of sex differences in the demand–withdraw pattern (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). It explains sex differences in terms of who wants change and who has the burden of change. If the woman wants change she will be in the demanding role, whereas the man will be in the demanding role if he wants change. Generally, women do more of the demanding because it is women who seek more change in marriage (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Several studies have supported the conflict structure explanation by demonstrating that when the conversational topic reflected the man's desire for change, the man demanded while the woman withdrew, and thus the tendency for the woman to demand was no longer evident (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). However, other studies found that women tended to be more demanding even when the spouses did not differ in their desire for change (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993), which suggests that the conflict structure view does not completely explain sex differences in the pattern (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Eldridge et al., 2007).

Eldridge et al. (2007) have argued that other variables may be moderating the effect of conflict structure on demand–withdraw communication. They employed both self-reports and observational methods to examine personal and relationship problems instigated by both partners. When it came to personal problems, the researchers engineered discussions so that the person wanting change was also the person responsible for making the change. They found a number of interesting results. Highly distressed couples who had been married longer than other couples tended to

rigidly employ the woman demand–man withdraw pattern of communication, regardless of whether the topic was of a relationship or personal nature. They also found, more generally, that when the discussion was focused on the husband changing (whether a wife relationship problem or husband personal problem), there was a gender disparity with women demanding and men withdrawing. The authors argued that this might be because men are more resistant to change, women are more insistent on change, or a combination of both (Eldridge et al., 2007). Regardless, the authors argue that the conflict structure view, expanded to take into account both proximal factors (such as who is seeking change and who carries the burden of change) and distal factors (such as distress level and length of marriage), provides the most promising explanation of sex differences.

In summary, research on Christensen and colleagues' (Christensen, 1987; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) conflict communication patterns has detected consistent patterns. Constructive communication, in which both partners work towards a mutual resolution of their problems, is considered to be the most functional of the patterns and is associated positively with relationship satisfaction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Research on the mutual avoidance and withholding pattern, which is characterized by both partners avoiding discussion of problems, has shown that satisfaction depends on factors such as length of marriage, the context in which avoidance occurs, and the content which is being avoided. Finally, the demand–withdraw pattern is characterised by one partner demanding discussion of a problem, and the other partner withdrawing. This pattern is the most researched of the three patterns and has clear associations with lower levels of satisfaction (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002).

Communication and Satisfaction over Time

Longitudinal studies of marriage often attempt to examine how marriages develop, succeed, or fail (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Given that cross-sectional studies have highlighted the importance of communication for couples' satisfaction, longitudinal studies have examined the relationship between communication and satisfaction over time (for a review, see Bradbury & Karney, 1993). For instance, in relation to communication patterns, constructive communication has predicted improvements in women's satisfaction (Gill et al., 1999), avoidance has predicted marital separation in newlyweds (Leonard & Roberts, 1998) and decline in wives' marital satisfaction over a 12-month period (Noller et al., 1994), while the demand-withdraw pattern of communication has predicted declines in satisfaction (Heavey et al., 1995), as well as divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

There is also evidence for different relationships between communication and concurrent versus longer-term satisfaction (Smith et al., 1990). For instance, it was found that couples who engaged in conflict that was characterised by anger and hostility reported concurrent dissatisfaction, while conflict avoidance was associated with dissatisfaction three years later (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). In another study, disengagement was found to be unrelated to concurrent satisfaction but was negatively related to satisfaction 18 and 30 months later (Smith et al., 1990). Similarly, it appears that the impact of marital behaviours depends on how long the couples have been together (Caughlin, 2002). For instance, studies have found that the husband demand–wife withdraw pattern predicts increases in satisfaction for couples who have been married for several years (Heavey et al., 1995; Heavey et al., 1993), whereas in newlywed couples this effect has not been found (Noller et al., 1994).

Trait EI and Conflict Communication Patterns

To date, there has been no research into the connections between trait EI and conflict communication patterns. Apart from the Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) study cited above, only one other study has examined conflict communication patterns in relation to personality variables. The study found that neuroticism was associated with more demanding and withdrawing and less constructive forms of communication for both men and women (Heaven, Smith, Prabhakar, Abraham, & Mete, 2006). The researchers also found that high levels of agreeableness were associated with couples' perceptions of constructive communication and high levels of agreeableness among women were negatively associated with women demanding and men withdrawing. Given that trait EI has been associated with all of the Big Five personality dimensions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Saklofske et al., 2003; van der Zee et al., 2002), these results suggest that trait EI may be meaningfully related to the communication patterns.

Examining the actual facets of trait EI that were derived by Petrides and Furnham (2001) (see Table 2.1 for a list of the facets) provides some indication of possible associations with conflict communication patterns. For instance, individuals high in trait EI are adaptable, assertive and able to clearly express their emotions, and these traits would more likely be enacted in the relationship through constructive communication patterns, rather than by demanding, withdrawing, or avoiding. Furthermore, individuals high in trait EI are able to regulate their own emotions, manage others' emotions, and are perceptive and empathic, and so would be more likely to understand and support their partner's point of view. Furthermore, they have high self-esteem, self-motivation, are happy and optimistic, and so may look to more mutually beneficial outcomes when discussing relationship issues. Finally, people high in trait EI are likely to have good relationship skills, be socially competent and be able

to manage their stress, which more likely would be associated with mutual and constructive communication patterns rather than dysfunctional communication patterns. In short, it would seem that, conceptually, trait EI might be associated with more constructive forms of communication rather than destructive forms such as demanding, withdrawing or withholding.

Conclusion

Marital researchers have identified clear patterns of interaction that couples use when they attempt to resolve relationship problems (Christensen, 1987). These patterns involve interdependent behaviours, some of which involve constructive negotiation of issues, whereas others reflect a general tendency to avoid conflict and/or enact behaviours that undermine the relationship (Burleson et al., 2000). These patterns are associated with couples' reports of satisfaction (Noller & White, 1990), and have been shown to predict changes in satisfaction over time (Noller et al., 1994). One aim of this project, then, is to examine the various influences that these patterns have on the relationship satisfaction of long-term cohabiting couples, at a single point in time and over a 12-month period. The project also aims to examine couples' communication patterns alongside their self-rated trait EI, so as to ascertain the relative influences of the variables on couples' reports of their relationship satisfaction. In the following section Study 1 examines the interrelatedness of these variables in a cross-sectional design.

Chapter 4

STUDY 1: CROSS-SECTIONAL INFLUENCES OF TRAIT EI AND CONFLICT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

What are the best predictors of spouses' relationship satisfaction? There is evidence that personality variables (e.g. neuroticism) and interpersonal processes (e.g. communication), contribute uniquely to relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The current study sought to examine couples' relationship satisfaction and the influences of trait EI and conflict communication patterns in a cross-sectional design. Indeed, while trait EI would seem to have obvious conceptual relevance to relationships, few studies have examined trait EI and its links to relationship satisfaction.

Trait EI is a personality trait that entails self-perceived emotion-related abilities and dispositions that are typically measured via self-report instruments (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The construct captures individual differences in affective self-evaluations and is said to integrate the emotion-related facets of the Giant Three and Big Five personality taxonomies (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). A program of research has also systematically found evidence for the construct validity of trait EI by demonstrating its discriminant, criterion and incremental validity (e.g. see Petrides et al., 2007b). In relation to couples, Schutte et al. (2001) found evidence for an association between trait EI and relationship satisfaction, although the construct has not been examined with data from both partners.

There is also evidence that couples' conflict communication patterns are associated with relationship satisfaction in predictable ways (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). For instance, a pattern of constructive communication has predicted high satisfaction, whereas patterns of demanding and withdrawing or avoiding and

withholding have been associated with lower levels of satisfaction (Noller & White, 1990). There are also correlations between the communication patterns and the Big Five personality dimensions (Heaven et al., 2006), but the associations between the communication patterns and trait EI have not been tested.

Aims and Rationale

The current study sought to examine whether couples' trait EI and conflict communication patterns relate to couples' relationship satisfaction. As many studies of couples report responses from only one member of the dyad, this study examined the responses of both individuals in order to gain a more complete view of couples' perceptions. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the extent that couples' relationship satisfaction was predicted by self-reported and/or estimates of spouses' trait EI and perceptions of communication patterns.

First, based on Schutte et al. (2001), it is hypothesised that trait EI will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (H1). Secondly, following from established connections between personality variables and perceptions of couples' conflict communication patterns (Heaven et al., 2006), it is anticipated that trait EI scores will be positively associated with perceptions of constructive communication patterns (H2) and negatively associated with perceptions of demanding and withdrawing, and avoidance and withholding patterns (H3). Finally, the study sought to explore individuals' estimates of their spouses' trait EI. It may be that an individual's perception of their spouse's trait EI is as important a predictor of relationship satisfaction as the individual's self-rated trait EI. As no research has looked at this effect, the question was posed: are individuals' ratings of their spouses' trait EI related to individuals' self-reported trait EI, perceptions of conflict communication patterns

and/or relationship satisfaction?. Before proceeding, in order to ensure clarity of terms, hereafter "self-reported trait EI" is the individual's rating of his or her own trait EI, while "estimates of spouse's trait EI" is the individual's rating of his or her spouse's trait EI. These terms need to be distinguished from "actor" and "partner", which are used to refer to analyses of variables at the couple level.

Method

Participants

Using network sampling, 82 heterosexual cohabiting couples were recruited. An initial group of participants was identified through the researcher's network of acquaintances and subsequent participants were found through recommendations of earlier participants. This method of sampling has been used in other studies examining couples (Heaven et al., 2006).

Within the sample of 82 couples, a subset of participants was recruited through two relationship counselling organisations. The Australian Institute for Relationship Studies, which is the research arm of Relationships Australia, granted permission to recruit couples through their Sydney branches. Anglicare Australia also granted permission to recruit participants through its Wollongong and Nowra centres. Recruitment was approved by the Ethics Committee of both organisations as well as the University of Wollongong committee. A poster encouraging couples to participate in the study accompanied by survey packages were set up in five Relationships Australia branches (Bondi, Lane Cove, Neutral Bay, Rockdale, Wollongong) and the Wollongong and Nowra branches of Anglicare. One couple was recruited through Relationships Australia and seven couples were recruited through Anglicare. The subgroup from the counselling agencies was compared with the larger sample on relationship satisfaction.

There were no differences in satisfaction (t = 1.97, n = 80, $p > .05$) between the men from the counselling agencies sample (M = 16.75, SD = 4.95) and the men from the non-counselling sample (M = 18.96, SD = 2.75). However, there was a significant difference for women (t = 2.13, n = 81, $p < .05$) with women from the counselling agencies reporting lower satisfaction (M = 16.50, SD = 3.66) than women drawn from the non-counselling sample (M = 18.91, SD = 2.97).

Participants resided in the Sydney-Wollongong region of New South Wales and were predominantly middle class. Women participants ranged in age from 20-79 years (M = 47, SD = 17), and men ranged in age from 22-80 years (M = 49, SD = 17). Of the total 82 couples, 67 couples (82%) were married and 15 (18%) were not. Three couples (4%) had been together for less than 1 year, 8 couples (10%) had been together for between 1 and 3 years, 8 (10%) had been together for between 3 and 5 years, 15 couples (18%) had been together for between 6 and 10 years, and 48 couples (58%) had been together for more than 10 years. Of all the participants, 28 (34%) had a high school education or less, 20 (24%) had a technical college education, while 34 (42%) had a university education. With respect to income, 28 couples (34%) had a combined family income of more than A$100 000 per annum. (See Appendix C for the demographics questions.)

Measures

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form (TEIQue-SF). The TEIQue-SF (see Appendix D) yields a global measure of trait EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). It is a 30-item self-report measure that uses two items from each of the 15 facet subscales (see discussion of facets in Chapter 2) of the TEIQue long form (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). Participants are asked to rate their degree of agreement with each item

on a seven-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from *completely disagree* (1) to *completely agree* (7). Participants completed two versions of the TEIQue-SF, one for their own self-reported trait EI and an estimate of their spouse's trait EI. The TEIQue-SF has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). The Cronbach's alphas for the TEIQue-SF have been reported as: = .89 and .91 (Petrides et al., 2007b). Alpha coefficient for self-reported trait EI = .94.

