

# The Relationship Power Inventory: Development and validation

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## Abstract

Power is a central concept in relationships, yet existing self-report measures of relationship power are not well validated and do not assess all aspects of power. To address this, we developed the Relationship Power Inventory (RPI), a self-report measure of power for romantic partners. In Study 1, we identified the most important decision-making domains in romantic relationships. In Study 2, we generated an item pool assessing relationship power, selected the best performing items for inclusion, and tested the convergent and divergent validity properties of the RPI. Study 3 revealed RPI scores predict observer ratings of power during decision-making discussions and showed the RPI has good test–retest reliability. We discuss how the RPI can advance research on power in close relationships

In his 1938 book, *Power: A New Social Analysis*, philosopher Bertrand Russell proposed that “the fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics . . . The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of power” (p. 4). More than six decades later, leading relationship scientists have echoed Russell’s call, claiming that power is a major organizing principle in the social and behavioral sciences (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). However, there is an enigma: Although power was recognized early on as an impactful dynamic in close relationships (Huston, 1983), relatively little theoretical or empirical work has focused on the processes underlying the establishment and maintenance of power within relationships, including the outcomes that power differences have on relationship partners, their decisions and behaviors, and the quality of their

relationship. We believe this is due in part to the lack of a comprehensive, well-validated self-report measure of relationship power; it is difficult to study a construct that cannot be measured accurately, and relationship scientists often depend on self-report scales to measure key constructs.

In this article, we introduce the Relationship Power Inventory (RPI), a self-report measure of power in romantic relationships that assesses the different types of power that can be held by each partner across different decision-making domains within a relationship. The RPI was developed from the dyadic power-social influence model (DPSIM; Simpson, Farrell, Oriña, & Rothman, 2015), which is a process model of power in relationships that incorporates concepts from several theoretical models and perspectives on power. We believe that this new measure represents an important step forward in the study of power in close relationships, and we hope that it will facilitate better, higher quality research on this important construct and topic.

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## Early power theories

Early theories on power were limited in that they viewed power as a characteristic

of individuals, independent of their social relationships (e.g., French & Raven's, 1959, social power theory), or they focused on power sources, but did not explain how power was used or the outcomes of having versus lacking power (e.g., Blood & Wolfe's, 1960, resource theory). One of the few early theoretical models of power to have a sustained impact on the field is interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which considered power within dyads. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) define power as the ability of one partner in a relationship to directly influence the quality of outcomes (i.e., the amount of rewards vs. costs) that can be obtained by the other partner in a given situation. Individuals who have better alternatives to the current partner/relationship should typically have greater power in their relationship because they can get better (more rewarding) outcomes outside the relationship than their current partner can. This concept of power is consistent with the principle of least interest (Waller & Hill, 1951), which proposes that the partner in a relationship who is "least interested" in continuing the relationship (i.e., the one who has better alternatives and less to lose if the relationship ends) should dictate important decisions made in the relationship, including whether the relationship continues or disbands.

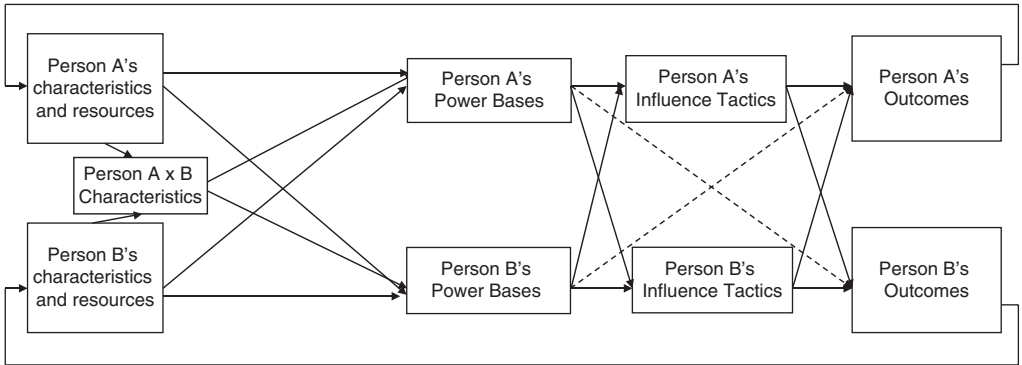
#### *The dyadic power-social influence model*

