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## Race-related Stress, Resiliency, and Relationship Quality in Black Couples

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RACE-RELATED STRESS, RESILIENCY, AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN  
BLACK COUPLES

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Family Sciences in the College  
of Agriculture, Food and Environment  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Melinda Murdock

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Nathan D. Wood, Professor of Family Sciences

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2020

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### RACE-RELATED STRESS, RESILIENCY, AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN BLACK COUPLES

Scholars have historically explained Black marriage patterns of instability and dissolution based on White middle-class models that ignore cultural factors and maintain a narrative of dysfunction. The current study examines resilience in Black couples by exploring mediation effects of attribution and dyadic coping processes on race-related stress and relationship quality. The present study used individual data from 131 middle-income Black couples residing in the South, who self-reported on stress, coping, and relationship quality via online survey. Dyadic Coping was predicted to mediate the relationship between Race-related Stress, Attribution, and Relationship quality. Results indicated that individuals who experienced greater stress from everyday experiences with racial discrimination were associated with perceiving more unsupportive behaviors from their partner, ultimately reporting less positive and more negative evaluations of relationship quality. Findings demonstrate the deleterious effects of racism on relational quality, reinforcing the call for societal change as it pertains to Black relationships.

KEYWORDS: Black couples, racial discrimination, resilience, relationship quality .

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May 15, 2020

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## CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.2 Introduction

Black couples have the lowest marriage rate and are more likely to experience instability, divorce, or dissolution than any other racial group in the United States (Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015). Researchers have tended to investigate structural factors (e.g., education, income, occupational status, and presence of children) rather than interpersonal processes to explain these patterns (Orbuch, 2002). Furthermore, a vast majority of studies on Black heterosexual couples are based on a heteronormative, White, middle-class model (e.g., Proulx, Ermer, & Kanter, 2017); do not consider the impact of racial discrimination on relationship dynamics among Black couples (e.g., Broman, 2005; Lei et al., 2016); or are deficiency-focused (Bulanda & Brown, 2006; Cutrona et al., 2011; Lavner et al., 2018).

Research examining the deleterious effects of discrimination on individuals and couples is imperative. In addition, and consistent with recent calls for a strengths-based approach to understanding relationship quality and flourishing (e.g., Galovan & Schram, 2018; Ogolsky, 2017), studies of resiliency in Black couples are needed (e.g., Murray et al., 2018; Smith & Landor, 2018). Specifically, studies exploring relational processes that may act as a buffer to race-related stressors are needed. In effort to shed insight on marriage disparities, relationship processes dyadic coping and attribution are examined as mediators of race-related stress on relationship quality. The focus in the present study is to capture resiliency in Black couple relationships through support relational processes mitigate the impact of racial discrimination.

### 1.2.1 Black Marriage Patterns

According to Banks (2012), the dilemma with Black marriage is Black heterosexual women remain unmarried because their marriage market is small (i.e., not enough marriage-quality Black men), whereas Black heterosexual men remain unmarried because their marriage market is large (i.e., too many marriage-quality Black women). When similarity in educational and socio-economic background are important prerequisites to marriage, and Black women have surpassed their male counterparts in educational attainment, marrying within one's racial group or –marrying at all, is becoming increasingly unlikely (Banks, 2012). When Black men marry, they are more likely than Black women to marry interracially. Therefore, interracial marriage comes into play for Black women because it could raise their rate of marriage or couple relationships (Banks, 2012). Nevertheless, Black marriage rates remain low as the marriage market for interracial marriage increases and the market for Black marriage decreases.

Marriage provides numerous psychosocial benefits, while Black marriage also provides cultural benefits (e.g., shared racial and ethnic identity, social networks, and religiosity) important for relationship longevity and vitality (Bryant et al., 2018; Philip, Wilmoth, Marks, 2012). Therefore, deficits in Black marriage eliminate an essential and intimate source of cultural psychosocial to the Black individual, family, and community health. For example, family scholars have found that marital patterns—and corresponding family structures—among Black Americans are associated with children's life trajectories. Crosnoe and Wildsmith (2011) found children born to unmarried women tended to have poorer educational trajectories. As it pertains to marriage, this is particularly important for Black Americans who have leading rates of non-marital births in the U.S. (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2017). As mentioned earlier, Black women are less likely to marry Black men with a less educational attainment, evidence that non-marital births have a generational and cyclic impact on marriage patterns (Banks, 2012). Nonetheless, Black family life and outcomes cannot be fully understood by marital status and family structure alone; historical, structural, and social context also matter.

The long-term effects of slavery continue to reverberate among Black families today. Whereas families and marriages were once broken from separation during slavery, they are now broken by the mass incarceration of Black men. The multigenerational, cultural, relational, and emotional consequences of slavery and racism have profoundly affected both structural and relational outcomes for Black Americans (Awosan & Opara, 2017; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Shifts in demographics from incarceration, continued mundane and institutional racism is among many reasons race is associated with economic disadvantage (Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015). Focusing on structural factors have allowed scholars to primarily treat race and ethnicity as peripheral variables and moderators, or to control and account for group differences in studies (Murray, 2018; Orbuch, 2002). For example, scholars often find that factors such as financial instability, low income, low education, and cohabitation are associated with relatively poor marital outcomes (e.g., Bulanda & Brown, 2006; Cutrona et al., 2011).

Structural and economic changes have shifted marriage patterns for all racial groups by redefining the meaning and purpose of marriage; marriage has become less of a financial and reproductive necessity and more of an emotional partnership (Awosan & Opara, 2017). For example, education is positively associated with economic stability independent of marriage, and thus educational attainment among Black women is negatively associated

with the likelihood of marriage (Banks, 2012; Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015). However, linking structural factors to marriage patterns only partially explains low marriage rates for Black Americans. Culture-specific factors, such as racial discrimination, also contribute to the marriage gap between Blacks and other racial groups by negatively impacting marital quality and well-being (Bryant et al., 2010; Richman & Leary, 2009). To understand how racial discrimination can contribute to marital discord and dissolution, race-related stress must be examined.

### 1.2.2 Racism, Race-related Stress, and Racial Identity

Racism can be either overt or covert, embedded in the social structure of institutions, such as the justice system, that perpetuate the oppression of minorities (Essed, 1991). Institutions that are oppressive are those that operate on distorted social values or views that become routine (Essed, 1991; Hernandez-Wolfe, 2014). As discriminatory beliefs remain unchallenged, whether out of ignorance or indifference, those who fail to challenge said beliefs no longer are potential agents of social change but now participants and beneficiaries of institutional oppression. Racism at its core is an interpersonal rejection (Essed, 1991). Regardless if perceived or objectively experienced, racism has important implications for one's thoughts, emotions, motives, behaviors, and overall biopsychosocial health (Awosan & Opara, 2017; Richman & Leary, 2009). Racial discrimination is corrosive to well-being because it is; (a) interpersonal (b) cumulative and (c) accompanied with non-interpersonal stressors (e.g., Frans, Rimmo, Aberg, & Fredrikson, 2005), resulting in cascading effects on one's health overtime.

Race-related stress is a result of reoccurring experiences with discrimination that cause physiological (e.g., hypertension and immune deficiency), psychological (e.g.,

depression and anxiety), and socioemotional harm (e.g., anger and withdrawal) to those who experience it (Awosan & Opara, 2017; Clark et al., 1999; Richman & Leary, 2009). How Black couples manage stress and adversity over time, is still a phenomena scholars are grappling to understand (Murray et al., 2018; Anderson, 2019). Lei et al. (2016) offer insight into how couples manage racial adversity through romantic relationship satisfaction as a mediator between contextual stress and physiological stress response. They found a negative and reciprocal association between contextual stress and romantic relationship satisfaction, demonstrating couple relationships act as a buffer to stressors through perceived satisfaction. Though the stressor variable examined in this study did not include minority or race-related stress, their findings suggest how couples cope in their relationship influences how they cope with outside stress.