In order to ascertain estimates of spouse's trait EI, the TEIQue-SF (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) was reworded to relate to the reporter's partner (see Appendix E). For instance, "I often find it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint" was changed to "My partner often finds it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint". In this study the alpha coefficient for estimate of spouse's trait EI = .95.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ). The CPQ (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) is a 35-item self-report instrument designed to assess the extent to which couples employ various types of interaction strategies when dealing with a relationship problem (see Appendix F). Each partner indicates what typically occurs in their relationship on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from *very unlike us* (1) to *very like us* (9). In this study four subscales were used: (a) the constructive communication subscale, (b) the female demand and male withdraw subscale, (c) the male demand and female withdraw subscale, and (d) the mutual avoidance and withholding subscale.

The constructive communication subscale is based on the scale used by Heavy et al. (1996) and contains items assessing mutual threat and aggression, subtracted from items assessing mutual discussion. The constructive communication subscale has a theoretical range of between -33 to 31, with higher scores indicating more constructive communication. Heavy et al. (1996) reported acceptable alpha coefficients for the

constructive communication scale: men = 0.84 and women = 0.81. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was .81.

The female demand and man withdraw subscale contains three items as does the man demand and female withdraw subscale. Christensen and Heavy (1990) reported alpha coefficients of women: female demand and man withdraw = 0.85 and man demand and woman withdraw = 0.50; and men: woman demand and man withdraw = 0.71 and man demand and woman withdraw = 0.72. The two demand–withdraw subscales have a range of 2 to 27, with higher scores indicating more demand–withdraw behaviour. Alpha coefficients for this study were .80 (woman demand and man withdraw) and .81 (man demand and woman withdraw).

The mutual avoidance and withholding subscale contains three items and the total ranges from 3 to 27, with higher scores indicating more avoidance and withholding. The Cronbach's alpha for the mutual avoidance and withholding scale has been reported as: men = 0.66 and women = 0.66 (Bodenmann et al., 1998). In this study the Cronbach's alpha was .66. Given that the estimate was below .70, this may be a limitation of the scale and is briefly noted in the Limitations section.

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory. The PRQC (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) is designed to measure individuals' evaluations of their relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. The satisfaction subscale only was used in this study. The subscale has three items and it measures satisfaction as a pure variable and does not conflate it with other behaviours which may inflate the results (sample item: "How satisfied are you with your relationship?") (see Appendix G). Each partner evaluates their relationship on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (7). Fletcher et al. (2000) reported an alpha coefficient for satisfaction = 0.93. Cronbach's alpha in this study was .91.

Procedure

Couples were provided with a test booklet that contained two information sheets (see Appendix A), two questionnaires (see *Measures* section above), two consent forms (see Appendix B), and two envelopes in which to return the questionnaires and consent forms separately. In keeping the consent forms and questionnaires separate, questionnaire data was confidential. Couples were asked to consent to participate in a second longitudinal study and to provide their birth dates and contact details. Participants were advised that their birth dates would be used as a unique code in order to link data from both studies. Couples were instructed not to discuss the questionnaire with their partner until the questionnaire session was concluded. Questionnaires were completed anonymously and took around 25 minutes to complete. Following completion both questionnaires were placed in a single sealed envelope (to allow data entry as a couple), while consent forms were placed in a separate envelope. Both envelopes were reply paid and were returned by mail to the researchers.

Plan of Analysis

Before examining the results, it is important to outline the unique statistical issues that arise when dealing with data from both partners in a relationship. Only recently have researchers begun to apply more complex statistical analyses to assess the influences that each partner has on the other partner in romantic relationships. Kenny, Kashy and Cook's (2006) *Dyadic Data Analysis*, remains the foremost text on analysis of couple data. The main issue with couple data is that the responses of both members of the couple are likely to be non-independent or correlated. This correlation arises because of similarity and because each person's emotions, thoughts and behaviours affect the other. One source of non-independence occurs when partners'

characteristics influence each other on another variable, or in other words, where the independent variable for each partner influences the dependent variable for both partners. For instance, an individual's neuroticism has been shown to predict relationship dissatisfaction in both the individual (an actor effect) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997) and in the individual's partner (a partner effect) (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). Furthermore, this non-independence violates assumptions of the independence of observations on which many statistical tests are based (Kenny, 1995). Thus, statistical analyses that attempt to examine couples must control for non-independence and need to examine the different sources of non-independence.

Kenny and colleagues devised a theoretical and statistical model to examine data from dyads that enables various sources of non-independence to be assessed (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny et al., 2006). The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) enables both actor and partner effects to be estimated, while controlling for each, so that various models can be tested. According to Kenny and colleagues, actor effects have often been assumed without concurrent testing of partner effects (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny et al., 2006). The APIM allows researchers to estimate whether only actor effects are responsible for the criterion variable, only partner effects, or both, so that a more couple-oriented model is tested. In a couple-oriented model, the actor and partner effects are relatively equal such that individuals are as much affected by their own characteristics and processes as they are by their partner's.

Only a few studies, however, have examined actor and partner effects in relation to personality. One study found that an individual's level of relationship satisfaction was primarily a function of the individual's trait characteristics rather than the partner's (Watson et al., 2000a), while another found that a partner's trait characteristics were

significantly correlated with aspects of an individual's satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997). This line of statistical analysis is in its early days, and replication is the key to determining whether actor-oriented, partner-oriented or couple-oriented models explain the relationships between personality and relationship satisfaction. The current study examines the APIM through multilevel modelling so as to ascertain the relative influences of both individuals' variables to both their own, and their partner's satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 presents the mean scores for men and women on self-reported trait EI, estimates of their spouse's trait EI, perceptions of communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction. In order to test for gender differences, paired sample t-tests were conducted. No gender differences were found on the trait EI, perceptions of communication patterns or relationship satisfaction measures: all *p*s > .1.

Table 4.1

Sex differences on trait EI, communication patterns and relationship satisfaction

	Males		Females	
Scales	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Self-reported trait EI	152.18	20.50	154.70	24.08
Estimate of spouse's trait EI	153.10	20.60	153.60	26.89
Reports of constructive communication	49.93	8.44	50.13	9.85
Reports of man demand/woman withdraw	9.89	5.22	10.06	6.44
Reports of woman demand/man withdraw	11.91	5.84	12.94	6.32
Reports of avoidance and withholding	6.05	3.57	6.63	4.19
Reports of satisfaction	18.74	3.07	18.71	3.09

Note n = 78-80.

Correlations

The relationships between male and female scores on trait EI, the communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction were calculated. Given that the power level for 80 subjects was 0.63 and that a high number of correlations were derived, a significance level of .01 was used to minimize the problem of type 1 error. Table 4.2 shows that men's and women's scores were positively correlated on reports of constructive communication, demand-withdraw communication, and on relationship satisfaction, effects that have also been reported elsewhere (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Watson et al., 2000a). Furthermore, when the correlations were re-run controlling for length of cohabitation, there were no appreciable changes to the correlations.

Table 4.2

Correlations between men's and women's scores on trait EI, communication patterns and relationship satisfaction

Scales	*r*	*n*	*p*
Self-reported trait EI	.18	80	.11
Estimates of spouse's trait EI	.09	80	.45
Reports of constructive communication	.46*	81	.00
Reports of man demand/woman withdraw	.37*	81	.00
Reports of woman demand/man withdraw	.50*	81	.00
Reports of avoidance and withholding	.25	81	.02
Reports of satisfaction	.56*	81	.00

* $p < 0.01$.

There was no assortative mating for trait EI; thus men's and women's scores were not correlated on self-reported or on estimates of their spouse's trait EI. However, men's self-reported trait EI was correlated with female estimates of spouses' trait EI

($r = .47$, $p < .001$), and likewise, women's self-reported trait EI was correlated with male estimates of spouses' trait EI ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). This suggests that there was some agreement between couples as to the estimates of each partner's trait EI. Furthermore, men's self-reported trait EI was correlated with men's estimates of their spouses' trait EI ($r = .45$, $p < .001$) and women's self-reported trait EI was correlated with their estimates of their spouses' trait EI ($r = .25$, $p < .05$). These effects suggest a similarity bias, which is addressed later in this section and in the Discussion section.

Table 4.3 highlights the correlations of men's and women's self-reported trait EI and estimates of their spouses' trait EI with perceptions of communication patterns and relationship satisfaction. Again, a significance level of 0.01 was used to reduce the chances of a type 1 error given the number of correlations derived for self-reported and estimates of spouses' trait EI. There was partial support for Hypothesis 1 that self-reported trait EI would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, as this association was only evident for men. There was support for Hypothesis 2 that self-reported trait EI would be positively associated with perceptions of constructive communication patterns. There was also general support for Hypothesis 3 that self-rated trait EI would be negatively associated with perceptions of the more dysfunctional conflict communication patterns. Re-examination of the correlations after controlling for length of cohabitation provided no significant changes.

Table 4.3

Correlations between men's and women's self-reported and estimates of spouses' trait EI, and communication patterns and relationship satisfaction

	Males		Females	
Scales	SR trait EI	ES trait EI	SR trait EI	ES trait EI
Reports of constructive communication				
Male perceptions	.46*	.52*	.27	.31*
Female perceptions	.21	.27	.50*	.54*
Reports of man demand/ woman withdraw				
Male perceptions	-.06	-.39*	-.34*	-.09
Female perceptions	-.14	-.43*	-.46*	-.24
Reports of woman demand/man withdraw				
Male perceptions	-.33*	-.35*	-.16	-.28
Female perceptions	-.15	-.20	-.27	-.50*
Reports of avoidance				
Male perceptions	-.50*	-.29*	-.09	-.31*
Female perception	-.19	-.12	-.22	-.53*
Reports of satisfaction				
Male satisfaction	.35*	.17	.14	.27
Female satisfaction	.10	.02	.18	.46*

Note. SR = self-reported. ES = Estimates of spouses'. * $p < 0.01$. n = 80, 81.

Estimates of Spouses' Trait EI

The next question explored was whether an individuals' estimates of their spouses' trait EI related to individuals' self-reported trait EI, perceptions of conflict communication patterns and/or relationship satisfaction. Table 4.3 presents the correlations of men's and women's estimates of their spouses' trait EI with perceptions of conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction. Similar effects were found for estimates of spouses' trait EI as for self-rated trait EI; however, the

correlations were often larger for estimates of spouses' trait EI and there were more associations for estimates of the spouse compared to self-rated trait EI. Again, controlling for length of cohabitation did not result in substantial changes.

Examining Actor and Partner Effects

In order to determine the predictors of couple-level perceptions, analyses were undertaken to examine actor and partner effects. The data were organised into a pair-wise structure and gender was the distinguishing variable (female coded 1, male coded -1) (Kenny et al., 2006). Multilevel modeling was used to determine the dyad-level perceptions as it allows several dependent variables to be entered and controlled for simultaneously. To identify demographic correlates of relationship satisfaction, age, income level, educational level, and length of relationship were entered as predictors of satisfaction in the multilevel regression analyses. None of these variables emerged as statistically reliable predictors. Furthermore, there were no significant effects for gender and gender did not moderate the linkage between trait EI and satisfaction.

Table 4.4 shows the results of the analyses testing both the actors' and partners' self-reports and spouse estimates of trait EI and conflict communication patterns in predicting relationship satisfaction. Actor variables only were significantly predictive of satisfaction, except for perceptions of the man demand and woman withdraw communication pattern. Thus there was strong support that self-rated trait EI predicted satisfaction. In relation to the research question, there was also evidence that estimates of one's spouse's trait EI predicted satisfaction.