The DPSIM (Simpson et al., 2015) integrates concepts from these past theoretical perspectives on power into a process model that explains the antecedents of power within a relationship, the use of different influence strategies by each partner, and the outcomes of power for both the relationship and each partner (see Figure 1). According to the DPSIM, *power* is defined as the ability or capacity to change another person's (i.e., the partner's) thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior so they align with one's own desired preferences, along with the ability or capacity to resist influence attempts imposed by the partner. Unlike previous definitions of power (e.g., French & Raven, 1959; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), our definition characterizes power as an emergent, dyadic property of the relationship

between two people, and it considers not only one's ability to influence the partner, but also one's ability not to be influenced in return. Power emerges from both individual characteristics (e.g., each partner's personality traits) and dyadic characteristics (e.g., each partner's relative level of commitment to the relationship). These characteristics determine what power bases each partner can draw upon. For example, individuals (partners) can have power that stems from their own expertise related to the particular issue being discussed or from their ability to reward or punish their partner (see French & Raven, 1959).

Partners then choose which influence tactics to use when having discussions with their relationship partner by selecting tactics that draw on their principal power bases. Influence tactics exist along two dimensions: valance (i.e., positive vs. negative) and directness (i.e., being explicit and direct vs. passive or covert; Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009). For example, someone who has power based on expertise may use logical reasoning to influence his or her partner, which is a positive-direct tactic. However, someone who has referent power, which is based on identification, may use supplication (a negative-indirect tactic) by focusing on how hurt he or she feels and how the decision impacts him or her, implying that the partner should simply go along with what he or she requests. These influence tactics can have both immediate and long-term effects on both the partners and their relationship (e.g., the resulting decision on the issue vs. generating greater relationship stability or instability over time).

These processes occur dyadically, reflecting the interdependence that exists between close partners. The nonparallel lines between the partners (see Figure 1), which exist at each stage of the model, are partner effects. In established couples, Partner A's characteristics help to determine Partner B's power bases, and Partner B's power bases and resulting influence attempts can impact Partner A's outcomes. For example, if Daniel is from an "old money" family that has good social connections, and his partner Emily has lower social status than him (even if she has fairly high status compared to other people), Daniel may draw upon his



**Figure 1.** The dyadic power-social influence model.

legitimate power base because of his relatively higher status and use an autocracy tactic by acting superior and patronizing Emily to get what he wants from her. This may cause Emily to capitulate to Daniel's preferences, which lowers her self-esteem and makes her more likely to give in on other issues in order to avoid this type of treatment later on.

A more detailed examination of power in specific situations and over time reveals added complexities. Power is not necessarily stable, either over time or across all decision domains within a relationship. For example, in a traditional marriage, the husband may have more power over financial decision making, but his wife may exert greater control over household and childrearing decisions. Power also has different components, including *process power* (i.e., control over the decision-making process itself, which can be enacted by leading conversations or laying out options and ideas) and *outcome power* (i.e., control over the final decisions made by a couple; Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh, & Kawaguchi, 1999). Each of these components must be considered in order to gain an accurate and complete picture of the power dynamics within a specific relationship. The relationship context in which power is held and enacted is also important. For example, two people may each have less power in their relationships than their partners do, but one person may still have some control and influence over decision making, whereas the other may be completely powerless and automatically go along with whatever his or her partner desires.