Racial identity is an important factor regarding how Black couples manage race-related stress and remain resilient overtime. Racial identity can be defined as an individual's conceptualization of self as it pertains to their racial group membership and their perception of that membership (Thomas, 2010). Racial identity is how an individual makes meaning of their identity, messages about race, culture, and experiences with racism. Racial discrimination has been found to be indirectly associated with racial identity (Seaton, Morgan-Lopez, Sellers, & Yip, 2012). For example, scholars have found that identity moderates the relationship between racial discrimination and mental health (Sellers, 2003). In other words, one's racial identity can buffer the adverse effects of racism on mental health, which may be a protective mechanism for Black couples. Other definitions describe racial identity as the extent to which members of an ethnic group place importance on their cultural heritage (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000). Cross and

Vandiver (2001) revised model of Nigresence explains how racial identity develops in four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization-commitment.

Pre-encounter is described as being largely unaware of race or implications associated with race, in addition to idealizing dominant White culture. Encounter is described as acknowledging race or the impact of racism in one's life and the beginning of the exploration of Black identity. Immersion-emersion is when one has an idealization of Black people, immerses themselves in Black history and culture, while also having an avoidance of whiteness by denigration of White people. Internalization is described as being secure in one's sense of racial identity, using Black as a primary reference group, and holding pluralistic, nonracist perspectives.

### 1.2.3 An Integrative-sociocultural Framework of Couple Resiliency

The following frameworks provide a lens for understanding how Black couples maintain relationship stability while experiencing race-related stress. A common theory used to examine stress on romantic relationships is the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model (VSA, Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The VSA model suggests couple relationship quality is contingent upon enduring vulnerabilities, stressors, and adaptive processes between partners. Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT, Baker, 1976) offers a culturally sensitive lens for treatment of Black couples in couple therapy. RCT extends the VSA model by explaining relational outcomes within the context of disconnection as a vulnerability, marginalization as a stressor, and mutual empathy as an adaptive process. RCT proposes: (a) oppression operates on an institutional level while marginalization occurs on an interpersonal level, (b) individuals have the need to connect with others; however, vulnerabilities of shame, isolation, and oppression from discrimination cause

disconnection, and (c) violations of connection can only be healed by new and empathic interpersonal connections (Clark et al., 2009; Comstock et al., 2008).

Healing for Black couples dealing with everyday discrimination becomes a matter of breaking the cycle of interpersonal rejection that leads to the withdrawal and avoidance of forming new healing connections. RCT refers to this cycle as the central relational paradox; disconnection that protects the individual but also inhibits them from reconnection (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Disconnection is a product of the stress caused by rejecting experiences of marginalization, which creates vulnerability and threatens relational self-efficacy. Empathy counters the stress response from rejection by reversing avoidance behaviors and fostering adaption through relational reconnection (Baker, 1976; Richman & Leary, 2009).

To further explain how couples adapt to their partner's stress and create reconnection through empathy, Galovan and Schram's (2018) theoretical concept of ethical relationality is introduced. Their model proposes we respond to others in two ways; I—it, which is to minimize others to their behaviors, traits, or characteristics or I—thou, to acknowledge others holistically as more than the labels we reduce them to. Factors that influence either response are partner stress, responsiveness, and relational-connectivity (Galovan & Schramm, 2018). Daily interpersonal rejections from others—either subtle or explicitly racist, are in nature I—It experiences. Therefore, this model is useful in understanding how Black couple relationships are a safe haven when: (a) the individual attributes their partner's race-related stress to an external threat, (b) empathically responds and reconnects, (c) healing is achieved through mitigation of marginalizing experiences. I

propose that when couples accomplish this adaptive process, they demonstrate resiliency and enhance their relationship quality.

#### 1.2.4 A Review of the Literature on Black Marriage

Much of the literature on Black relationships draw assumptions about marital quality using White, heteronormative middle-class samples. Excluding diverse groups does not consider variation in marital style or other influencing factors and risks generating inaccurate measurement and assessment of marital quality (Broman, 2005). Bryant et al. (2010) introduced A Model Depicting Factors Associated with African American Outcomes considering stressors and demographic characteristics (e.g., racial discrimination, minority status, and financial strain) that directly and indirectly influence couple relationships overtime. Scholars proposed the social effects from exposure to high levels of racial discrimination impact psychosocial resources (e.g., emotional distress, religiosity, and racial identity) and couple interactions (e.g., egalitarian, warm, and hostile behaviors) which mediate the relationship between marital quality and minority stress (Bryant et al., 2010). For example, religiosity and egalitarian behaviors mediate the relationship between financial strain and marital stability.

Studies that include racially and ethnically diverse samples frequently do not examine racial discrimination as an influencing factor on marital quality, leading scholars to arrive at conclusions of pathology and dysfunction about minority populations. Past scholars have focused on demonstrating differences between race, as opposed to exploring within-group differences (Bryant et al., 2010). For example, in a race-comparative study between Black and White couples Broman (2005) proposed race is a proxy for spouse behavior. Broman (2005) concluded Black couples were more likely to report negative

spouse behaviors (e.g., having affairs, hitting, wasting money, and less likely to feel loved by spouse), explaining differences in marital quality between Black and White couples. This observation implies race determines one's tendency to be aggressive and disloyal in relationships. Contrarily, other scholars argue relational processes that determine marital quality are quite similar between Black and White couples, however, the interpretation and expectations of those interactions differ based on cultural, social, and structural context (Orbuch, 1999; 2002).

Recently, some scholars have studied diverse samples and examined racial discrimination to explain differences in Black couple relationships. Many of these studies have been deficiency-focused, maintaining a problem-saturated narrative around the patterns we see in Black marriage today. Lavner, Barton, Bryant, and Beach (2018) explored the relationship between racial discrimination and couple functioning by examining psychological and physical aggression in African American couples. It was found partners experiencing high levels of racial discrimination within the last six months self-reported more physical or psychological aggressive tendencies (i.e., threatening or insulting partner). Findings suggest stress developed by experiences with racial discrimination create maladaptive coping responses within couple interactions. Examining resiliency in Black couples allows us to study adaptive processes instead of maintaining a deficiency narrative around Blackness. Similarly, scholars have decided to approach relationship quality from this perspective; studying positive outcomes instead of assuming healthy relationship quality is the absence of negative outcomes.

### 1.2.5 A Positive Approach to Romantic Relationships

Marriage scholars are taking a positive approach to measuring relationship quality, satisfaction, and functioning (e.g., Fincham, 1992; Fowers, 2016; Ledermann Bodenmann, 2012; Mattson et al., 2012), introducing more effective ways to assess relationship quality. Previously marital quality has been measured; (a) assessing quality only as individual satisfaction, (b) defining the construct of satisfaction narrowly, and (c) examining relationship satisfaction as the absence of negative evaluations (Fowers, 2016; Mattson & Rogge, 2012). Addressing these limitations, Fowers (2016) proposed the assessment of relationship flourishing. Relationship flourishing is when a partner's mutual interest is to further their partner's well-being through relational activities that have shared meaning, personal growth, goal sharing, and relational giving (Fowers, 2016). These four areas highlight meaningful activities that transcend individual satisfaction and emphasize partner-interested actions.

Mattson and Rogge (2012) also addressed criticisms of previous ways to assess relationship satisfaction, calling for the measurement of positive and negative dimensions of relationship quality. Assessing satisfaction as two-dimensional suggests positive and negative evaluations of the relationships are distinctly associated with relationship functioning (Mattson & Rogge, 2012). Typically, satisfaction measures are one dimensional and place responses on a single continuum (e.g., extremely happy to perfectly happy), assuming satisfaction and dissatisfaction are polar opposites (Mattson and Rogge, 2012). Similarly, scholars assess relationship processes as being uni-dimensional (Bodenmann and Ledermann et al., 2008; 2010). Dyadic coping is defined as a couples ability to respond positively or negatively to one another when under stress. Supportive

dyadic coping involves helping with tasks, displaying empathy, problem solving, and sharing feelings. Negative dyadic coping is reflected by unwillingness to offer support (e.g., ambivalence, hostility, and superficial).