Table 4.4

Multilevel regression analyses predicting relationship satisfaction

Scales	*B*	*SE*	*t ratio*
Self-rated trait EI			
Actor	.04**	.01	3.6
Partner	.01	.01	0.9
Estimates of spouse's trait EI			
Actor	.04**	.01	4.6
Partner	.02	.01	1.8
Perceptions of constructive communication			
Actor	.11**	.03	4.4
Partner	.01	.03	0.4
Perceptions of man demand/woman withdraw			
Actor	-.08	.04	-1.9
Partner	-.05	.04	-1.3
Perceptions of woman demand/man withdraw			
Actor	-.09*	.04	-2.3
Partner	-.07	.04	-1.7
Perceptions of avoidance and withholding			
Actor	-.28**	.06	-5.1
Partner	-.09	.06	-1.7

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Analyses were then run to determine which variables, when all variables were combined, were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Given that none of the partner variables were significant in the earlier analyses, a regression of only the actor variables was performed. In the final covariance model, perceptions of avoidance and withholding communication (B = -0.15, SE = 0.059, r^2 = .047, p = 0.01) and estimates

of one's spouse's trait EI (B = 0.018, SE = 0.009, r^2 = .013, p = 0.05) were significant and unique predictors of an individual's relationship satisfaction.

Exploring the Effects of Satisfaction on Perceptions of Trait EI

Given the strong effects for estimates of spouses' trait EI, further analyses were undertaken to better understand the relationship between perceptions of trait EI and satisfaction. First, it was determined whether satisfied couples would be more similar in reports of trait EI than dissatisfied couples. Partners were divided into high and low satisfaction groups based on a median split. Amongst men, a significant difference (Z = -2.04, p < .05) was found between the size of correlations for self-rated trait EI and estimate of spouses' trait EI for low satisfaction (r = .284, n = 45, p > .05) and high satisfaction (r = .654, n = 34, p < .05). Amongst women, a similar difference (Z = -3.12, p < .01) was found for low satisfaction (r = .025, n = 43, p > .05) and high satisfaction (r = 609, n = 36, p < .01). These effects suggest that satisfied couples were more likely than dissatisfied couples to see themselves as having similar levels of trait EI.

The above analyses involved the actor making two ratings (for self and spouse). The next set of analyses examined the strength of relationships involving actor and partner ratings, that is, across raters. There was a significant difference (Z = -1.91, p <.05 one-tailed) in perceptions of trait EI amongst dissatisfied couples (r - .02, n = 48) and satisfied couples (r = .44, n = 30, p < .05). Thus, satisfied couples tended to have more similar trait EI self-ratings than dissatisfied couples. The last analyses were to determine whether those individuals who reported lower satisfaction, also tended to rate their spouses as low in trait EI. The effect was not significant for men (F (1,77) = .61, MSE = 221.30, p > .05) but was for women (F (1,77) = 8.48, MSE = *451.41*, p < .05). As presented in Figure 4.1,

dissatisfied women tended to rate their partners' trait EI lower than their own, while satisfied women tended to rate their spouses' trait EI higher than their own.

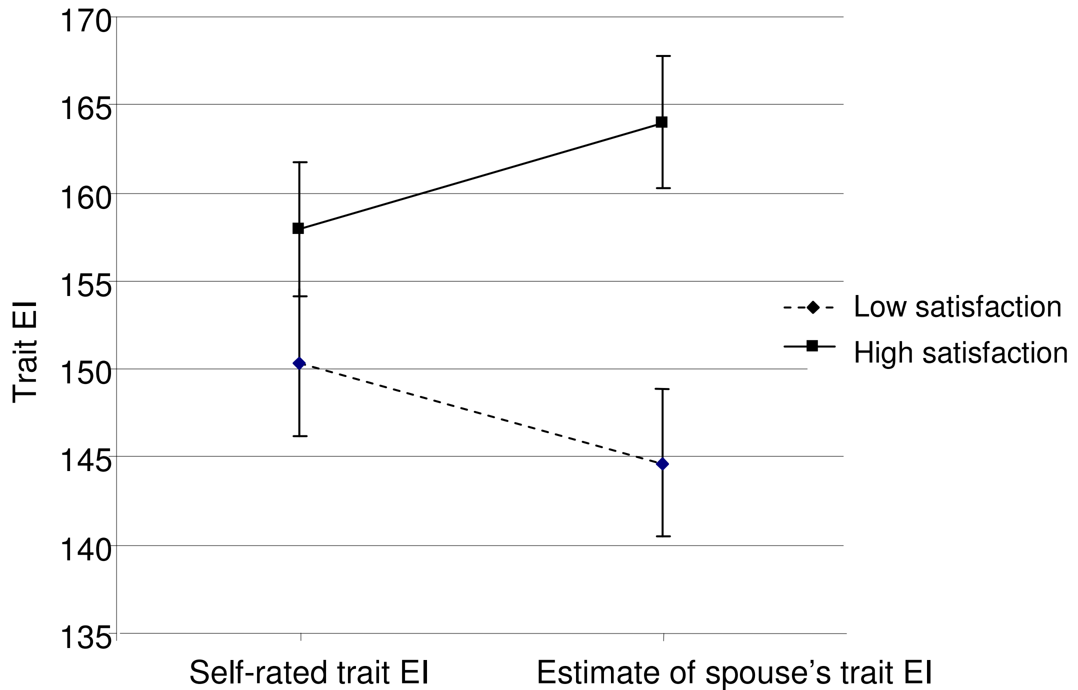


Figure 4.1

Comparison of self-rated trait EI and estimates of spouse's trait EI amongst women who are satisfied or dissatisfied with their relationship

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate the effects of trait EI and conflict communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of cohabiting couples. As no study to date has examined trait EI in both partners, one of the aims of the study was to see how both self-rated and estimates of one's spouse's trait EI were related to couples' perceptions of communication patterns and satisfaction. The results indicated that an individual's self-rated trait EI, estimates of their spouses' trait EI, and perceptions of conflict communication patterns were consistent predictors of relationship satisfaction. It was also found that partner variables were not predictive of an individual's level of

satisfaction. When all the previously significant actor variables were examined together, perceptions of avoidance and withholding, and estimates of spouses' trait EI were the only predictors of satisfaction. These findings are discussed in the light of past research.

Trait EI and Conflict Communication Patterns

There was consistent evidence in the correlational analyses that self-reported trait EI was related to perceptions of all the communication patterns. In the multilevel regression analyses, actors' perceptions of constructive communication, the woman demand pattern, and avoidance and withholding predicted satisfaction. However, when all the significant actor variables were analysed together, it was the avoidance and withholding communication pattern that was the strongest (and most distinct) predictor of dissatisfaction. This was surprising given the evidence for a strong relationship between the demand–withdraw pattern and dissatisfaction (Christensen, 1987; Christensen & Heavey, 1990). However, in the present sample 58 per cent of respondents had co-habited for longer than 10 years, and perhaps it is the case that avoidance becomes a more corrosive conflict pattern for long-term partners. Indeed, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found evidence that some conflict engagement resulted in concurrent reductions in satisfaction but not in dissatisfaction over time. However, couples whose conflict was characterised by avoidance and withdrawal reported dissatisfaction over time. The authors speculated that conflict-avoiding couples are at some risk over time because they are not able to gain a sense of "working through" conflict situations (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

When looking at actor and partner effects in predicting couples' satisfaction, there was strong evidence that actor variables only were predictors. This suggests that,

while partners are involved in a relationship with another person, it is their own personality that creates their subjective experience of the relationship and hence their evaluations of satisfaction. The findings support studies that have concluded that an individual's level of relationship satisfaction is primarily a function of his or her own trait characteristics (e.g. as assessed by the Big Five), rather than the characteristics of the partner, or a combination of both (Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Watson et al., 2000a).

However, while individual factors predicted satisfaction, when it came to trait EI, it was the actor's estimate of their spouse's trait EI that was the only unique predictor of satisfaction in the final covariance model. In order to make sense of this finding, the possibility was explored that actors' estimates of their spouses' trait EI reflected more about the actors than the spouses they were rating. Research on partner ratings within dyads indicates that ratings contain both valid and invalid components (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). The valid sources are identified by showing that partner ratings of the target individual correlate with both the target's self-ratings and the target's satisfaction (Watson et al., 2000a). The correlations show agreement between targets' self-ratings and partner ratings of targets' trait EI, but only limited agreement between partner ratings of the target's trait EI and the target's satisfaction. Furthermore, in relation to the communication and satisfaction variables, there were generally more, and larger, associations between these variables and estimates of spouses' trait EI than self-rated trait EI. Together, these findings suggest that biases of some kind were operating when estimating spouses' trait EI.

Murray et al. (1996) have suggested that partners fill in gaps of knowledge about their spouses by using their self-rated satisfaction as a heuristic. Indeed, positive illusions about one's partner have been shown to predict satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996; Watson et al., 2000a). When this possibility was examined, it was found that

dissatisfied women tended to rate their spouses' trait EI lower than their own, but that satisfied women tended to estimate their spouses' trait EI to be higher than their own. This finding is consistent with the possibility that satisfied women held positive illusions about their partner. While there was no such effect for men, this may have been due to the small sample size or this may be a genuine sex effect, suggesting that women are more likely to idealize their partners' trait EI. Future studies will be needed to replicate this result.

The results also indicated that satisfaction was related to perceived similarity of self-rated trait EI and estimates of spouses' trait EI, and this effect was found across raters. Whether these spouses were genuinely similar is unknown. There is evidence that some spouses are similar on personality traits (e.g. the Big Five) and that similarity is related to satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2007). What is clear from this study, is that individuals who perceived similarity between their own and their spouse's trait EI were more satisfied than individuals who saw no similarity.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study is not without its limitations. First, self-reports were used to measure both trait EI and conflict communication patterns, and thus similar positive or negative biases may have occurred in both sets of ratings. However, the moderate correlations between self-reports of trait EI and estimates of spouses' trait EI (observer reports) suggests that biases may not have been so influential in the results. Second, while couples were instructed not to discuss any aspect of the questionnaire until the questionnaires had been sealed in the envelopes, there was no way to enforce this instruction. Third, a small snowball sample of acquaintances of the researchers was used, and therefore probably overrepresented middle class participants. Fourth, given

that the sample size was small and that a large number of correlations were derived, a conservative significance level of $p < .01$ was used. This was undertaken to reduce the possibility of type 1 errors. Clearly, future studies that seek to replicate these results will need to employ larger samples to resolve such issues. Fifth, the Cronbach's alpha of 0.66 for the avoidance and withholding scale was just below the accepted level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978), which may be a limitation of the scale. Finally, as the study was correlational in design it does not enable conclusions to be drawn regarding causation.

In summary, this study provides new insights into the role of trait EI and perceptions of conflict communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of cohabiting couples. Importantly, it was found that an individual's reports of trait EI and the communication patterns were the only salient predictors of relationship satisfaction. When all of the self-rated variables were examined together, couples' perceptions of avoidance and withholding communication and estimates of one's spouse's trait EI predicted satisfaction. From this study it seems that the most satisfied couples are those who do not avoid conflict, who tend to see each other as being similar in trait EI, and who tend to idealize the other's trait EI to some extent.

The next stage of analysis involves a longitudinal methodology. Chapter 5 presents a study that examines self-rated trait EI, conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction over a 12-month period. The study aims to examine whether the effect of self-rated trait EI on satisfaction is stable over time. Couples' conflict communication patterns will also be analysed to establish to what degree constructive communication, the demand-withdraw pattern and/or a pattern of avoidance and withholding are associated with changes in satisfaction over time.

Chapter 5

STUDY 2: LONGITUDINAL INFLUENCES OF TRAIT EI AND CONFLICT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

How stable are long-term cohabiting relationships? What factors influence changes in couples' satisfaction over time? In Study 1, there was evidence that trait EI and conflict communication patterns predicted the relationship satisfaction of cohabiting couples. There was also evidence for actor effects only, in that an individual's perceptions of their personality and the couple's communication patterns were the only predictors of an individual's satisfaction. The aim of this study is to extend that research by examining whether and to what degree trait EI and communication patterns were associated with changes in relationship satisfaction over a 12-month period.