Guided by the DPSIM, we identified four key features a good measure of relationship power should include. First, the relevant characteristics for determining power should vary across different decision domains. For example, individuals vary in their expertise across different decision-making topics, so their power within each domain is also likely to vary. Second, influence (and power) can take many forms. A relationship power measure should not only focus on *outcome power*, the more direct form of power that involves the ability to make final decisions in a relationship. *Process power*, which includes bringing up options or laying out the pros and cons of an issue, may also be important in leading partners toward final decisions and outcomes that an individual who uses process power actually prefers. A power inventory, therefore, needs to measure both forms of power to capture the power dynamics within relationships fully. Third, partner effects are an important part of the power process. Assessing the power held by both the individual and his or her partner provides a more detailed view of the behavior and perceptions of both partners within a relationship. Fourth, power involves not only the ability to influence the partner, but the ability to resist being influenced by the partner (see Simpson et al., 2015). Accordingly, power items should assess not only each individual's ability to make decisions or lead discussions, but his or her ability to block decisions or veto ideas put forth by the partner as well.

### *Power domains*

To obtain an accurate and complete account of power dynamics within relationships, one must assess power in different relationship domains that are important to each partner and/or the couple. We define *relationship domains* as general areas within a relationship in which partners need to resolve issues or make decisions that affect both of them.

A few studies have identified domains relevant to romantic relationships. These studies, however, have either measured constructs other than power (e.g., the Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale; Locke & Wallace, 1959), or they have examined decision making in a limited number of domains (e.g., finances, trips, running the household, entertainment; Dorfman & Heckert, 1988). Several factors must be considered when selecting relevant domains for couples, which may be difficult for researchers to anticipate. Not only are some domains irrelevant for certain couples (e.g., “child care” if a couple has no children), but couples are likely to differ in the degree to which certain domains matter or are important to them, something that a relationship power measure must capture. If, for example, Adam has greater power in the domains that he and his wife Kristina rate as most important to both of them (e.g., finances), but Kristina has more power in less important domains (e.g., how to spend time together), this reflects an important asymmetry in the relationship. Adam has greater power, even if he and Kristina each hold more power in an equal number of domains. Partners may also differ on which domains they deem most important in their relationship.

### *Process power and outcome power*

As previously discussed, examining only the final outcome of a couple’s decision is not enough; the process through which the decision is reached must also be assessed (Davis & Rigaux, 1974). Galliher et al. (1999) were among the first to make a distinction between process and outcome power in romantic couples. They observed adolescent couples discussing hypothetical relationship issues and coded the extent to which each partner talked and led the conversation as an index of process

power. In addition, they asked each partner to report who typically controlled the final decisions in the relationship, who usually “got their way” when there were disagreements, and who controlled sexual decisions to measure outcome power. Galliher et al. did not report whether process and outcome power were correlated, but one might expect that these constructs would be somewhat orthogonal. They reflect very different approaches to controlling decision making, and they rely on different sets of skills. For example, individuals who feel less comfortable pushing aggressively for their own point of view might be more inclined to frame issues during discussions in ways that make their preferences seem more appealing or logical. Other individuals may enact power by “making the final decision,” even if their partner has essentially led them to the final outcome.

This is not to suggest that outcome and process power are always held by different partners. One can imagine relationships in which one partner both leads the conversation and makes the final decision, or relationships in which both partners equally control both the decision-making process and the final outcomes. Both types of power should be assessed for both partners to determine the balance of process and outcome power within domains and across the relationship.

### *Current measures of power in relationships*

To date, power in relationships has been measured primarily with two types of assessments: observed social interactions and self-report surveys. In observational interaction studies, couples are typically brought into the lab and asked to engage in a decision-making task. Investigators frequently rely on the revealed difference task, in which partners first make decisions separately, compare their decisions, and then arrive at a final decision together (Olson, 1970; Strodbeck, 1951). The similarity of the final list to each partner’s original list is used to assess power. Coded aspects of the interaction, such as the proportion of time each partner spends talking or stating opinions, are then analyzed to identify mechanisms of power.

More recent work has attempted to code power dynamics directly from observed interactions. Dunbar and Burgoon (2005), for example, had couples complete a revealed difference task in which partners decided how to spend a hypothetical \$1,000 gift. From these interactions, they coded the verbal (e.g., making demands, interrupting) and nonverbal (e.g., gaze patterns) dominance behaviors displayed by each partner during the discussion and treated this as an index of each partner's power.