In addition to dyadic coping, Ogolsky et al. (2017) also found attribution to also be a salient strategy in relationship maintenance and mitigation of environmental stressors. Attribution in romantic relationships is the explanation a partner ascribes to their partner's behaviors and the extent to which their partner is responsible (Fincham 1992; Ogolsky et al., 2017). The cause of the behavior can either be located in the partner, in themselves, or by some other situational or external factor to the relationship (Fincham, 1992). I propose when couples externalize their partner's stress as being caused by race-related factors, they successfully use threat mitigation strategies. Threat mitigation is a concept introduced by Ogolsky et al. (2017) that describes a couple's ability to regulate forces that threaten relationship satisfaction and stability. Positive attributions have been found to be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction and happiness (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990), therefore attribution and dyadic coping strategies can be protective and adaptive processes to race-related stress.

#### 1.2.6 Family Resilience: A Model for Couple Resiliency

Research using a culture-specific lens to examine Black couple resiliency is scarce; therefore, it is useful to draw from models of family resilience (Bryant et al., 2010). Walsh (2016) defines resilience as family processes –depending on context, developmental phase, and risk and protective factors –that mediate stressful conditions before, after, and during crisis and prolonged hardship. Walsh's (2016) model proposes resiliency is when family processes become long-term adaptation to stressors, although pileup of stress can

counteract these processes (Walsh, 2016). This model is useful in understanding how families forge resilience in the wake of crisis, however, it offers few implications for how Black families maintain adaptive processes while often experiencing both crisis and ongoing hardships from sociocultural stressors.

Smith and Landor (2018) introduce the Sociocultural Family Stress (SFS) model which considers intersectional and sociocultural factors that influence African American families' ability to maintain and adapt to stress. Identified in this model are culture-specific resources and coping strategies such as; (i.e., spirituality and religion, racial identity and socialization, extended family and kin networks, egalitarianism, and family cohesion) that are integral to African American's stress response processes (Murray et al., 2018; Smith & Landor, 2018). Their model proposes that resiliency is dependent on (a) resources and coping strategies, (b) perceptions, and (c) degree of stress (Smith & Landor, 2018). The SFS model proves to be a useful framework for couple resiliency in that it demonstrates; (a) dyadic coping as a strategy, (b) attribution as perception of race-related stress, and (c) everyday racial discrimination as a measure of stress degree. All of which are pertinent factors to Black couple's ability to cope with stress, demonstrate resiliency, and maintain healthy relationship quality.

It is also important to mention Anderson's (2019) consideration of potential risks when assuming resiliency and long-term stability and viability for Black couple relationships. Family science scholars have traditionally glorified the Black community's ability to push forward in the face of historical and contextual adversity, without acknowledging the long-term physical and psychological damage that often accompanies resiliency (Anderson, 2019). Anderson (2019) argued family scientists fail to advocate

second-order change; the need for social justice activism to counteract oppressive institutions. For Black couples this can mean, despite experiencing racial adversity, they may demonstrate resilience but overtime relational stability and viability is compromised. It would be irresponsible to explore protective relational processes without acknowledging the equally imperative need for structural change to occur in the environment these couples live.

### 1.3 Hypotheses

The goal of this study was to analyze existing relationship strategies to identify couple processes that are salient to relationship quality for Black couples using a strengths-based perspective. I predicted the following correlations based on hypothetical relationships between race-related stress, causal attribution, dyadic coping, and relationship quality (see Figure 1.1). I hypothesized (a) a positive relationship between race-related stress and attribution, (b) a positive relationship between causal attribution and supportive dyadic coping, (c) a positive relationship between responsible attribution and negative dyadic coping, (d) a positive relationship between dyadic coping and relationship quality, and (e) dyadic coping will mediate the relationship between race-related stress, causal attribution, and relationship quality (see Figure 2.1).

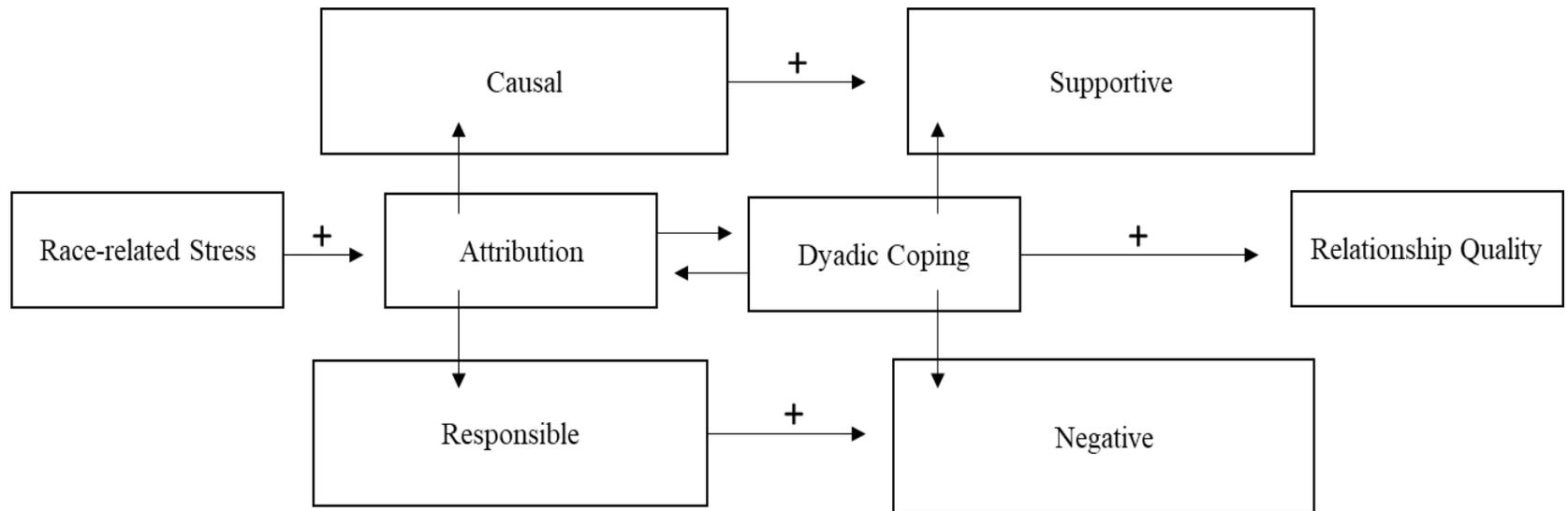


Figure 1.1 The Hypothetical Relationship Between Race-related Stress, Causal Attribution, Dyadic Coping, and Relationship Quality