Trait EI

As discussed previously, trait EI is a personality trait that involves a constellation of self-perceived emotion-related abilities and dispositions that are typically measured via self-report instruments (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The construct has been argued to capture individual differences in affective self-evaluations and is said to integrate the emotion-related facets of the Giant Three and Big Five personality taxonomies (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The construct validity of trait EI has been supported through a program of research that has systematically demonstrated its discriminant, criterion and incremental validity (e.g. see Kluemper, 2008; Petrides et al., 2007b).

To date, however, few studies have examined the rank-order stability of trait EI. Rank-order stability, as discussed in Chapter 2, refers to the consistency of an

individual's relative ranking in a sample in relation to a particular trait over time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Rank-order stability is typically indexed by a correlation coefficient (or test-retest correlation) between two scores across two points in time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Rank-order stability is the most often measured type of stability in the individual differences literature, giving rise to Caspi, Roberts and Shiner's (2005) principles of rank-order stability.

In relation to trait EI, the examination of rank-order stability is in its infancy. Given that it is conceptualised as a personality trait, theoretically trait EI is assumed to be relatively stable over time (Petrides et al., 2007a). Two studies to date have examined the rank-order stability of trait EI, and both employed samples of young adults. Tett et al. (2005) examined test-retest correlations over four to six weeks for their unnamed trait EI instrument and reported a median correlation of .76. The second study examined Bar-On's EQ-i:Short and found stability of .56 over three years (Parker et al., 2005). Following from the conclusions outlined by Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005), rank-order stability increases with age, but decreases as the interval between measurement increases. Thus, a moderate to high test-retest correlation would be expected for trait EI over a 12-month period for a sample of older adults.

Trait EI and Relationship Satisfaction

While Study 1 found that trait EI was correlated with relationship satisfaction in cohabiting couples, as far as can be established, no study has examined the longitudinal connections between trait EI and relationship satisfaction. Research in trait EI-related personality domains, however, may indicate possible relationships. For instance, when looking at the effects of personality on changes on relationship satisfaction, neuroticism (or trait anxiety) has received the most attention (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Longitudinal studies have found that while neuroticism predicted initial levels of dissatisfaction in newlyweds, it was not associated with changes in satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). One aim of the present study is to examine whether trait EI has a constant and beneficial effect on relationship satisfaction over time, or whether it predicts changes in relationship satisfaction.

Communication and Satisfaction

When it comes to longitudinal studies of romantic relationships, couples' problem-solving behaviours have often been the variable of interest (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). There is clear cross-sectional evidence that constructive communication patterns are associated with satisfaction, while more dysfunctional patterns, such as the demand-withdraw pattern and mutual avoidance and withholding, are associated with relationship dissatisfaction (Noller & White, 1990). The longitudinal connections between communication and satisfaction have also been examined. For instance, constructive communication has predicted improvements in satisfaction (Gill et al., 1999), whereas a pattern of avoidance has predicted declines in satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), and the demand-withdraw pattern of communication has predicted declines in satisfaction and divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

Trait EI, Communication Patterns and Satisfaction

In theorizing about marital development, Karney and Bradbury (1995) have proposed that personality is an enduring vulnerability that forms part of the intrapersonal environment of marital relationships. The authors have argued that the effect of this environment on marital satisfaction is realized early in marriage, and that once realized, its effect is relatively constant over time. However, interpersonal processes such as communication tend to develop with the relationship, and thus are

proposed to be related to changes in satisfaction over time. Karney and Bradbury (1997) tested their theory by examining the associations between neuroticism, marital interaction and satisfaction in newlyweds over four years. They found that while neuroticism predicted satisfaction at each of the eight time waves, it did not predict changes in satisfaction. However, couples' marital interaction predicted changes in satisfaction over the four-year period. They concluded that neuroticism is more strongly associated with spouses' initial levels of satisfaction, whereas marital interaction is more strongly associated with changes in satisfaction over time. These results were later supported by Caughlin et al. (2000).

Aims and Rationale

The aim of this study was to examine the longitudinal influences of trait EI, conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction in cohabiting couples over a 12-month period. To date, no study has examined these relationships longitudinally. First, from studies on rank-order stability, it is hypothesized that test-retest correlations for trait EI over a 12-month period for adults will be moderate to large (Caspi et al., 2005; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000) (H1). Second, following from Karney and Bradbury's (1997) study on neuroticism and satisfaction it is hypothesised that the effect of self-reported trait EI on satisfaction will be stable and that self-reported trait EI will not be associated with changes in satisfaction over time (H2). Third, following from Karney and Bradbury (1997) and the literature on communication patterns, it is anticipated that reports of the Time 1 communication patterns will predict Time 2 satisfaction. Specifically, it is expected that Time 1 constructive communication will predict increases in Time 2 satisfaction (H3) (Gill et al., 1999), while Time 1 reports of demanding and withdrawing (Gottman &

Levenson, 2000) (H4) or avoidance and withholding (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) (H5) will predict decreases in Time 2 satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Using network sampling, 82 heterosexual cohabiting couples were recruited. An initial group of participants was identified through the researcher's network of acquaintances and subsequent participants were found through recommendations of earlier participants. This method of sampling has been used in other studies examining couples (Heaven et al., 2006). Participants resided in the Sydney-Wollongong region of New South Wales, and were predominantly middle class. Women participants ranged in age from 20-79 years (M = 47, SD = 17), and men ranged in age from 22-80 years (M = 49, SD = 17). Of the total, 67 couples (82%) were married and 15 (18%) were not. Three couples (4%) had been together for less than 1 year, 8 couples (10%) had been together for between 1 and 3 years, 8 (10%) had been together for between 3 and 5 years, 15 couples (18%) had been together for between 6 and 10 years, and 48 couples (58%) had been together for more than 10 years. Of all the participants, 28 (34%) had a high school education or less, 20 (24%) had a technical college education, while 34 (42%) had a university education. With respect to income, 28 couples (34%) had a combined family income of more than A$100 000 per annum.

Of the original sample of 82 couples, 37 couples (45%) did not participate at Time 2. Thus, 90 participants or 45 couples completed the full longitudinal study. Of the 37 couples who did not participate in the second study, three couples were unable to be contacted, two couples declined to participate, while non-participation by the remaining

couples was unexplained. Couples were contacted by mail, with follow-up phone calls for non-returned questionnaires, followed by a second-round of questionnaires.

Measures

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form (TEIQue-SF). The TEIQue-SF (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) is a 30-item self-report scale (see Appendix D), as reported in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was .91.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ). The CPQ (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) is a self-report instrument (see Appendix F), which is detailed in Study 1. The constructive communication subscale alpha coefficient was .85. The female demand and man withdraw subscale coefficient was .85, and the man demand and woman withdraw coefficient was .81. The mutual avoidance and withholding alpha was .74.

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory. The PRQC (Fletcher et al., 2000) (see Appendix G) was used to measure relationship satisfaction, as outlined in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Procedure

Couples were provided with a test booklet that contained two information sheets (see Appendix H), two consent forms (see Appendix I), two questionnaires (see *Measures* section above), and two envelopes in which to return the questionnaires and consent forms separately. In keeping the consent forms and questionnaires separate, questionnaire data was confidential. Couples were instructed not to discuss the questionnaire with their partner until the questionnaire session was concluded. Questionnaires were completed anonymously and took around 20 minutes to complete. Following completion, both questionnaires were placed in a single sealed envelope (to

allow data entry as a couple), while consent forms were placed in a separate envelope. Both envelopes were reply paid and were returned by mail to the researchers.

Plan of analysis

A number of different statistical analyses will be conducted in order to test the hypotheses. Correlational analyses by sex will be conducted, followed by structural equation modelling (SEM). One advantage of SEM is that it allows both individuals' data to be analysed together so as to ascertain both actor and partner effects. Actor effects measure the effects of an individual's predictor variable on their own outcome variable (e.g. the effects of men's Time 1 self-rated EI on men's Time 2 satisfaction) and partner effects measure the effect of the individual's predictor variable on their partner's outcome variable (e.g. the effects of women's Time 1 self-rated EI on men's Time 2 satisfaction). The other advantage of SEM is that it controls for dyadic dependence or correlation (e.g. men's and women's satisfaction scores are likely to be correlated) (see Table 4.2 in Study 1) and autocorrelation (the correlation between measurements of a variable at two points in time, for example see Table 5.2), which, if not controlled, can bias tests of significance and degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2006).

To test Hypothesis 1, that the test-retest correlations for self-rated trait EI over a 12-month period for adults will be moderate to large, correlations for both men and women between Time 1 and Time 2 will be conducted. In order to test Hypothesis 2, that the effect of self-reported EI on satisfaction will be constant, first, correlations for each sex between Time 1 self-reported EI and Time 2 satisfaction will be derived, followed by correlations between Time 2 self-reported EI (controlling for Time 1 satisfaction) and Time 2 satisfaction. If the correlations are significant, SEM will be used to test whether the effect of self-rated EI on satisfaction, on average, is stable across time. In order to test Hypotheses 2

to 5 regarding self-rated trait EI and the conflict communication patterns as predictors of changes in satisfaction, first, for each sex, Time 1 reports of the communication patterns will be correlated with Time 2 satisfaction (controlling for Time 1 satisfaction). If these correlations are significant, the communication patterns will then be tested with SEM to determine whether, on average, people who report lower self-rated trait EI or more dysfunctional communication patterns show greater decreases in relationship satisfaction compared to those who report higher self-rated trait EI or more functional communication patterns, and the same baseline levels of satisfaction.

Results

Given that 37 couples (45%) from the initial sample did not participate at Time 2, the means for both samples were analysed to establish if there were differences in reports of satisfaction at Time 1 between those who participated at Time 2 and those who did not. An independent samples t-test indicated there was no difference ($t(79) = 1.12$, $p > .05$) between the Time 1 mean satisfaction scores for men who did not participate at Time 2 ($M = 19.17$, $SD = 2.82$, $n = 36$) versus those who did ($M = 18.40$, $SD = 3.24$, $n = 45$). Similarly, there was no significant difference for women ($t(68.49) = 1.94$, $p > .05$) in the mean satisfaction scores at Time 1 for the women who did not participate at Time 2 ($M = 19.35$, $SD = 1.93$, $n = 37$) versus those who did ($M = 18.11$, $SD = 3.73$, $n = 45$).

Mean Differences

Table 5.1 presents the mean scores and differences for men’s and women’s variables at Time 1 and Time 2. Paired samples t-tests indicated significant differences on both men’s and women’s avoidance and withholding, both indicating reports of more avoidance and withholding at Time 2. These results suggest that, excepting the avoidance and withholding pattern of communication, the variables

were stable at the group level. The differences in men's Time 1 and Time 2 reports of avoidance and withholding had a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.15$), while the differences for women's reports had a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.\ 57$). Furthermore, post hoc power analyses indicated that the analyses for males had 0.89 power to detect a medium effect (0.5) and 0.24 power to detect a small effect (0.2). For females, the analyses had 0.90 power to detect a medium effect and 0.25 power to detect a small effect.

Furthermore, paired samples t-tests also indicated a significant difference between men's and women's reports of avoidance and withholding at Time 1 ($t(43) = 2.19$, $p < .05$), with women reporting more avoidance and withholding than men, and with an effect size of 0.32. This suggests a difference in reporting, rather than behaviour, as both individuals reported on the couples' patterns. However, there were no other sex differences on any of the variables at Times 1 or 2.