These observed interaction methods are compelling in that they capture how power dynamics play out during actual decision making. Moreover, the revealed difference technique allows for more objective assessments of power than merely coding behavior based on the outcome of the final negotiated list. These assessments, however, provide a limited assessment of power within relationships. First, these interactions focus on decisions made in only one relationship domain. The power dynamics of the partners in other domains may be different, and a single interaction may not accurately represent the overall balance of power within the relationship. Furthermore, decisions made in these types of tasks are often not necessarily important or impactful for many couples. More powerful partners within a relationship, for example, may let their lower power partners "get their way" on decisions about hypothetical situations, but not on decisions that involve important issues bearing on their daily lives. In addition, some influence strategies that partners may routinely use in daily life to gain, wield, or maintain power cannot be displayed in the lab (e.g., promises of sex) or may be taboo (e.g., physical coercion). Perhaps most importantly, observed interaction methods are often not feasible because they require video and coding equipment and lengthy data collection. Thus, a valid and reliable self-report measure of power within relationships is needed.

Several prior studies have used self-report measures of power, but none of these measures has been widely adopted by the field. Existing self-report power scales tend to contain intuitively face-valid items such as, "When you and your partner disagree about something,

who usually wins?" (Bentley, Galliher, & Ferguson, 2007; Galliher et al., 1999) or "In your relationship, who has more power?" (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). These measures are short, typically containing one to four items. In addition, some scales, such as the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (Pulerwitz, Gortmaker, & DeJong, 2000) or Davis and Rigaux's (1974) Purchasing Decision-Making Table, measure power within very specific relationship domains.

These measures, however, do not fulfill all the necessary criteria for relationship power measures discussed above. By relying on so few items, these measures require partners to make global judgments across many different domains and types of power, which are then mentally "averaged" when partners provide reports. Not only is this difficult to do, but partners may fail to consider more indirect and subtle forms power and instead report only the overt control or dominance that each partner has in the relationship. Partners may also focus on the power dynamics in their relationship for just the domain(s) that are currently salient to them, and they may fail to consider power dynamics in other important domains. In addition, the conclusions drawn from using scales that measure power in only one specific domain (e.g., sexual decisions, purchasing) may not apply to the relationship as a whole. Furthermore, because many existing power measures use bipolar scales (ranging from *me to both of us equally to my partner*), one can deduce only the relative levels of power within the relationship, not the absolute levels of power or the amount of influence actually wielded by each partner. Finally, most existing power scales provide little or no validation evidence confirming either that they validly tap power or that they predict actual behavior and decision making in relationships.<sup>1</sup>

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1. A few self-report measures do fit some of these criteria, but they have limitations. Bentley et al. (2007) and Galliher et al. (1999), for example, developed a 10-item power scale that contains items such as, "When you and your partner disagree on something, who usually wins?" and "Who decides how much time you should spend together?" Although some of these items ask about power within specific domains, few domains are listed, and the scale only assesses outcome-based



In addition, although some existing measures of relationship power do assess power within specific domains or have dyadic features, none of them meet all the criteria articulated in the DPSIM. Furthermore, none have sufficiently well-documented validation properties.

### *The Relationship Power Inventory*

Given that prior self-report measures of power in relationships do not fulfill all of the requirements of the DPSIM, we developed a measure that would do so—the RPI. To allow for variation in power across different relationship domains, participants (partners) in relationships were asked to report on their power in several key domains. We designed the RPI so partners could choose the specific decision-making domains that they believe are most relevant and important to their relationship from a list of possible domains, bypassing the issue of having partners report on domains that are not relevant to them or their relationship. In addition, we designed the RPI so partners could weight each chosen domain in terms of its importance to themselves and/or the relationship, allowing us to determine the balance of power across domains within each relationship. This complexity resulted in a fairly long measure. In addition to the Relationship Domains RPI, therefore, we also developed a

shorter 20-item Overall RPI measure that used the same items to assess power in the relationship generally (across domains).