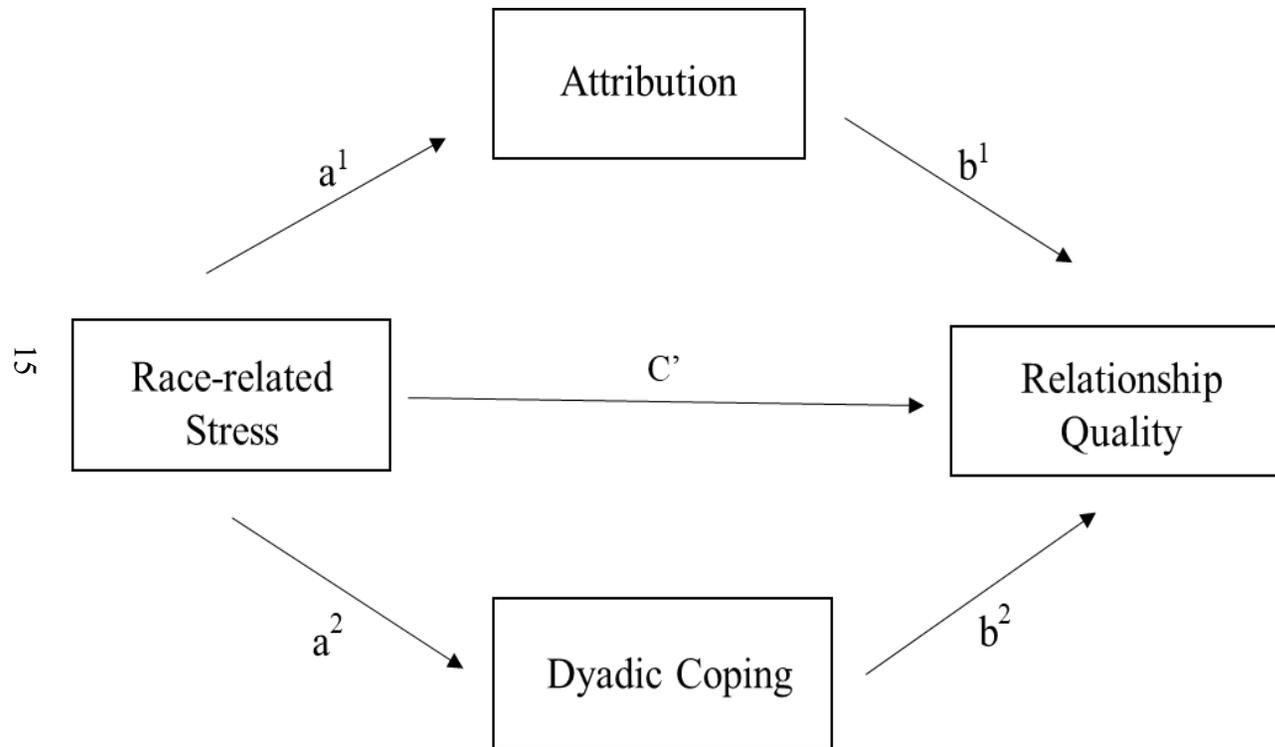


Figure 2.1 Path Model for the Mediation of Causal Attribution and Dyadic Coping on Race-related Stress and Relationship Quality

## CHAPTER 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Participants

Participants in the study were 131 (100 female, 31 male) individuals who identified as Black or African American between 18 and 69 years of age who were in dating, engaged, or married relationships (95.4% had been in their current relationship a year or longer). A small majority of participants (55.7%) had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 72.7% of participants resided in the Southern region of the United States. For more details on sample demographics, see Table 1.1. To meet the inclusion criteria, participants needed to identify as Black or African American, regardless of ethnicity, and at least 6 months into a committed heterosexual relationship with a partner who also identified as Black or African American.

### 2.2 Procedures

The research flyer advertisement received approval from UK Public Relations. Flyers were posted around the University of Kentucky campus, and included a brief description of the study, participant criteria, a survey link, and my contact information. Ads posted on social media platforms, such as; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, included a digital copy of the flyer. Advertisements were posted on profiles, timelines, and stories using hashtags and other key words. Before participants were recruited in-person, gatekeepers of community organizations, local churches, and student programs were contacted via email and provided with a description of the study, a copy of the complete survey, and the survey advertisement. Gatekeepers were asked to forward the email to their group members. Upon receiving approval from gatekeepers, I also distributed flyers in person to those within the organization. All flyers, advertisements,

Table 1.1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants*

Sample Characteristics -----	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	31	23.7%
Female	100	76.3%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	127	97.7%
Bisexual	2	1.5%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	124	95.4%
Biracial/Multiracial	6	4.6%
Highest Education Level		
High School Diploma/GED	12	9.2%
Some college	27	20.6%
Associates degree	19	14.5%
Bachelor's degree	35	26.7%
Masters degree	31	23.7%
Doctorate or professional degree	7	5.4%
Income		
Low	17	13.1%
Lower-middle	19	14.6%
Middle	71	54.6%
Upper middle	20	15.4%
High	3	2.3%
Region of U.S.		
South	93	72.7%
West	5	3.9%
Midwest	12	9.4%
Southeast	17	13.3%
Northeast	1	0.8%
Relationship Status		
Dating or engaged	41	36.9%
Married	84	63.1%
Relationship Length		
Less than a year	5	3.8%
A year or longer	125	96.2%

and the survey itself included an invitation to forward the survey link to others interested in the study.

Using Qualtrics, participants were given the survey. Respondents provided informed consent to participate by continuing to screen questions that assessed for eligibility according to the aforementioned inclusion criteria. At the conclusion of each survey, participants were encouraged to forward the ad and survey link to those they believed would be interested and met the inclusion criteria. Participants were not compensated but were informed their responses contributed to research and were given information of where to find the study's results.

## 2.3 Measures

### 2.3.1 Demographic Questionnaire

A brief demographics questionnaire (see Appendix 1) included 13 questions assessing age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, educational level, income, work setting, geographical location, relationship status, and relationship length. Although individual responses were only included in the analysis, four questions were included which prompted respondents to provide both their own and their partner's date of birth and the last letter of the city they resided. This information made it possible to later match and identify each couple's responses without requiring identifiable information.

### 2.3.2 Racial Identity

Participants' racial identity was assessed using 30 items from the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS; Parham & Helms, 1985; see Appendix 2). The racial identity attitude scale was designed to assess Black identity on four dimensions that are associated theoretical stages of racial identity: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion–

emersion, and internalization. Pre-encounter stage describes attitudes that devalue one's blackness and idealize whiteness (e.g., "I believe that a large number of Blacks are untrustworthy"). Encounter stage describes personal or social events that lead one to question their identity (e.g., "I feel guilty and/or anxious about some of the things I believe about Black people"). Immersion–emersion stage explains attitudes that reflect as a sense of Black pride (e.g., "I am determined to find my Black identity"). Internalization stage describes inner security of one's Black identity that does not denigrate White people (e.g., "People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations").

Participants respond to each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree (scored as 1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of attitudes associated with each stage. Yanico, Swanson, and Tokar (1994) reported the following psychometric properties: pre-encounter ( $M = 1.94$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ,  $\alpha = .59$ ), encounter ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ,  $\alpha = .45$ ), immersion ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ,  $\alpha = .63$ ), and internalization ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ,  $\alpha = .59$ ). Mean scores for the present study were: pre-encounter ( $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ), encounter ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ,  $\alpha = .62$ ), immersion ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ), and internalization ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ,  $\alpha = .40$ ).

### 2.3.3 Race-related Stress

Stress from everyday experiences of racial discrimination was assessed using 9 items from the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS: Forman et al., 1997, See Appendix 3). Participants were asked to report the frequency of which they experienced racial stressors over the past six months (e.g., "Have you been threatened or harassed because of your race?") using a six-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 6 (Almost Every day); high

scores reflect more race-related stress. Psychometrics for the EDS in previous studies (Clark, Coleman, & Novak, 2004) were ( $M = 25.17$ ,  $SD = 9.73$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ) while the current sample was ( $M = 26.94$ ,  $SD = 8.94$ ,  $\alpha = .931$ ).

#### 2.3.4 Dyadic Coping

Couples ability to cope while under stress was assessed using 37 items from The Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI: Ledermann et al., 2010, See Appendix 4). The DCI assesses coping to external stress on the relationship from three perspectives; self, partner, and we. “Self” is the respondent’s perspective of their own attempts to reduce the stress of their partner. “Partner” is the respondent’s perspective of their partner’s attempts to reduce their stress. “We” is the perspective of the respondent’s joint efforts with their partner to reduce each other’s stress. Dyadic coping is measured on four dimensions: supportive, delegated, negative, and joint dyadic coping.