Table 5.1

Differences between Time 1 and Time 2 scores for men and women on trait EI, perceptions of the communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction

	Time 1		Time 2				
Scales	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Self-reported trait EI							
Males	153.77	19.88	154.16	20.05	43	-21	.83
Females	151.27	21.86	151.98	20.66	44	-.32	.75
Constructive communication							
Male reports	50.86	6.99	49.88	8.02	41	.92	.36
Female reports	50.74	9.27	50.19	7.98	42	.47	.64
Man demand/woman withdraw							
Male reports	10.09	5.15	9.81	4.97	42	.42	.68
Females reports	9.91	5.95	10.24	5.50	44	-.40	.69
Woman demand/man withdraw							
Male reports	11.91	5.65	11.00	5.75	42	1.25	.22
Female reports	12.89	6.50	11.60	6.25	44	1.86	.07
Avoidance and withholding							
Male reports	5.26	2.82	9.23	3.98	41	-6.43	.00
Female reports	6.89	4.39	9.75	5.54	43	-3.60	.00
Satisfaction							
Male reports	18.40	3.24	18.89	2.57	44	-1.32	.19
Female reports	18.05	3.75	18.09	3.44	43	-.09	.93

Stability Correlations

The next step was to explore the stability of the variables across Time 1 and Time 2. Table 5.2 presents both the zero-order and partial correlations controlling for length of cohabitation and for age for all the variables for men and women between Time 1 and Time 2. Given the small sample size for the second study, power analyses were conducted post hoc. For a medium effect size (r = .30) for correlations, the sample had power of 0.54, indicating that 54% of studies would be expected to yield a significant effect, thus rejecting the null hypothesis.

Given the small sample size of 45 couples, a significance level of .01 was used to reduce the chance of type 1 error. As can be seen, the test-retest correlations for men's and women's self-reported trait EI were large. This provides support for Hypothesis 1 regarding the rank-order stability of trait EI across the 12-month period. Furthermore, from Table 5.2, all correlations were significant and all were moderate to large in size, except for men's reports of avoidance and withholding which was not significant at $p < 0.01$. This suggests that the variables were relatively stable across the 12 months. Furthermore, controlling for length of cohabitation and age did not result in appreciable changes to the correlations, except that when controlling for age women's reports of the avoidance and withholding pattern increased. This suggests that women's reports of avoidance and withholding change with age.

Table 5.2

Zero-order and partial correlations (controlling for length of cohabitation and age) between Time 1 and Time 2 scores for men and women on EI, communication patterns, and satisfaction

Scales	*r*	*n*	*Partial r (coh)*	*Partial r (age)*	*n*
Male self-reported EI	.82*	44	82*	.81*	41
Female self-reported EI	.76*	45	74*	.77*	42
Male reports of constructive communication	.59*	42	59*	.58*	39
Female reports of constructive communication	.61*	43	.61*	.59*	40
Male reports of man demand/woman withdraw	.62*	43	.62*	.64*	40
Female reports of man demand/woman withdraw	.53*	45	.52*	.54*	42
Male reports of woman demand/man withdraw	.65*	43	.65*	.68*	40
Female reports of woman demand/man withdraw	.74*	45	.75*	.72*	42
Male reports of avoidance and withholding	.34	42	.36	.43	39
Female reports of avoidance and withholding	.46*	44	.39	.59*	41
Male reports of satisfaction	.66*	45	.67*	.65*	42
Female reports of satisfaction	.57*	44	.51*	.56*	41

*p < 0.01.

Correlations at Each Time Wave and Across the Two Waves

Table 5.3 presents the correlations between men's and women's self-reported trait EI, communication patterns and relationship satisfaction at Times 1 and 2 (see the first two columns). There were moderate correlations at Time 1 and Time 2, for both men and women, with few cross-correlations between the sexes. In relation to Hypothesis 2, there was some cross-sectional support for the prediction that the effect of self-rated trait EI on satisfaction would be stable at Time 1 and Time 2. Notably, men's self-rated trait EI was correlated with concurrent satisfaction at Time 1, and women's self-rated trait EI was correlated with satisfaction at Time 2. Again, a conservative significance level of $p < .01$ was used. The longitudinal test of the stable effect of self-rated trait EI is presented in the next section. Table 5.3 also presents the correlations for men and women between Time 1 self-reported trait EI, the communication patterns and Time 2 satisfaction, controlling for Time 1 satisfaction (see the third column). When it came to assessing changes over time, women's Time 1 reports of avoidance and withholding were correlated with women's Time 2 satisfaction.

Table 5.3

Correlations for men's and women's self-reported trait EI, communication patterns and satisfaction, at Time 1, at Time 2, and (controlling for Time 1 satisfaction) between Time 1 and Time 2

	T1 variables and T1 satisfaction		T2 variables and T2 satisfaction		T1 variables and T2 satisfaction	
Scales	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Self-rated trait EI						
Male reports	.40*	.12	.36	.18	.09	.06
Female reports	.19	.27	.33	.48*	.21	.07
Perceptions of constructive communication						
Male reports	.49*	.20	.56*	.24	.19	-.08
Female reports	.28	.43*	.53*	.31	.22	.24
Perceptions of man demand/woman withdraw						
Male reports	-.12	-.14	-.34	-.17	-.11	-.13
Female reports	-.20	-.21	-.38	-.23	-.20	-.03
Perceptions of woman demand/man withdraw						
Male reports	-.23	-.25	-.45*	-.28	-.05	-.13
Female reports	-.22	-.20	-.29	-.32	-.18	-.22
Perceptions of avoidance and withholding						
Male reports	-.51*	-.24	-.38	-.08	-.15	-.02
Female reports	-.30	-.30	-.32	-.28	-.31	-.43*

* $p < 0.01$. n = 40.

Assessing the Stable Effect of Self-Rated Trait EI on Satisfaction

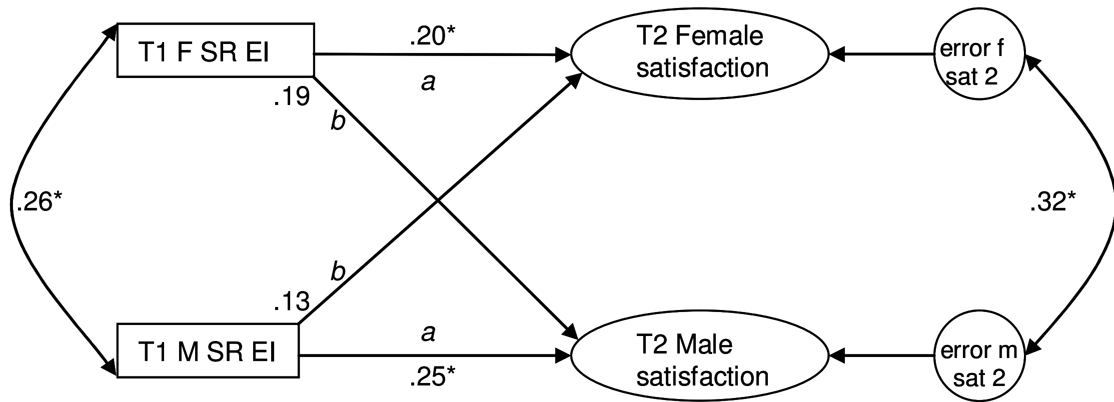
Given that self-rated trait EI was associated with satisfaction cross-sectionally, the next step was to test if the influence of self-rated trait EI was stable across the 12-month period. A series of analyses were conducted using SEM, as outlined by Kenny et al. (2006). This analysis tests whether the effect of self-rated trait EI on satisfaction, on average, is stable across time. When testing the model, certain paths were assumed to be the same or equal. In order to test this assumption, Chi square (χ^2) was used to measure goodness of fit. When Chi square is non-significant, the result indicates that the assumption of equality does not reduce the fit of the model. It must be noted, that Chi square follows an asymptotic distribution and is more likely to be significant in a large sample, which is a limitation of this statistic. For this reason, other goodness of fit indices were also used, including the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Table 5.4

Stable effect of Time 1 self-rated trait EI on Time 2 satisfaction

Time 1	Time 2	*ß*	*SE*	*CR*	*P*	*path*
Female SR EI	Female satisfaction	.032	.014	2.25	.024	a
Male SR EI	Male satisfaction	.032	.014	2.25	.024	a
Female SR EI	Male satisfaction	.021	.016	1.32	.186	b
Male SR EI	Female satisfaction	.024	.024	.99	.321	b

Note: SR EI = self-rated trait EI.



* significant coefficients

Figure 5.1

Standardized parameter estimates for the final model predicting the stable effect of Time 1 self-rated trait EI on Time 2 satisfaction

When the synchronous and cross-lagged effects of men's and women's self-rated trait EI were tested, the paths were assumed to be equal, and this did not reduce the fit of the model ($\chi^2(2) = .1$, $p > .05$; TLI = 1, CFI = 1, RMSEA = 0). The important results of the SEM analyses are presented in Table 5.4 and the standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 5.1. These results indicated that an individual's self-rated EI had a stable or constant effect on their satisfaction over the 12-month period, which supports Hypothesis 2. There were, however, no partner effects.

Predicting Changes in Satisfaction

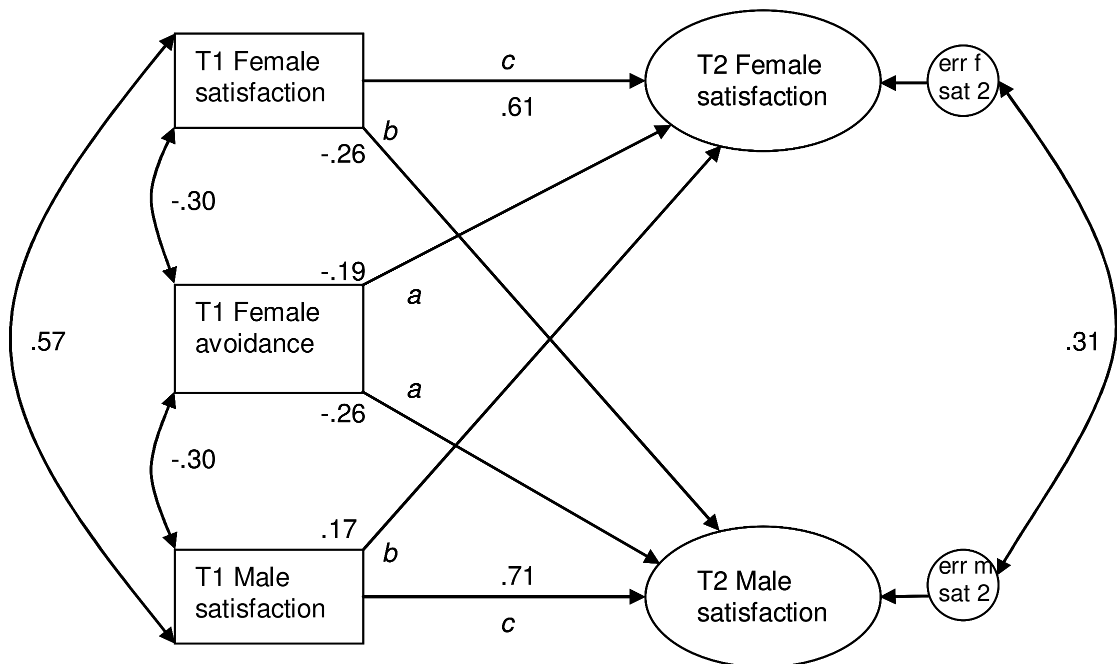
A further series of analyses were run using SEM to ascertain which Time 1 variables predicted changes in Time 2 satisfaction. These analyses test whether, on average, people with low trait EI or who report more dysfunctional communication patterns show greater decreases in relationship satisfaction compared to those with high trait EI or more functional communication patterns, and the same baseline levels of

satisfaction. Using SEM, the cross-lagged regression model was estimated for actor and partner effects, and equality constraints for all paths in the model were tested.

Table 5.5

Regression analyses predicting men's and women's Time 2 satisfaction

Time 1 reports	Time 2 reports	*ß*	*SE*	*CR*	*p*	*path*
Female avoidance	Female satisfaction	-.151	.061	-2.467	.014	a
Female avoidance	Male satisfaction	-.151	.061	-2.467	.014	a
Female satisfaction	Male satisfaction	-.174	.069	-2.521	.012	b
Male satisfaction	Female satisfaction	-.174	.069	-2.521	.012	b
Female satisfaction	Female satisfaction	.553	.074	7.495	.000	c
Male satisfaction	Male satisfaction	.553	.074	7.495	.000	c



Note: all coefficients are significant

Figure 5.2

Standardized parameter estimates for the final model predicting changes in Time 2 satisfaction

In the final model, as illustrated in Figure 5.2, equal paths were assumed for all effects, and this did not significantly drop the fit of the model (χ^2 (3, n = 45) = 6, $p > .05$; TLI = .79, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .079). As shown in Table 5.5, women's Time 1 reports of avoidance and withholding communication predicted declines in both men's and women's Time 2 reports of satisfaction (path a) (an actor and partner effect). (The standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 5.2.) Unexpectedly, in the final model, for individuals who reported high satisfaction at Time 1, their scores predicted declines in their partners' satisfaction at Time 2 (path b) (a partner effect). Finally, as theoretically expected, an individual's satisfaction at Time 1 predicted their satisfaction at Time 2 (path c) (an actor effect).