Both the Relationship Domains and Overall RPI measures contain items that assess the power of both the individual and his or her partner, permitting us to measure power dyadically. The RPI also has multiple items that tap both process power (i.e., “I tend to lead and structure discussions”; “My partner tends to bring up issues”) and outcome power (i.e., “I get the final say when making decisions”; “My partner tends to give in to my preferences”), allowing us to measure both major types of relationship power. This structure also allowed us to assess how well individuals are able to resist influence attempts from their partners, thereby assessing that core aspect of power as well.

In three studies reported below, we describe the development and validation of the Relationship Domains and Overall versions of the RPI. In Study 1, we identify the general decision domains on which power tends to vary in romantic couples, using both top-down and bottom-up strategies. In Study 2, we present the RPI items and then test the structural, convergent, and divergent validities of the measures. Study 3 provides behavioral predictive validity evidence for both versions of the RPI by showing that scores on the measures predict power-relevant behavior during couples’ decision-making discussions, and that the measures have good test–retest reliability over a 3-month period.

### **Study 1**

Because the RPI is intended to assess different types of romantic relationships (e.g., marital, cohabiting, dating), Study 1 identified which decision-making domains tend to be most important and relevant to romantic relationships in general. To identify these domains, we used two complementary approaches: (a) an inductive approach, in which participants reported which domains were most relevant to their own relationship, and (b) a deductive approach, in which participants rated decision-making domains previously identified in the literature on relevant dimensions such as the importance of the domain, the

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power. Davis and Rigaux’s (1974) Purchasing Power measure assesses power at three stages in 25 domains: problem recognition, search for information, and final decision. All of these domains, however, involve specific purchasing or monetary decisions (e.g., furniture, insurance, saving money). The most comprehensive measure of power in romantic relationships developed thus far is Beach and Tesser’s (1993) Marital Decision-Making Scale (MDMS). The MDMS asks married individuals about decision making in 24 relationship domains. For each domain, spouses indicate how much the couple agrees on each domain, who primarily makes decisions in each domain (the husband or the wife), and how important each domain is to each spouse. The MDMS forces individuals to respond to all domains, although many of the domains are not relevant to individuals in nonmarital relationships, and thus MDMS does not assess power well across all types of romantic relationships. In addition, individuals must report imbalances in decision-making power for each domain, which fails to capture the egalitarian nature of some relationships, and does not assess the degree of inequality for each domain.

frequency with which it was discussed in one's relationship, and the extent to which it affected both partners.

## Method

### Participants

Two samples were collected as part of Study 1. The first was a sample of 45 undergraduate psychology students at a large Midwestern university who were currently involved in romantic relationships. These participants were given extra credit in their psychology courses for participating in the study. They were on average 20.42 years old ( $SD = 4.82$ ), and their relationships had lasted for an average of 2.34 years ( $SD = 3.27$ ). Of these participants, 60% were female, 82.2% were White, and 82.2% were in dating relationships. The second sample was recruited from the local community and consisted of 40 individuals currently in romantic relationships. They were on average 37.52 years old ( $SD = 18.20$ ), and their relationships had lasted for an average of 12 years ( $SD = 15.38$ ). Of these participants, 50% were female, 55% were married, and 32.5% were in dating relationships.

### Measures

The survey, which was completed anonymously by all participants, contained the following measures.

*Demographic information.* Participants reported their age, sex, and race/ethnicity; their partner's age and sex; their relationship status (i.e., dating exclusively, cohabitating, engaged, married, other); and the length of their relationship.

*Freely generated domains.* Participants were given the following instructions: "There are many different domains, such as how to spend time together or how to spend money, where couples must make decisions that are important to or affect each other. What are some major domains in your relationship where you both, as a couple, make decisions?" Participants were asked to list up to eight domains.