Supportive dyadic coping is when one partner offers solution-oriented or emotionally-focused support (e.g. “I show empathy and understanding to my partner”). Delegated dyadic coping is when one partner volunteers responsibilities to reduce their partners stress (e.g., “My partner takes on things that I normally do in order to help me out”). Negative dyadic coping assesses for hostile, ambivalent, and superficial actions/words that are harmful to support (e.g., “My partner blames me for not coping well enough with stress”). Joint dyadic coping is when both partners experience stress and work together simultaneously to reduce stress (e.g. “We try to cope with the problem together and search for ascertained solutions”).

Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often) with higher scores reflecting greater endorsement of attitudes. Psychometric properties for DCI

in previous studies (Ledermann et al., 2010) were: joint ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = .63$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ ), supportive by partner ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .76$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ), supportive by oneself ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = .60$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), negative by partner ( $M = 1.30$ ,  $SD = .49$ ,  $\alpha = .67$ ), negative by oneself ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = .48$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ). Scores for the current sample were: joint ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .892$ ), supportive by partner ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ,  $\alpha = .885$ ), supportive by oneself ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .66$ ,  $\alpha = .724$ ), negative by partner ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .82$ ,  $\alpha = .720$ ), negative by oneself ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = .69$ ,  $\alpha = .675$ ).

### 2.3.5 Attribution

Couples Partners tendency to make causal attributions for negative events were assessed using 8 items from the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM: Fincham & Bradbury, 1992, See Appendix 5). RAM assesses for distressed and non-distressed partners who make causal attributions for negative events that either exacerbate or minimize impact on the relationship. Three types of statements are used to assess causal attributions (i.e., locus, stability, and globality). Attribution locus is whether the cause rests in oneself, the partner, or outside circumstances (e.g., “My husband’s behavior was due to the mood he was in”). Attribution stability is if the cause of the act was likely to change (e.g., “The reason my husband criticizes me is not likely to change”). Attribution globality is if the cause affects other areas of the relationship (e.g., “The reason my husband criticizes me is something that affects other areas of our marriage”). Three types of statements are used to assess responsible attributions (i.e., intentionality, motivation, and blame). Attribution intentionality assesses intention of the act (e.g., “My husband criticizes me on purpose rather than unintentionally”). Attribution motivation assesses motive behind act (e.g., “My husband’s behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns”). Attribution

blame assesses whether the partner is at fault (e.g., “My husband deserves to be blamed for criticizing me”).

Respondents are given eight negative hypothetical partner behaviors (e.g., “Your husband criticizes something you say”) using a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Higher scores on causal attribution indicated spouses were more likely to locate the cause in the partner, while higher scores on the responsibility attribution indicated more intentional, selfishly motivated and blame-worthy attributions. Means, standard deviations, and reliability statistics for the present study were; causal attribution ( $M = 56.95$ ,  $SD = 9.92$ ,  $\alpha = .755$ ), and responsible attribution ( $M = 47.97$ ,  $SD = 11.92$ ,  $\alpha = .855$ ).

#### 2.3.6 Relationship Quality

Couple relationship quality was assessed using 7 items from the Positive and Negative Semantic Differential (PN-SMD: Mattson et al., 2012, See Appendix 6). The PN-SMD assesses relationship satisfaction across positive and negative dimensions (e.g. “Considering only the positive/negative qualities of your relationship and ignoring positive/negative ones, evaluate your relationship on the following qualities...”). Respondents are given seven pairs of antonyms describing their relationship negatively and positively (e.g. empty, full) using a 7-point response scale from 0 (not at all) to 7 (completely). Higher scores reflected more positive or negative relationship evaluations. Previous studies (Mattson et al., 2012) reported positive ( $M = 40.4$ ,  $SD = 7.4$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ) and negative ( $M = 5.7$ ,  $SD = 6.7$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ) evaluations of relationship quality, while the current study reported positive ( $M = 40.60$ ,  $SD = 11.0$ ,  $\alpha = .958$ ) and negative ( $M = 14.75$ ,  $SD = 8.75$ ,  $\alpha = .917$ ) evaluations of relationship quality.

Couple relationship quality was also assessed using 12 items from the Relationship Flourish Scale (RFS; Fowers et al., 2016, See Appendix 7). The RFS assesses relationship quality across four dimensions; meaning, personal growth, goal sharing, and relational giving. Respondents are given examples of relational actions that demonstrate personal growth and goal sharing (e.g., “We look for activities that help us grow as a couple”) using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Respondents are given examples of relational actions that demonstrate goal sharing and relational giving (e.g., “We do things that are deeply meaningful to us as a couple”) using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). High scores reflect greater relationship flourishing with previous studies (Fowers et al., 2016) reporting ( $M = 46.36$ ,  $SD = 7.60$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ), and the current study reporting ( $M = 40.11$ ,  $SD = 7.74$ ,  $\alpha = .937$ ).

## CHAPTER 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1 Results

The first four hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlations (see Table 2.1). The first hypotheses predicted a positive correlation between Race-related Stress and Attribution. Contrary to the hypothesis, the correlations between Race-related Stress and Causal Attribution ( $r = .06$ ,  $p = .541$ ,  $n = 105$ ) and between Race-related Stress and Responsible Attribution ( $r = -.05$ ,  $p = .611$ ,  $n = 106$ ) were not statistically significant.

The second hypothesis predicted there would be a positive relationship between Causal Attribution and Supportive Dyadic Coping. Correlation results between Causal Attribution and Supportive Dyadic Coping by oneself were statistically significant, but not in the predicted direction ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $n = 105$ ). Causal Attribution and Supportive Dyadic Coping by partner ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $n = 105$ ) and Joint Dyadic Coping ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $n = 105$ ) were also negatively associated contrary to the hypothesis.

The third hypothesis predicted that there would be a positive relationship between Responsible Attribution and Negative Dyadic Coping. Correlation results were in the predicted direction, revealing a positive significant relationship between Responsible Attribution and Negative Dyadic Coping by oneself ( $r = .230$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $n = 106$ ). Correlation results between Responsible Attribution and Negative Dyadic Coping by partner ( $r = .441$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 106$ ) were also significant and in the predicted direction of the hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that there would be positive relationship between Dyadic Coping and Relationship Quality. Correlation results between Relationship Flourishing Scale and Supportive Dyadic Coping by partner ( $r = .753$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 106$ ), and Supportive Dyadic Coping by oneself ( $r = -.415$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 106$ ) were significant in the

Table 2.1 Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for EDS, RIAS, RAM, DCI, PN-SMD, and RFS

Table 2

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on EDS, RIAS, RAM, DCI, PN-SMD, and RFS (N = 105)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	M	SD
1. EDS	—															26.94	8.94
RIAS																	
2. Internalization	.24*	—														4.46	.61
3. Immersion	.40*	.42*	—													2.05	.80
4. Encounter	.32*	.41*	.77*	—												2.90	.91
5. Pre-encounter	-.05	-.17	-.18	.06	—											1.60	.46
RAM																	
6. Causal	.06	-.04	.08	.20	.13	—										56.95	9.92
7. Responsible	-.05	-.01	-.01	-.04	.12	.58*	—									47.97	11.92
DCI																	
8. Joint	.12	.23*	.06	-.04	-.20*	-.25*	-.36*	—								3.61	.95
9. Supportive-Partner	.00	.22*	.07	.04	-.07	-.24*	-.35*	.77*	—							3.83	1.01
10. Supportive-Self	.06	.22*	-.03	-.12	-.13	-.10	-.13	.63*	.64*	—						3.87	.66
11. Negative-Partner	.20*	-.03	-.01	-.02	.04	.34*	.44*	-.47*	-.54*	-.20*	—					2.04	.82
12. Negative-Self	.10	.02	.07	.24*	.10	.22*	.23*	-.50*	-.50*	-.44*	.41*	—				1.8	.69
PN-SMD																	
13. Positive	.10	.30*	.80	.15	-2.0	-.27*	-.40*	.74*	.77*	.54*	-.53*	-.42*	—			40.60	11.0
14. Negative	-.03	-.20	-.06	-.12	.13	.27*	.40*	-.60*	-.66*	-.39*	.48*	.38*	-.71*	—		14.75	8.75
15. RFS	.14	.31*	.03	.08	-.08	-.22*	-.43*	.82*	.75*	.61*	-.42*	-.42*	.73*	-.70*	—	40.11	7.74

Note. Intercorrelations for participants (n = 100) are presented above. Means and standard deviations for Black couples are presented in vertical columns. For all scales, higher scores are indicative of responses in the direction of the construct assessed. EDS = Everyday Discrimination Scale, RIAS = Racial Identity Attitude Scale, RAM = Relationship Attribution Measure, DCI = Dyadic Coping Inventory, PN-SMD = Positive and Negative Semantic Differential, RFS = Relationship Flourishing Scale.