In summarizing the results, a number of hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 1, which anticipated moderate to large test-retest correlations for self-reported trait EI was supported for both men and women. Hypothesis 2, which expected that the effect of self-reported trait EI on satisfaction would be stable, and would not be associated with changes in satisfaction, was supported cross-sectionally and longitudinally. There was, however, no support for Hypothesis 3, which expected that Time 1 reports of constructive communication would predict increases in Time 2 satisfaction. There was also no support for Hypothesis 4 that a pattern of demanding and withdrawing would predict decreases in satisfaction. However, there was support for Hypothesis 5 that reports of avoidance and withholding communication would predict decreases in Time 2 satisfaction.

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate the longitudinal influences of trait EI, conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction in cohabiting couples over a 12-month period. The results indicated that the effect of an individual's self-rated trait

EI on their own satisfaction was stable over the 12-month period and was not related to changes in satisfaction. In contrast, women's reports of the avoidance and withholding pattern of communication predicted declines in both men's and women's satisfaction at Time 2. These results are discussed in the light of past research.

As expected, self-reported trait EI was relatively stable over the 12-month period, with large test-retest correlations for men and women. These findings are in line with current knowledge of rank-order stability (Caspi et al., 2005) and provide some support for the theorised stability of self-reported trait EI (Petrides et al., 2007a). Furthermore, as hypothesised, the effect of an individual's self-reported trait EI on their own satisfaction was significant cross-sectionally and longitudinally, although it was not associated with changes in satisfaction. There was no evidence for partner effects suggesting that it is an individual's own personality that contributes to their satisfaction. These findings also support evidence that personality, particularly neuroticism, has a stable effect on satisfaction and is not associated with changes in satisfaction over time (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997).

One unexpected finding was that individuals who reported greater satisfaction at Time 1, compared to individuals who reported lower satisfaction at that time, had partners who reported declines in satisfaction at Time 2. There is no theoretical reason to expect this effect, and it may have occurred by chance. However, this is a one-year snap shot of satisfaction, and as satisfaction is known to fluctuate over time (Bradbury & Karney, 2004), it may be the case that examining satisfaction over a longer period of time would provide a clearer picture of the changes in satisfaction. What was clear from the final model, was that the strongest predictor of an individual's Time 2 satisfaction, was their Time 1 satisfaction, and this is consistent with current evidence and theory (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

In relation to the conflict communication patterns, women's reports of avoidance and withholding communication predicted decreases in their own and their partner's satisfaction. This supports Karney and Bradbury's (1997) finding that interaction processes, such as communication, are associated with changes in satisfaction over time. However, it is often the demand-withdraw pattern of communication that has demonstrated the strongest effects in relation to satisfaction and divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). It is speculated here that avoidance may be more significant in long-term cohabiting couples like those in our sample (Bodenmann et al., 1998). Consistent with this view, Gottman and Krokoff (1989), in a sample of couples in long-term marriages (M = 23 years married), found that avoidance predicted dissatisfaction over time, but not cross-sectionally. The researchers argued that partners who avoid discussion of problems are at some risk over time because they are not able to develop a sense of working through their problems together.

Interestingly, women's reports of an avoidant pattern had an important impact on their own satisfaction as well as partner satisfaction, whereas men's reports of the avoidant pattern had no effect. There is evidence that women tend to be the initiators of problem-solving discussions (Ball, Cowan, & Cowan, 1995). There is also evidence that men tend to avoid and withdraw more than women (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). It may be that women are the initiators of conflict discussions, and if they avoid discussion of relationship problems then issues are unlikely to be discussed and resolved. This would explain the resulting declines in satisfaction for both partners and underlines the importance of the woman's role in couples' communication over time. Indeed, this finding highlights the importance of examining both actor and partner effects to gain a more complete understanding of relational processes.

Limitations and Conclusions

This study is not without its limitations. First, self-report instruments were employed to measure both trait EI and the conflict communication patterns. While data were collected from both partners, which should reduce possible distortions regarding the relationships in question, it is possible that similar negative or positive biases may have occurred in both sets of ratings. Secondly, while partners were instructed not to discuss any aspect of the questionnaire prior to completion, there was no way of ensuring that couples did not discuss their responses. Thirdly, the sample was drawn from acquaintances of the researchers and probably overrepresented middle class participants. Fourthly, the small sample size meant that there was limited statistical power and the analyses may not have detected small to medium-sized effects. Furthermore, a conservative significance level of 0.01 was used to reduce the chances of type 1 errors. Fifthly, the ranges in age and length of cohabitation of the participants, although statistically controlled for in the initial correlational analyses, may have affected the generalizability of the results. Finally, in measuring the rank-order stability or test-retest correlations for self-reported trait EI, the results provide a snapshot of rank-order stability. Two time points only were measured, and thus patterns of continuity could not be ascertained from the data (Fraley & Roberts, 2005).

Notwithstanding these limitations, there were some interesting results. Self-reported trait EI had a stable effect on satisfaction across the 12-month period, and it was not predictive of changes in satisfaction. Instead, women’s reports of avoidance and withholding communication predicted decreases in satisfaction over the 12-month period for both partners. This finding underlines the corrosive effects of moderate to high levels of avoidance, and also suggests the importance of the woman’s role in couples’ communication.

Following is a discussion of both studies. Chapter 6 examines the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 in detail in the light of past research. It also looks at the possible clinical applications of the results and suggests areas for future research. The chapter completes the project by providing concluding comments on the studies.

Chapter 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This project was designed to investigate the cross-sectional and longitudinal influences of trait EI and conflict communication patterns on the satisfaction of cohabiting heterosexual couples. To date, no study has examined the influences of trait EI and communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of both partners. A major strength of both studies was that couple effects were analysed, so that conclusions were able to be drawn about actor and partner effects. Indeed, these analyses gave rise to a number of interesting results in both studies.

In the first study, only actor effects were found, indicating that an individual's variables were the strongest predictors of his or her satisfaction. It was also clear that an individual's self-rated trait EI predicted their relationship satisfaction. When examining estimates of spouses' trait EI, it was evident that individuals who tended to idealize their partner's trait EI reported greater satisfaction. In relation to the communication patterns in the first study, an individual's reports of the avoidance and withholding communication pattern was the strongest cross-sectional predictor of satisfaction. In the second study, there was evidence that the effect of an individual's self-reported trait EI on their satisfaction was stable over time. However, when it came to communication patterns, women's reports of the avoidance and withholding pattern of communication predicted declines in satisfaction for both men and women. These results are examined in the light of past research and clinical applications are discussed.

Self-Rated Trait EI

Study 1 found that an individual's self-rated trait EI predicted the individual's relationship satisfaction and a recent study noted the same effect (Zeidner & Kaluda, 2008). This result suggests the importance of this relatively new trait for couples' satisfaction. The finding also contributes to the developing body of evidence for the construct validity of self-rated trait EI. For instance, in Study 1, the criterion validity of trait EI was supported given that it was related to the conflict communication patterns as expected. Trait EI was positively associated with perceptions of constructive communication and negatively associated with demand–withdraw communication and avoidance and withholding. This suggests that people who rated themselves as high in trait EI and who positively endorsed the items in the TEIQue, tended also to report using more constructive forms of negotiation when problem-solving with their partners. Similarly, those who rated themselves high in trait EI tended not to use more dysfunctional problem-solving strategies like demanding and withdrawing, or avoiding and withholding. Thus, these results support the literature demonstrating the construct validity of trait EI (Petrides et al., 2007b; Petrides et al., 2007c).

Longitudinally, the effect of an individual's self-rated trait EI on satisfaction was found to be constant over the 12-month period. This means that the effect of self-rated trait EI on satisfaction is consistent with the theoretical contention that personality provides a stable intrapersonal context or environment for individuals, where its effect on satisfaction is thought to be fully realized early in the relationship and remains stable over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The finding also supports studies that have found that personality, and specifically, neuroticism (probably the most widely examined personality in the relationships literature), has a stable and consistent effect on satisfaction over time (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997).

In examining both partners' data, both studies found strong actor effects but no partner effects for self-rated trait EI. This suggests that while partners are involved in a relationship with another person, it is their own personality that creates their subjective experience of the relationship and thus their evaluations of satisfaction. These findings support earlier studies that concluded that an individual's level of relationship satisfaction is primarily a function of his or her own trait characteristics (namely via the Big Five), rather than the characteristics of the partner (Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Watson et al., 2000a). Other studies, however, have found that partners' personality traits predicted satisfaction suggesting that further research is needed to replicate the results (Botwin et al., 1997; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981).

Additionally, the stability of self-rated trait EI over the 12-month period supports the rank-order stability of trait EI. Given that it is conceptualised as a personality trait, trait EI is assumed to be relatively stable over time (Petrides et al., 2007a). However, as discussed in the Introduction, there are five different indices for measuring stability, and it must be noted that Study 2 examined rank-order stability only. This type of stability refers to the consistency of an individual's relative ranking in a sample in relation to a particular trait over time (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). Following from meta-analytic studies, Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005), have observed that rank-order stability increases with age, but decreases as the interval between measurement increases. The test-retest correlations in Study 2 for men (r = .82) and women (r = .76) were moderate to large, in line with the principles set out by Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005). However, as test-retest correlations were taken for two points in time only, little can really be said about the stability of trait EI. Fraley and Roberts (Fraley & Roberts, 2005) have suggested that the extent to which a psychological construct is enduring is reflected in the way that test-retest correlations decay over time, and in order to

demonstrate this correlational matrices need to capture stability coefficients across the lifespan. So, while the stability coefficients were moderate to large, no conclusions can be drawn about the stability of trait EI over and above 12 months.

In relation to the clinical applicability of self-rated trait EI, the construct may also be important for clinicians. Given that research in the area of trait EI is still in its infancy, there have been no studies to date on the clinical utility of the construct (Parker, 2005; Vachon & Bagby, 2007). However, the results from the two studies suggest that self-rated trait EI may be a useful indicator of emotion-related deficits. For instance, low trait EI has been associated with depression-proneness (Saklofske et al., 2003), and trait EI has negatively predicted depression when controlling for positive and negative affectivity (Petrides et al., 2007b). Trait EI has also been negatively related to alexithymia (Dawda & Hart, 2000; Saklofske et al., 2003), and has negatively predicted personality disorders within the World Health Organization's *Tenth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases* (Petrides et al., 2007b). Trait EI has also negatively predicted dysfunctional attitudes (Petrides et al., 2007b), which have been theorised to be implicated in vulnerability to depression (Clark & Beck, 1999). While there is no direct evidence for the clinical utility of trait EI, the current study suggests that individuals self-reporting low trait EI are likely to be dissatisfied in their relationships. Furthermore, as discussed below, dissatisfaction can be an important indicator of possible future depressive symptomatology.

Estimates of Spouses' Trait EI: The Role of Idealization

Study 1 found that estimates of spouses' trait EI was the strongest personality predictor of satisfaction when all the significant predictors were included. This finding suggests that, while an individual's self-rated trait EI predicted satisfaction, estimates of

spouses' trait EI was a stronger predictor of satisfaction. Given the correlational results for estimates of spouses' trait EI and the fact that actor effects only were found (i.e. partners' self-rated trait EI did not predict satisfaction), it is clear that estimates of spouses' EI were more a reflection of the individuals providing the rating than the spouses being rated. Following from evidence that positive illusions about one's partner have predicted satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996; Watson et al., 2000a), the hypothesis that idealization was occurring was explored.