*Deductive ratings.* Nine potential power domains were identified from previous marital relationship studies: handling finances, how to spend time together, demonstrations of affection and sexual relations, spending time with family and friends, philosophy of life/religion/values, amount of time spent together, household tasks, career/moving decisions, and childrearing (Dorfman & Heckert, 1988; Locke & Wallace, 1959). For each domain, participants rated (using 7-point Likert-type scales) the extent to which each domain was important/relevant to their relationship (anchored 1 = *not important/relevant* to 7 = *very important/relevant*), the extent to which each domain affected them and their partner (anchored 1 = *doesn't affect both of us* to 7 = *always affects both of us*), and the frequency with which each domain was discussed (anchored 1 = *never discussed* to 7 = *very frequently discussed*).

## Results

### Inductive analyses

The participants from both samples generated 302 relationship power domains. The samples did not differ in the average number of domains generated (students:  $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ; community:  $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ),  $t(83) = .410$ ,  $p = .68$ . Three trained coders first independently sorted the 302 responses into 11–13 overarching categories and then met to identify similar (i.e., overly redundant) categories and create a final list of categories. There was very high consensus on the relevant categories between all of the coders. Six categories appeared in all three coders' lists (how to spend time together, when/how much time together, vacations, finances, parenting, and religion/values) and two appeared in two coders' lists (future plans and what to eat). Based on the discussion between the coders, a final list of 10 domains was identified: Family and Friends, Finances, Future Plans, How to Spend Time Together, Parenting, Purchases, Relationship Issues, Religion, Vacations, and When/How Much Time Together.

### *Deductive analyses*

We first examined the ratings of importance, mutual relevance, and frequency of each previously identified potential power domain (see Table 1). Overall, how to spend time together was the most important domain, followed by demonstrations of affection/sexual relations and amount of time together, with childrearing being the least important domain. Similarly, demonstrations of affection/sexual relations and how to spend time together were the two most mutually relevant domains along with amount of time together, with childrearing once again receiving the lowest scores. Amount of time together, demonstrations of affection/sexual relations, and family and friends were the domains rated as occurring most frequently, and division of labor/household tasks and childrearing were the least frequent domains. Correlations between domain ratings on different dimensions were all significant ( $p < .001$ ) and fairly high, with ratings of importance and mutual relevance being slightly more highly correlated across domains ( $r$ s ranged from .58 to .88) than importance and frequency ( $r$ s ranged from .43 to .83) or mutual relevance and frequency ( $r$ s ranged from .39 to .80).

To explore whether there were differences in the importance, mutual relevance, or frequency of domains based on type of relationship, we divided the sample into two subgroups: dating couples ( $n = 53$ ) and engaged/married/cohabitating couples ( $n = 31$ ). We then ran a series of  $t$  tests to determine whether dating versus long-term couples differed in their ratings (see Table 2). Long-term couples reported finances ( $t = -8.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ), philosophy of life/religion/values ( $t = -2.39$ ,  $p = .020$ ), division of labor/household tasks ( $t = -5.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ), career/moving decisions ( $t = -2.31$ ,  $p < .023$ ), and childrearing ( $t = -5.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as more important or relevant domains in their relationships. Long-term couples also reported that finances ( $t = -3.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ), division of labor/household tasks ( $t = -5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and childrearing ( $t = -6.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were more relevant to themselves and their partner. Individuals in dating relationships reported that issues related to

how to spend time together ( $t = 2.65$ ,  $p = .011$ ), demonstrations of affection and sexual relations ( $t = 2.11$ ,  $p = .039$ ), and the amount of time spent together ( $t = 3.74$ ,  $p = .001$ ) arose more frequently in their relationships than in those of long-term relationships, who reported issues related to the division of labor/household tasks ( $t = -6.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and childrearing ( $t = -4.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as being more common.