\* p < .05

expected direction. Correlation results between Relationship Flourishing Scale and Joint Dyadic Coping were significant ( $r = .823$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 106$ ) as predicted. Additionally, correlation results between positive Positive-Negative Semantic Differential and Supportive Dyadic Coping by partner were significant in the predicted direction ( $r = .772$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 110$ ) and Supportive Dyadic Coping by oneself ( $r = .536$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 110$ ). Lastly, positive Positive-Negative Semantic Differential and Joint Dyadic Coping were positively correlated ( $r = .743$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $n = 110$ ) as expected.

Finally, I hypothesized Dyadic Coping would mediate the relationship between Race-related Stress, Causal Attribution, and Relationship Quality. Based on the correlations presented above, several path models were tested with the final model presented in Figure 3.1. Following Hu and Bentler (1998, 1999), the following fit criteria were used to determine good model fit: non-significant model  $\chi^2$ , CFI > .95, RMSEA < .06. The model in Figure 3.1 was an excellent fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1.83$ ,  $p = .177$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .08).

As predicted, the results of the final path model suggest that the relationship between Race-related Stress and Negative Relationship Quality was mediated by Negative Dyadic Coping. As Figure 3 illustrates, Race-related Stress was positively associated with Negative Dyadic Coping ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Negative Dyadic Coping was negatively correlated with Positive Relationship Quality ( $\beta = -.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and positively correlated with Negative Relationship Quality ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The path between Race-related Stress and Negative Dyadic Coping was statistically significant, as was path between Negative Dyadic Coping and Negative and Positive Relationship Quality. However, the path between Race-related stress and Positive Relationship Quality was not significant ( $\beta$

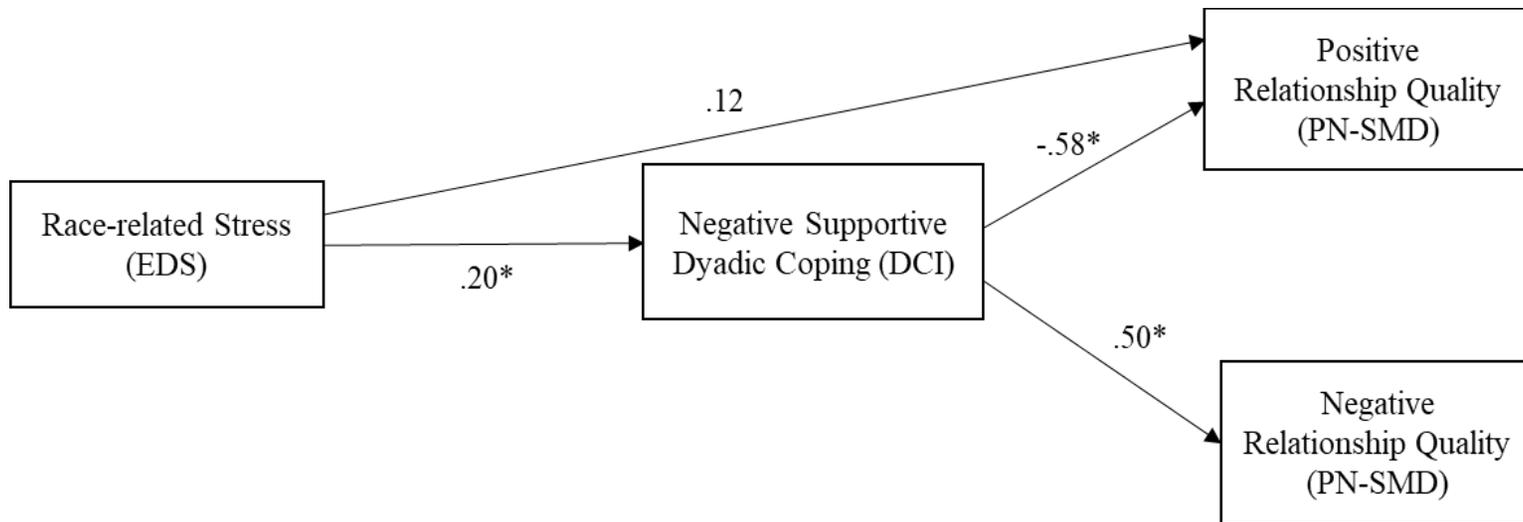


Figure 3.1 Standard Regression Coefficients for the Relationship Between Race-related Stress and Positive and Negative Relationship Quality as mediated by Negative Supportive Dyadic Coping. Standardized estimates were reported. \* $p < .05$ .

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= .12,  $p = .059$ ). Notably, the predicted correlation between Race-related Stress and Negative Relationship Quality was removed from the model due to a lack of statistical significance.

### 3.2 Discussion

The present study was designed to identify couple processes that buffer the effects of race-related stress on Black couple relationships. No direct correlation was found between race-related stress and relationship quality, in contrast to prior studies in which links between racial discrimination and relationship instability had been reported (e.g., Lavner et al., 2018). However, scholars have argued that stressors have indirect effects on marital outcomes, moderated by factors such as emotional distress, religiosity, social networks, and warm and hostile couple interactions (e.g., Bryant et al., 2010). The present study supports that supposition in that race-related stress is associated with relationship quality via negative dyadic coping.

Specifically, individuals experiencing increased race-related stress are associated with perceiving unsupportive behaviors from their partner such as, “My partner blames me for not coping well enough with stress”. Consistent with Hardy’s (2016) concept of invisible wounds of sociocultural oppression, findings echo the greater narrative Black Americans are often blamed for how they respond to experiences of injustices and told to quietly cope with the stress those experiences create. Supporting Awosan and Opara’s (2018) argument these invisible wounds are detrimental to Black relationship quality, participants that perceived unsupportive behaviors from their partner were associated with reporting less positive and more negative relationship qualities. The present study provides

support to the question of how everyday experiences of discrimination interrupt relationship processes between Black couples.

It is important to note that the present study also advances the literature by utilizing measures that assess for multiple forms of dyadic coping in addition to measures of relational quality that are sensitive to both positive and negative dimensions rather than assuming relational quality as a uni-dimensional (i.e., positive-negative) construct. It is imperative scholars continue to use measures and analytical strategies that allow for an equal narrative of vulnerability and resiliency of Black couples. Previous race-comparative studies have measured marital quality of Black couples using total scores (e.g., Broman, 2005), combining both positive and negative dimensions of relationship quality. Consistent with efforts to take a positive approach in examining marital quality, scholars should focus on strengths and cultural factors rather than the deficiency of Black couple relationships to understand differences in marital patterns between racial groups.

### 3.2.1 Clinical Implications

Clinically, it is important for therapists to consider how race-related stressors affect client's lives and invite clients to discuss these experiences. Since there is evidence a flourishing relationship can be protective to race-related stressors, marriage and family therapists can encourage clients to bring their partners to therapy. As demonstrated in the current study, racial stressors experienced outside the home can impact how the client perceives their partner's support and ultimately impact their relationship quality. Clinicians would be wise to have an explicit conversation surrounding racial stress, ideally with both partners present. Assessments such as Cultural Formation Interview (e.g., Lewis-Fernandez et al., 2015) can be utilized by therapists to explore client's experiences

centering race, culture, identity, and experiences with discrimination. These assessments can be learning tools for couples as they become more aware of their partner's experiences and how impact their response to stress.