When further analyses were conducted, there was clear evidence for a process of idealization. It was found that satisfied women tended to estimate their partners' trait EI as greater than their own self-rated trait EI, but dissatisfied women rated partners' trait EI as lower than their own. There was also evidence that satisfied individuals tended to estimate their spouse's trait EI as similar to their own compared to dissatisfied individuals who reported no such similarity. Partners' similarity on the Big Five dimensions has been associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2007; Russell & Wells, 1991), and partners who become more alike in personality experience increased satisfaction over time (Gonzaga et al., 2007). There is, however, no way of knowing if the partners in Study 1 were similar in reality. What is clear from the study is that perceived similarity is associated with greater satisfaction and this has been noted elsewhere (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000b). These findings indicate that individuals who idealized their spouses' EI were more satisfied than those who did not. Thus, while it seems that individuals' self-rated trait EI predicts satisfaction, when it comes to their partners, it is about how the individuals perceive their partners, rather than how the partners sees themselves, that predicts an individual's satisfaction.

Avoidance in Long-Term Couples

The results from both studies suggest the importance of reports of the avoidance and withholding communication pattern on couples' satisfaction. Avoidance was the strongest cross-sectional predictor of satisfaction in Study 1 and was also the strongest predictor of declines in satisfaction over 12 months in Study 2. These results support other studies that have found an inverse relationship between avoidance and satisfaction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Noller & White, 1990), as well as studies that have found that avoidance predicts declines in satisfaction over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Smith et al., 1990). While avoidance has been identified as a stable communication pattern in couples (Gottman, 1993), the literature has often focused on the demand-withdraw pattern of communication. There is also contradictory evidence for the effects of avoidance on couples' relationship satisfaction (Christensen & Pasch, 1993; Gill et al., 1999). So, while the present studies found that a pattern of avoidance had important effects on satisfaction, this is not a common finding.

One reason for the paucity of discussion on couples' avoidance is that it is difficult to observe. Observational methodologies that require couples to discuss problems are impractical because discussion necessarily precludes avoidance (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). Another reason that avoidance is not often discussed is that there is evidence that a pattern of avoidance becomes more common in longer-term relationships (Bodenmann et al., 1998), so that few studies that have focused on newlyweds and early marriage have identified strong trends for couples' avoidance. Some of the studies that have detected avoidance have used older couples with mean ages over 41 years (and with means for length of marriage over 17 years) (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Noller & White, 1990). It appears then, that survey-based studies that

use older samples are more likely to detect avoidance. This may explain the strong results for reports of the avoidance pattern in the studies reported here.

Regarding the effect of avoidance, there is evidence that avoidance can be both beneficial and detrimental to relationships (Gill et al., 1999). Gottman (1993) indentified a functional couple conflict-type he called the “avoider” adaptation. He argued that these couples tend to minimize the importance of disagreement, and while this results in calm interaction it also creates emotional distance in the marriage (Gottman, 1993). These couples, it is argued, tend be satisfied (Driver et al., 2003) and there is some evidence for this (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). There is also evidence that avoidance is functional for satisfied couples who are confronted with a relationship threat (Buysse & Ickes, 1999). In fact, it has been argued that when avoidance occurs in relation to mundane and non-threatening issues, this results in dissatisfaction, whereas for happily married couples avoidance is functional in the face of threatening issues (Buysse et al., 2000).

There is also evidence that conflict avoidance is associated with dissatisfaction cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Noller & White, 1990). However, for some studies that have examined avoidance using both methodologies, the effect has been detected longitudinally but not cross-sectionally. Gottman and Krokoff (1989), for example, found that couples who engaged in conflict that was characterised by anger and hostility reported concurrent dissatisfaction, while conflict avoidance was associated with dissatisfaction three years later. Similarly, disengagement was found to be unrelated to concurrent satisfaction but was negatively related to satisfaction 18 and 30 months later (Smith et al., 1990). In the current project, however, avoidance predicted dissatisfaction cross-sectionally and predicted declines in satisfaction longitudinally. In combination, the results clearly

suggest the corrosive effects of avoidance and withholding on relationship satisfaction. No other communication pattern had any effect longitudinally, and cross-sectionally, when all the predictors were combined, avoidance was the single best predictor of satisfaction, although the relationship was, of course, negative. Looking at the effects for actors and partners provides some clues as to what may have been happening.

The first study found consistent evidence for actor effects only; that is, an individual's perceptions of the communication patterns were the only contributors to the individual's satisfaction. Had the results indicated that both actors' and partners' reports of the communication patterns predicted individuals' satisfaction, there would have been evidence for a couple-oriented explanation for the results. However, in Study 1 there was evidence only for actor effects across all the variables.

When it came to Study 2, there were slightly different results. Women's reports of avoidance and withholding communication predicted declines in both their own and their partner's satisfaction over a 12-month period. As was argued in Study 2, there is evidence that women tend to be the initiators of problem-solving discussions (Ball et al., 1995; Oggins, Veroff, & Leber, 1993), while men tend to avoid and withdraw (Buysse et al., 2000; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Greenberg & Johnson, 1986). Perhaps it is the case that women are more sensitive to avoidance, because they are the initiators of conflict discussions. It follows that, if women start to avoid, then conflicts will not be resolved, resulting in decreased satisfaction for both partners. However, it may be that the small sample did not provide enough statistical power to detect the effects of men's reports of avoidance, suggesting that this result will need to be replicated in the future.

While there is strong evidence for the deleterious effects of avoidance on satisfaction, there is also evidence for an association between couples' avoidance and depression. Avoidance has been associated with depressive symptoms in married

couples (Marchand & Hock, 2000) and there is evidence that women in distressed relationships use avoidance as a strategy to protect themselves from depression (Heene, Buysse, & Van Oost, 2005). While Study 1 and Study 2 did not examine whether the couples were depressed, these findings suggest that some forms of avoidance are implicated in spouses' depressive symptomatology.

In relation to the clinical applications of the communication patterns, there appears to be advantages to examining couples' communication patterns. There is some evidence from controlled studies that distressed couples gain better long-term benefits from developing insights into their relationship patterns than from skill-based communication interventions (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Snyder, Wills, & Grady-Fletcher, 1991). Thus it would seem that assessing couples' conflict communication patterns is an important first step in helping couples to understand the predominant patterns they employ when negotiating conflict. Another advantage to looking at communication patterns is that it enables a shift in the individual's focus from the partner to the relationship, and thus seeks to avoid blame. There is also evidence that distressed spouses tend to blame their partners for marital problems (Fincham, 1985). A shift in view from the partner as the problem to relationship patterns as the problem, may be a further reason why examining patterns may provide better long-term outcomes for couples in therapy.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been one of the most important outcome variables for researchers examining marital relationships (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Many marriages start out as the source of great satisfaction and promise, but a third of Australian first marriages end up in divorce, suggesting

many marriages are less than satisfying (A.B.S., 2007b). Marriage often provides a guard against health problems (Williams & Umberson, 2004) and married individuals report greater well-being (Williams, 2003), and while marital relationships become more stable over time, they also become less satisfying (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Research into marital satisfaction then, may help to identify the factors implicated in dissatisfaction, and ultimately, in divorce. Dissatisfaction may also presage more serious clinical problems, which is a further reason to examine this important variable.

Couples' reports of satisfaction may be an important indicator of their vulnerability to depression and other disorders (Whisman, 2007). Weissman (1987), for example, found that married individuals who were not getting along with their partners were 25 times more likely to have a diagnosis of depression than individuals in happy marriages. Similarly, dissatisfied spouses were nearly three times more likely than satisfied spouses to develop a major depressive episode (MDE) and nearly 30 per cent of new occurrences of MDE were associated with marital dissatisfaction (Whisman & Bruce, 1999). There is also evidence for a reciprocal relationship between dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms in that marital dissatisfaction has been found to predict increases in depressive symptoms over time (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003; Beach & O'Leary, 1993) and depressive symptoms have predicted decreases in satisfaction (Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tochluk, 1997; Kurdek, 1998). Satisfaction is clearly an important construct for therapists working with couples and ratings of satisfaction need to be considered by therapists developing treatment plans for couples.

There is also evidence that for depressed spouses, couples therapy is more effective than therapy that simply targets the depressive symptoms. In a study examining attributions about depression, the majority of women in discordant marriages indicated that their martial problems preceded or caused their depression (O'Leary,

Riso, & Beach, 1990). When women who made these attributions were treated with marital therapy their satisfaction scores increased significantly, but when treated by cognitive therapy alone their depression improved but their satisfaction decreased (O'Leary et al., 1990). This suggests that if marital dissatisfaction contributed to the depressive symptoms, then it is the couple, rather than the individual that needs to be treated. These findings highlight the importance of examining couples' satisfaction and the contribution satisfaction can make to spouses' mental health.

Trait EI, Avoidance and Relationship Satisfaction

In bringing all the variables together, the studies provide support for aspects of Karney and Bradbury's (1995) Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model of marital development. They argued that personality, as an enduring vulnerability, is an intrapersonal variable and that once its effect on satisfaction is realized – usually early in the relationship – the effect will remain stable over time. Study 1 provided preliminary evidence for this contention by showing that an individual's self-rated trait EI predicted satisfaction. In support of the stable effect of self-rated trait EI, Study 2 demonstrated that the effect was constant over the 12-month period and that trait EI was not associated with changes in satisfaction during this period. This supports Karney and Bradbury's (1997) research that found that neuroticism had a stable effect on satisfaction over time and was not associated with changes in satisfaction.

According to Karney and Bradbury's theory (1995), after the effect of personality has been realized, it is interpersonal processes, such as communication, that predict changes in couples' satisfaction over time. Study 2 tested this contention and found that women's reports of avoidance and withholding predicted declines in both men's and women's reports of satisfaction. This finding again supported Karney and

Bradbury's (1997) study, and provides evidence that, over time, it is couples' interpersonal processes (e.g. communication), and not their enduring vulnerabilities (e.g. personalities), that predict changes in their satisfaction.

Conclusion

The current project examined the influences of self-rated trait EI and couples' communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of heterosexual cohabiting couples. To date, no study has examined the influences of trait EI and communication patterns on the relationship satisfaction of both partners. Two studies were conducted, and both used statistical modelling techniques to analyse both actor and partner effects, to gain a more complete understanding of couple processes. Study 1 used a cross-sectional approach to examine the variables, while Study 2 analysed the effects over a 12-month period. The studies found a number of interesting and important effects that help to provide a greater understanding of relationship satisfaction.

In the first study, only actor effects were found, indicating that an individual's variables were the strongest predictors of his or her satisfaction. It was also clear that an individual's self-rated trait EI predicted their relationship satisfaction. When examining estimates of spouses' trait EI, individuals who tended to idealize their partner's trait EI reported greater satisfaction, as did those who reported that their partner had similar levels of trait EI. In relation to the communication patterns in the first study, an individual's reports of the avoidance and withholding communication pattern was the strongest cross-sectional predictor of satisfaction. In the second study, there was evidence that the effect of an individual's self-reported trait EI on their satisfaction was stable over time. However, when it came to communication patterns, women's reports

of the avoidance and withholding pattern of communication predicted declines in satisfaction for both men and women.

Altogether, these results provide evidence for the utility of self-rated trait EI in predicting spouses' satisfaction. The effect of trait EI was evident cross-sectionally and longitudinally, suggesting the importance of this personality trait. However, the strongest and most salient finding was the corrosive effect of couples' avoidance on spousal satisfaction. Cross-sectionally, a pattern of avoidance was the strongest predictor of spouses' satisfaction, while longitudinally, women's reports of avoidance resulted in declines in both spouses' satisfaction. This suggests that for long-term cohabiting couples, a pattern of avoidance results in decreases in satisfaction. The results also highlight the importance of women's role in couples' communication.