### *Discussion*

Through our inductive categorization of the power domains that were freely generated by participants, as well as their ratings of domains from the existing literature, we identified 10 major, nonredundant power domains for romantic couples: Friends and Family, Finances, How to Spend Time Together, Parenting, Purchases, Relationship Issues, Religion, Vacations, and When/How Much Time Together (see Table 3). These domains were identified using an inductive coding process, but their identification was also supported by the deductive ratings. All 10 of these domains were represented among the freely generated domains. Because the division of labor/household tasks received fairly low ratings across the board, we felt justified in excluding it from the final list. Given the high correspondence between the inductive and deductive analyses, it appears as if these domains accurately reflect the normal range of major relational topics on which most couples frequently make important decisions.

However, there were some differences in the domains deemed most relevant to certain types of couples. This is not surprising. Dating couples have to negotiate topics such as how much time to spend together versus apart, which typically is a less important issue once partners live together. Likewise, married and cohabitating partners jointly share many things, such as finances and household tasks, which dating partners often keep separate, giving long-term partners a larger number of relevant domains. Cohabitating and noncohabitating couples should, therefore, be compared separately to assess and model these



**Table 1.** Study 1: Ratings of importance, relevance, and frequency for previously identified domains

Domain	Relevance to relationship, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Affects both partners, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Frequency issues arise, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Amount of time together	5.49 (1.23)	5.57 (1.40)	4.96 (1.54)
Career/moving decisions	4.67 (1.84)	4.54 (1.93)	4.20 (1.83)
Childrearing	3.00 (2.50)	2.92 (2.42)	2.86 (2.21)
Demonstrations of affection/sexual relations	5.70 (1.23)	5.68 (1.28)	4.69 (1.50)
Division of labor/household tasks	3.20 (1.82)	3.25 (1.86)	2.81 (1.70)
Family and friends	5.45 (1.03)	5.10 (1.20)	4.65 (1.20)
Finances	4.07 (2.04)	4.10 (2.03)	3.96 (2.09)
How to spend time together	5.86 (1.26)	5.56 (1.43)	5.42 (1.35)
Philosophy of life/religion/values	4.56 (1.93)	4.35 (1.90)	4.12 (1.75)

differences. Even within each type of romantic relationship, however, couples varied in the domains they rated as more frequent and important. For example, although childrearing received fairly low ratings on average in the full sample (especially for those in long-term relationships), it consistently had larger standard deviations, suggesting that for couples with children, this is a very important, relevant, and frequently arising domain. For this reason, the RPI allows individuals to choose which domains are most relevant to their relationship and to weight them in terms of both their importance and frequency.

**Study 2**

Study 1 identified the most important and relevant power domains for romantic relationships in general. In Study 2, we created a pool of items designed to tap process power (i.e., control over raising issues and framing discussions) and outcome power (i.e., control over the final decision) within each of the 10 decision-making domains. Our ultimate goal was to select a subset of best performing items, resulting in the RPI. We also wanted to develop and compare two versions of the RPI: (a) a domain-specific version, called the Relationship Domains RPI, which asks people to report on their power dynamics in each of the domains

identified in Study 1, and (b) a briefer version called the Overall RPI, which asks about power dynamics generally in the relationship. To identify which items should be included in the RPI measures, we tested the structural validity of a large set of items via factor analyses to narrow down the pool of items considered for inclusion in the final measures. We expected that the latent factor structure should consist of four factors (based on whether the item focused on the individual or the partner and whether it asked about process or outcome power): self-outcome, partner-outcome, self-process, and partner-process.

We also tested the convergent and divergent validity of both versions of the RPI in Study 2. We expected that the RPI would show good convergent validity (i.e., correlate significantly with) two existing proxy measures of relational power: (a) the balance of influence in the relationship, which according to the DPSIM is the foundation of power, and (b) mutuality of dependence on the relationship, which indexes the degree to which partners perceive they are more versus less dependent compared to their partners in terms of experiencing need fulfillment in the relationship (see Waller & Hill, 1951). In addition, we expected that social dominance orientation might have small but positive associations with the RPI, given that individuals who score higher on social