Through couples therapy clients will be able to increase their supportive and joint dyadic coping behaviors, which is correlated with more positive relationship evaluations of relationship satisfaction. Couple and family therapy can be extremely beneficial to those experiencing racial stress or racial trauma. Therapy modalities such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Gottman Method offer useful strategies for couples to increase support of one another and perceptions of each other's stress. For example, EFT guides couples to reconnect experientially by exploring underlying emotions that drive behaviors in the couple's cycle. For Black couples identifying how race-related stress can influence relationship processes is an important part of Stage II of EFT.

Additionally, Gottman Method would suggest couples focus less on decreasing negative dyadic behaviors and increasing positive sentiment-override. Positive sentiment-override gives partners the ability to make more positive evaluations of each other and the relationship. For Black couples this may be key in externalizing stress caused by everyday experiences with discrimination and replacing harmful societal narratives about Black stress. Therapy provides an environment for Black couples to find healing and foster reconnection, however, even more integral to Black relational health is the need for structural and societal change. Couples therapy can provide the space for healing in Black relationships, nonetheless couples have to return to the familiar and threatening environment in which they live every day. This is why clinicians must reinforce the relationship itself as a safe-haven to threats of racism. Clinicians should build on cultural-

strengths Black couples already possess. Finally, clinicians must be ready at all times to advocate for social justice reform within and outside the therapy room.

### 3.2.2 Research Implications

Though the goal of this study was to bring forward the strengths of Black couple relationships, results clearly demonstrated the detrimental impact of racism on romantic relationships. A negative relationship was not found between supportive coping and stress, meaning; participants did not report less race-related stress when they perceived more support from their partners –failing to support an argument for resiliency. Nevertheless, resilience cannot be separate from adversity. When we focus on any one narrative too much we begin to deviate from the truth. Therefore, one cannot exist without the other – vulnerability and strength. Future studies should continue to use measures and analytical strategies that capture the Black experience in its entirety.

Further, results of adverse outcomes on relationship quality from racial discrimination may explain why racial identity was salient in the perception of supportive behaviors for this sample. It was found that those in the internalization stage perceived more positive support from their partners, consistent with claims racial identity moderates stressors and marital quality (Bryant et al., 2010). Exploring and developing one’s racial identity can contribute significantly to Black mental and relational health and should be encouraged by clinicians in therapy. Positive perceptions of oneself and identity can strengthen relationship processes and buffer the effects of race-related stressors. Future studies should explore how Black couples perceptions of their own identity influence their ability to empathically respond to their partner when under stress.

### 3.2 Conclusion

The present study is the first designed to examine the mediating factors of dyadic coping and attribution on race-related stress. It is novel to consider how individual and dyadic factors work interchangeably to minimize race-related stress and maximize relationship quality. I extend the limited literature on how racial discrimination impacts Black relationships and how couples foster resiliency to combat stress these experiences create. How Black couples maintain connection while experiencing interpersonal rejection and disconnection from experiences with racism is a resiliency process not yet sufficiently understood by researchers. This study begins to address this very question, providing a foundation for future research of this phenomena.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your date of birth? For example: (01/01/2020)
2. What is your partner's date of birth? For example: (01/01/2020)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the last letter of the city you live in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the last letter of the city your partner lives in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Transgender
  - d. Gender fluid
  - e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your sexual orientation?
  - a. Heterosexual
  - b. Lesbian
  - c. Gay
  - d. Bisexual
  - e. Queer
  - f. Pansexual
  - g. Other\_\_\_\_\_
7. Which race do you primarily identify as?
  - a. Black
  - b. Bi/multiracial
8. What is your ethnicity? Check all that apply:
  - a. African American
  - b. African
  - c. Afro-Caribbean
  - d. Caucasian
  - e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
9. Indicate your highest level of education:
  - a. Less than high school
  - b. High school diploma/GED
  - c. Some college
  - d. Associate degree
  - e. Master's degree

- f. Professional degree
- g. Doctorate degree

10. How would you describe you and your partner's income?

Your individual income:

- a. Low income
- b. Lower-middle income
- c. Middle Income
- d. Upper-middle income
- e. High income

Combined income of you and your partner:

- f. Low income
- g. Lower-middle income
- h. Middle Income
- i. Upper-middle income
- j. High income

11. Briefly describe your work setting.

---

12. Which region of the U.S. do you live in?

- a. South
- b. West
- c. Midwest
- d. Southeast

13. What is your relationship status? Check all that apply:

- a. Single
- b. In a committed relationship
- c. Engaged
- d. Married
- e. Living together
- f. Living separately
- g. Previously divorced/separated

14. How many years and months have you been in your current committed relationship \_\_\_\_\_years \_\_\_\_\_months

## APPENDIX 2. RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES SCALE

1. I feel excitement and joy in Black surroundings
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
2. I believe that a large number of Blacks are untrustworthy
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
3. I believe that White people look and express themselves better than Blacks
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
4. I feel very uncomfortable around Black people
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
5. I believe that to be Black is not necessarily good
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
6. I believe that Black people should learn to think and experience life in ways that are similar to White people
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
7. I believe that Black people came from a strange, dark, and uncivilized continent
  - a. Strongly agree

- b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
8. I feel guilty and/or anxious about some of the things I believe about Black people
- a. Strongly agree
  - a. Agree
  - b. Neutral
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree
9. I believe that a Black person's most effective weapon for solving problems is to become a part of the White person's world
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
10. I believe White people are intellectually superior to Blacks
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
11. I feel unable to involve myself in White experiences and am increasing my involvement in Black experiences
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
12. I find myself reading a lot of Black literature and thinking about being Black
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
13. I often find myself referring to White people as honkies, devils, and pigs
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree

- e. Strongly disagree
14. I frequently confront the system and the man
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
15. I believe the world should be interpreted from a Black perspective
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
16. I have changed my style of life to fit my beliefs about Black people
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
17. I speak my mind regardless of the consequences
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
18. I believe that everything Black is good and consequently I limit myself to Black activities
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
19. I am determined to find my Black identity
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
20. I believe that because I am Black, I have many strengths
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree

- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

21. I feel comfortable wherever I am

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

22. I believe certain aspects of the Black experience apply to me, others do not

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

23. I constantly involve myself in Black political and social activities

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

24. I involve myself in social action and political groups even if there are no other Blacks involved

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

### APPENDIX 3. EVERYDAY DISCRIMINATION SCALE

In your day-to-day life how often have the following things happened to you because of your race?

1. Treated with less courtesy
  - a. Almost everyday
  - b. Most days
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Rarely
  - f. Never
  
2. Treated with less respect
  - a. Almost everyday
  - b. Most days
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Rarely
  - f. Never
  
3. Receive poorer service
  - a. Almost everyday
  - b. Most days
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Rarely
  - f. Never
  
4. People act as if you are not as smart
  - a. Almost everyday
  - b. Most days
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Rarely
  - f. Never
  
5. People act as if they are afraid of you
  - a. Almost everyday
  - b. Most days
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Rarely
  - f. Never
  
6. People act as if you are dishonest
  - a. Almost everyday

- b. Most days
- c. Occasionally
- d. Sometimes
- e. Rarely
- f. Never

7. People act as if they are better

- a. Almost everyday
- b. Most days
- c. Occasionally
- d. Sometimes
- e. Rarely
- f. Never

8. Called names

- a. Almost everyday
- b. Most days
- c. Occasionally
- d. Sometimes
- e. Rarely
- f. Never

9. Threatened or harassed

- a. Almost everyday
- b. Most days
- c. Occasionally
- d. Sometimes
- e. Rarely
- f. Never