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Appendix A

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY 1

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY

Relationship satisfaction is an important focus for psychologists wanting to tailor effective therapeutic approaches for couples seeking therapy. As part of the requirements of the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree, I am conducting research into the factors determining the relationship satisfaction of co-habiting couples. The project is being conducted through the University of Wollongong and is supervised by Associate Professor Patrick Heaven.

The study examines the effects of communication patterns and personality on the relationship satisfaction of co-habiting couples. The study also examines how relationship satisfaction changes over time. As a participant, you are asked to complete a questionnaire for Phase 1 of the study, and later, in 12 months' time, to complete the same questionnaire for Phase 2 of the study. In order to contact you in the future, it will be necessary to collect your contact details. Please add your contact details to the Consent Form. Note that your contact details will *not* be linked to the questionnaire. Furthermore, a code will be created based on your birth date so that the first questionnaire can be linked to the second questionnaire. This code, however, will not be linked to your contact details. Both questionnaires will be completed anonymously and in private, and it is important that you do not discuss the questionnaire with your partner until the questionnaires have been sealed in the large envelope. The data you provide will be used for my thesis for the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree and for journal articles arising out of the research.

Having volunteered to participate in this study, please take the time to complete the questionnaire as honestly and truthfully as possible. Remember, each person has their own private views and *there are no right or wrong answers*. Note that your partner will complete an identical questionnaire and that both questionnaires will be linked, although they will remain anonymous. Please do not write your name or address on the questionnaire. When you have completed the survey, please place both questionnaires in the large stamped envelope. The small stamped envelope is for the two consent forms. This way, the questionnaires and consent forms (with your contact details) will remain separate.

If you have any questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the Secretary, University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Lynne Smith

Supervisor: Associate Professor Patrick Heaven (02) 4221 3742

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY 1

[ON UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG LETTERHEAD]

[To identify the source of participants in Study 1, consent forms and questionnaires were printed on colour paper. White paper for general participants; green paper for Anglicare; and yellow paper for Relationships Australia.]

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

CONSENT FORM

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY

I hereby consent to participate in a study of communication patterns, personality and relationship satisfaction. I understand that the project is as described on the Information Sheet and that I will complete a series of survey questions. I also understand that the data I provide will be used for research purposes only and that I consent to the data being used in that manner. I know that the information will be kept confidential, and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the envelopes are opened. I also acknowledge that I am not currently being treated for a psychiatric disorder and I have no serious physical health problems. Furthermore, I understand that the study will be conducted in two phases, and I consent to being contacted to participate in the second phase of the study.

Signed: ……………………………..…………………………………………………

Dated: ..……………………………..…………………………………………………

Name: ..……………………………..…………………………………………………

Postal address: ..………………………….………………………………………..…..

Phone number: ..………………………….……………………………………………..

Appendix C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2

Please provide us with the following background information:

1. Age (years):

2. Date of birth (dd/mm/yy):

3. Gender (please circle): 1. Male 2. Female

4. Are you and your partner married? 1. Yes 2. No

5. For how long have you been living with your partner or spouse?

   (a) Less than 1 yr (b) less than 3 yrs (c) 3 to 5 yrs (d) 6 to 10 yrs
   (e) longer than 10yrs

6. What is your postcode?

7. What is the highest level of education that you have reached (circle letter)

   (a) Less than year 10
   (b) Completed year 10
   (c) Completed year 12
   (d) Completed TAFE course
   (e) Completed university course

8. What is YOUR annual income? (circle letter)

   (a) $0 - $19 999 per year
   (b) $20 000–$29 999 per year
   (c) $30 000–$39 999 per year
   (d) $40 000–$49 999 per year
   (e) $50 000 –$59 999 per year
   (f) More than $60, 000 per year

9. What is your COMBINED HOUSEHOLD income? (circle letter)

   (a) Less than $39 999 per year
   (b) $40 000–$59 999 per year
   (c) $60 000–$79 999 per year
   (d) $80 000–$99 999 per year
   (e) More than $100 000 per year

Appendix D

TEIQUE FOR SELF-RATING FOR STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2

Please answer each statement below by putting a circle around the number that best reflects your degree of agreement or disagreement with that statement. Do not think too long about the exact meaning of the statements. Work quickly and try to answer as accurately as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. There are seven possible responses to each statement ranging from 1 (= 'Completely Disagree') to 7 (='Completely Agree').

1 . . . . .2 . . . . .3 . . . . .4 . . . . 5 . . . . .6 7

Completely Disagree — **Completely Agree**

Statement							
1. Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I often find it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. On the whole, I'm a highly motivated person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I generally don't find life enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I can deal effectively with people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I tend to change my mind frequently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Many times, I can't figure out what emotion I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I often find it difficult to stand up for my rights.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I'm usually able to influence the way other people feel.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. On the whole, I have a gloomy perspective on most things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Those close to me often complain that I don't treat them right.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 . . . . 5 . . . . 6 7

Completely Disagree — **Completely Agree**

14. I often find it difficult to adjust my life according to the circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. On the whole, I'm able to deal with stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I often find it difficult to show my affection to those close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I'm normally able to "get into someone's shoes" and experience their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I normally find it difficult to keep myself motivated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I'm usually able to find ways to control my emotions when I want to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. On the whole, I'm pleased with my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I would describe myself as a good negotiator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I tend to get involved in things I later wish I could get out of.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I often pause and think about my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I believe I'm full of personal strengths.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I tend to "back down" even if I know I'm right.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I don't seem to have any power at all over other people's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. I find it difficult to bond well even with those close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Generally, I'm able to adapt to new environments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Others admire me for being relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix E

TEIQUE FOR RATING OF SPOUSE FOR STUDY 1

Please answer each statement below by putting a circle around the number that best reflects your degree of agreement or disagreement with that statement. Do not think too long about the exact meaning of the statements. Work quickly and try to answer as accurately as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. There are seven possible responses to each statement ranging from 1 (= 'Completely Disagree') to 7 (='Completely Agree').

1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 . . . . 5 . . . . 6 7

Completely Disagree — **Completely Agree**

Statement							
1. Expressing emotions with words is not a problem for my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My partner often finds it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. On the whole, my partner is a highly motivated person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My partner usually finds it difficult to regulate his/her emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My partner generally does not find life enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My partner can deal effectively with people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. My partner tends to change his/her mind frequently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Many times, my partner can't figure out what emotion he/she is feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. My partner feels they have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My partner often finds it difficult to stand up for their rights.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. My partner is usually able to influence the way other people feel.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. On the whole, my partner has a gloomy perspective on most things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Those close to my partner often complain that he/she does not treat them right.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. . . . . . . .2 . . . . .3 . . . . 4 . . . . 5 . . . . 6 7

Completely Disagree							**Completely Agree**
14. My partner often finds it difficult to adjust his/her life according to the circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. On the whole, my partner is able to deal with stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. My partner often finds it difficult to show his/her affection to those who are close to him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. My partner is normally able to “get into someone’s shoes” and experience their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My partner normally finds it difficult to keep motivated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. My partner is usually able to find ways to control their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. On the whole, my partner is pleased with his/her life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My partner would describe him/herself as a good negotiator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My partner tends to get involved in things he/she later wishes he/she could get out of.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. My partner often pauses and thinks about his/her feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. My partner believes he/she is full of personal strengths.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My partner tends to “back down” even if he/she knows he/she is right.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My partner doesn’t seem to have any power at all over other people’s feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. My partner generally believes that things will work out fine in his/her life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. My partner finds it difficult to bond well even with those close to him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Generally, my partner is able to adapt to new environments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Others admire my partner for being relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix F

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2

We are interested in how you and your partner typically deal with problems in your relationship. Please rate ***each item*** on a scale of 1 (= very *un*likely) to 9 (= very likely). Circle the number that best describes how you and your partner deal with the issues.

	Very unlike us								Very like us
A. When some problem in the relationship arises,									
1. Both members avoid discussing the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. Both members try to discuss the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. Man tries to start a discussion while Woman tries to avoid a discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman tries to start a discussion while Man tries to avoid a discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
B. During a discussion of a relationship problem,									
1. Both members blame, accuse, and criticize each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. Both members express their feelings to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. Both members threaten each other with negative consequences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. Man nags and demands while Woman withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Very unlike us								Very like us
Woman nags and demands while Man withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. Man criticizes while Woman defends herself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman criticizes while Man defends himself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. Man pressures Woman to take some action or stop some action, while Woman resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pressures Man to take some action or stop some action, while Man resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. Man expresses feelings while Woman offers reasons and solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman expresses feelings while Man offers reasons and solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. Man threatens negative consequences and Woman gives in or backs down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman threatens negative consequences and Man gives in or backs down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. Man calls Woman names, swears at her, or attacks her character.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman calls Man names, swears at him, or attack his character.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. Man pushes, shoves, slaps, hits, or kicks Woman.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pushes, shoves, slaps, hits, or kicks Man.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

C. After a discussion of a relationship problem,

1. Both feel each other has understood his/her position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. Both withdraw from each other after the discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Very unlike us						Very like us		
3. Both feel that the problem has been solved.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. Neither partner is giving to the other after the discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. After the discussion, both try to be especially nice to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. Man feels guilty for what he said or did while Woman feels hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman feels guilty for what she said or did while Man feels hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. Man tries to be especially nice, acts as if things are back to normal, while Woman acts distant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman tries to be especially nice, acts as if things are back to normal, while Man acts distant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. Man pressures Woman to apologize or promise to do better, while Woman resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pressures Man to apologize or promise to do better, while Man resists	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. Man seeks support from others (parent, friend, children)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman seeks support from others (parent, friend, children)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Appendix G

SATISFACTION SCALE FROM PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP QUALITY COMPONENTS INVENTORY FOR STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2

Circle the item that best describes your partner and your relationship. Please rate ***each item*** on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely).

	Not at all				Extremely		
1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. How content are you with your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. How happy are you with your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix H

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY 2

COMMUNICATION, PERSONALITY AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

As part of the requirements of the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree, I am conducting research into the factors determining the relationship satisfaction of co-habiting couples. The project is being conducted through the University of Wollongong and is supervised by Associate Professor Patrick Heaven.

The current study is the final stage of a two-stage study. The first study, in which you participated last year, examined the effects of communication patterns and personality on relationship satisfaction. This second study examines how relationship satisfaction changes over time. As part of the first study we asked for your consent to contact you for the second study and you provided us with your contact details.

As a participant, you are asked to complete a questionnaire based on the same questionnaire you completed last year. Please note your contact details will *not* be linked to the questionnaire. In the first questionnaire we asked you to provide your birth date so that we could link your two questionnaires. Again, we will ask for your birth date. However, your birth date has not been, nor will it be, linked to your contact details. Both questionnaires need to be completed confidentially and in private. The data you provide will be used for my thesis for the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree and for journal articles arising out of the research.

Having volunteered to participate in this study, please take the time to complete the questionnaire as honestly and truthfully as possible. Remember, each person has their own private views and *there are no right or wrong answers*. Note that your partner will be asked to complete an identical questionnaire and that both questionnaires will be linked, although they will remain confidential. Please do not write your name or address on the questionnaire. When you have completed the survey, please place both questionnaires in the large envelope. The small envelope is for the two consent forms. This way, the questionnaires and consent forms (with your names) will remain separate. All envelopes will be opened together at the University of Wollongong and it will not be possible to identify individuals. Please return the questionnaires by 31 August 2007.

If you have any questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the Secretary, University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Lynne Smith

Supervisor: Associate Professor Patrick Heaven (02) 4221 3742

Appendix I

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY 2

[ON UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG LETTERHEAD]

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

CONSENT FORM

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY

I hereby consent to participate in a second study of communication patterns, personality and relationship satisfaction. I understand that the project is as described on the Information Sheet and that I will complete a series of survey questions. I also understand that the data I provide will be used for research purposes only and that I consent to the data being used in that manner. I know that the information will be kept confidential, and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the envelopes are opened. I also acknowledge that I am not currently being treated for a psychiatric disorder and I have no serious physical health problems.

Name: …..…………………………………..

Signed: …..…………………………………..

Dated: …………………………………….