#### APPENDIX 4. DYADIC COPING INVENTORY

1. I let my partner know that I appreciate his/her practical support, advice, or help.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
2. I ask my partner to do things for me when I have too much to do.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
3. I show my partner through my behavior when I am not doing well or when I have problems.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
4. I tell my partner openly how I feel and that I would appreciate his/her support.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
5. My partner shows empathy and understanding to me
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
6. My partner expresses that he/she is on my side.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
  
7. My partner blames me for not coping well enough with stress.
  - a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely

- c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
8. My partner helps me to see stressful situations in a different light.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
9. My partner listens to me and gives me the opportunity to communicate what really bothers me.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
10. My partner does not take my stress seriously.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
11. My partner provides support but does so unwillingly and unmotivated.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
12. My partner takes on things that I normally do in order to help me out.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
13. My partner helps me analyze the situations so that I can better face the problem.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often

14. When I am too busy, my partner helps me out.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
15. When I am stressed, my partner tends to withdraw.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
16. My partner lets me know that he/she appreciated my practical support, advice, or help.
- a. Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
17. My partner asks me to do things for him/her when he/she has too much to do.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
18. My partner shows me through his/her behavior that he/she is not doing well or when he/she has problems.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
19. My partner tells me openly how he/she feels and that he/she would appreciate my support.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
20. I show empathy and understanding to my partner.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely

- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

21. I express to my partner that I am on his/her side.

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

22. I blame my partner for not coping well enough with stress

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

23. I tell my partner that his/her stress is not that bad and help him/her to see the situation in a different light.

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

24. I listen to my partner and give him/her space and time to communicate what really bothers him/her.

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

25. I do not take my partner's stress seriously.

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

26. When my partner is stressed, I tend to withdraw.

- a. Very rarely
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Very Often

27. I provide support but do it so unwillingly and unmotivated because I think that he/she should cope with his/her problems on his/her own.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
28. I take on things that my partner would normally do in order to help him/her out.\
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
29. I try to analyze the situation together with my partner in an objective manner and help him/her to understand and change the problem.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
30. When my partner feels he/she has too much to do, I help him/her out.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
31. We try to cope with the problem together and search for ascertained solutions.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
32. We engage in a serious discussion about the problem and think through what has to be done.
- Very rarely
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often

33. We help one another to put the problem in perspective and see it in a new light. a. Very rarely
- a. Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Often
  - d. Very Often
34. We help each other relax with such things like massage, taking a bath together, or listening to music together.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
35. We are affectionate to each other, make love and try that way to cope with stress. a. Very rarely
- a. Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Often
  - d. Very Often
36. I am satisfied with the support I receive from my partner and the way we deal with stress together.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often
37. I am satisfied with the support I receive from my partner and I find as a couple, the way we deal with stress together is effective.
- a. Very rarely
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very Often

## APPENDIX 5. RELATIONSHIP ATTRIBUTION MEASURE

Your partner criticizes something you say:

15. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
16. The reason my partner criticized me is not likely to change
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
17. The reason my partner criticized me is something that affects other areas of our relationship
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
18. My partner criticized me on purpose rather than unintentionally
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
19. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
20. My partner deserves to be blamed for criticizing me
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree

- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

Your partner begins to spend less time with you:

- 21. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
- 22. The reason my partner spending less time with me is not likely to change
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
- 23. The reason my partner spending less time with me is something that affects other areas of our relationship
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
- 24. My partner spending less time with me is on purpose rather than unintentionally
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
  
- 25. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns
  - a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly

26. My partner deserves to be blamed for spending less time with me
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly

Your partner compliments you:

27. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
28. The reason my partner complimented me is not likely to change
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
29. The reason my partner complimenting me is something that affects other areas of our relationship
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
30. My partner complimented me on purpose rather than unintentionally
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
31. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat

- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

32. My partner deserves to be blamed for complimenting me

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

Your partner does not pay attention to what you are saying:

33. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

34. The reason my partner not paying attention to me is not likely to change

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

1. The reason my partner not paying attention to me is something that affects other areas of our relationship

- g. Disagree strongly
- h. Disagree
- i. Disagree somewhat
- j. Agree somewhat
- k. Agree
- l. Agree strongly

2. My partner not paying attention to me is on purpose rather than unintentionally

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

3. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

4. My partner deserves to be blamed for not paying attention to me
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly

Your partner is cool and distant:

5. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
6. The reason my partner being cool and distant is not likely to change
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
7. The reason my partner being cool and distant is something that affects other areas of our relationship
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
8. My partner is being cool and distant to me on purpose rather than unintentionally
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree

- f. Agree strongly
9. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
10. My partner deserves to be blamed for being cool and distant
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly

Your partner treats you more lovingly:

11. My partner's behavior was due to something about the type of mood they were in
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
12. The reason my partner treated me more lovingly is not likely to change
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
13. The reason my partner treated me more lovingly is something that affects other areas of our relationship
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Disagree somewhat
  - d. Agree somewhat
  - e. Agree
  - f. Agree strongly
14. My partner is treating me more lovingly on purpose rather than unintentionally
- a. Disagree strongly
  - b. Disagree

- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

15. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

16. My partner deserves to be blamed for treating me more lovingly

- a. Disagree strongly
- b. Disagree
- c. Disagree somewhat
- d. Agree somewhat
- e. Agree
- f. Agree strongly

## APPENDIX 6. POSITIVE NEGATIVE SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL SCALE

Considering only the positive qualities of your relationship and ignoring the negative ones, evaluate your relationship on the following qualities:

My relationship is...

1. Interesting
  - a. Not at all
  - b. A tiny bit
  - c. A little
  - d. Somewhat
  - e. Mostly
  - f. Very
  - g. Extremely
  - h. Completely
  
2. Full
  - a. Not at all
  - b. A tiny bit
  - c. A little
  - d. Somewhat
  - e. Mostly
  - f. Very
  - g. Extremely
  - h. Completely
  
3. Sturdy
  - a. Not at all
  - b. A tiny bit
  - c. A little
  - d. Somewhat
  - e. Mostly
  - f. Very
  - g. Extremely
  - h. Completely
  
4. Enjoyable
  - a. Not at all
  - b. A tiny bit
  - c. A little
  - d. Somewhat
  - e. Mostly
  - f. Very

- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

5. Good

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

6. Friendly

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

7. Hopeful

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

Considering only the negative qualities of your relationship and ignoring the positive ones, evaluate your relationship on the following qualities:

My relationship is...

8. Bad

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly

- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

9. Lonely

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

10. Discouraging

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

11. Boring

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

12. Empty

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

13. Fragile

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

14. Miserable

- a. Not at all
- b. A tiny bit
- c. A little
- d. Somewhat
- e. Mostly
- f. Very
- g. Extremely
- h. Completely

## APPENDIX 7. RELATIONSHIP FLOURISHING SCALE

1. I have more success in my important goals because of my partners help
  - a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Somewhat disagree
  - c. Somewhat Agree
  - d. Strongly agree
  
2. We look for activities that help us grow as a couple
  - a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Somewhat disagree
  - c. Somewhat Agree
  - d. Strongly agree
  
3. My partner has helped me to grow in ways that I could not have done on my own
  - a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Somewhat disagree
  - c. Somewhat Agree
  - d. Strongly agree
  
4. It is worth it to share my most personal thoughts with my partner
  - a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Somewhat disagree
  - c. Somewhat Agree
  - d. Strongly agree
  
5. When making important decisions, I think about whether it will be good for our relationships
  - a. Always
  - b. Often
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Rarely
  - e. Never
  
6. It is natural and easy for me to do things that keep our relationship strong
  - a. Always
  - b. Often
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Rarely
  - e. Never
  
7. Talking with my partner helps me to see things in new ways
  - a. Always
  - b. Often

- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

8. I make it a point to celebrate my partner's successes

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

9. I really work to improve our relationship

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

10. My partner shows interest in things that are important to me

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

11. We do things that are deeply meaningful to us as a couple

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

12. I make time when my partner needs to talk

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

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