**Table 2.** Study 1: List of final domains with example issues

Domain	Example issues
Family and Friends	Whose family to spend Thanksgiving with Whose friends to hang out with this weekend
Finances	Setting up a household budget How to invest money
Future Plans	Where to move What job to take
How to Spend Time Together	What to do this weekend What to do for your anniversary
Parenting	How many kids to have How to discipline children
Purchases	What kind of car to buy What renovations should be made on the house
Relationship Issues	Communication issues If/when to get married
Religion	What holidays to celebrate How much time/money to invest in religious groups
Vacations	Where to go on vacation What to do while on vacation
When/How Much Time Together	When to spend time together vs. doing your own thing How much time to spend together vs. working or seeing friends

dominance toward other people in general might also tend to exert somewhat more dominance over their partners in their romantic relationships. We also wanted to examine whether possible relations between the RPI and gender norm beliefs were moderated by gender, such as whether men who have more traditional gender beliefs also report having relatively greater power in their relationships, and whether women who have more traditional gender beliefs report having comparatively less power. Finally, to determine whether RPI responses are affected by peoples’ tendency to give desirable responses on questionnaire measures, we assessed whether scores on the RPI were correlated with social desirability measures.

*Method*

*Item generation*

To create a provisional pool of items, we first examined past theoretical work on power

generally and outcome and process power specifically to ascertain the most relevant facets of each construct (e.g., Huston, 1983). For outcome power, we wanted to assess the extent to which individuals controlled making final decisions in their relationships, got their way when partners disagreed, and gave in to their partner’s preferences. For process power, we sought to assess power at earlier stages of the decision-making process, such as which partner brings up issues, lays out possible options, structures or leads discussions, or attempts to subtly influence the partner during discussions. Each relevant behavior was described in as many face-valid ways as possible to generate a provisional pool of items, which yielded eight outcome power items and six process power items. The phrase “in this domain” was added to each item so it could be used to assess each of the 10 domains identified in Study 1. Each item was written in two ways: (a) to assess the power of the participant (e.g., “When we make decisions, I get the final say”) and (b) to assess the power of his/her

**Table 3.** Study 2: Provisional item pool with structural validity evidence

Item	Interitem correlations	EFA	CFA
1. I have more say than my partner does when we make decisions in our relationship.			
2. I have more control over decision making than my partner does in our relationship.			
3. When we make decisions in our relationship, I get the final say.			
4. I have more influence than my partner does on decisions in our relationship.			
5. I have more power than my partner when deciding about issues in our relationship.			
6. I am more likely than my partner to get my way when we disagree about issues in our relationship.			
7. <i>My partner typically accepts what I want when we make decisions in this domain.</i>	Fair	Poor	—
8. <i>My partner tends to give in to my preferences when we disagree about decisions in this domain.</i>		Poor	—
9. My partner has more say than I do when we make decisions in our relationship.			
10. My partner has more control over decision making than I do in our relationship.			
11. When we make decisions in our relationship, my partner gets the final say.			
12. My partner has more influence than I do on decisions in our relationship.			
13. My partner has more power than me when deciding about issues in our relationship.			
14. My partner is more likely to get his/her way than me when we disagree about issues in our relationship.			
15. <i>I typically accept what my partner wants when we make decisions in this domain.</i>	Poor	Poor	—
16. <i>I tend to give in to my partner's preferences when we disagree about decisions in this domain.</i>	Poor	Poor	—
17. I am more likely than my partner to start discussions about issues in our relationship.			
18. When my partner and I make decisions in our relationship, I tend to structure and lead the discussion.			
19. I lay out the options more than my partner does when we discuss decisions in our relationship.			

Table 3. Continued

Item	Interitem correlations	EFA	CFA
20. I tend to bring up issues in our relationship more often than my partner does.		Fair	
21. <i>I generally steer the discussions my partner and I have about decisions in this domain.</i>	Fair		Poor
22. <i>I can make my partner come around to what I want when making decisions in this domain without him/her noticing what I am doing.</i>	Poor	Poor	—
23. My partner is more likely than me to start discussions about issues in our relationship.			
24. When my partner and I make decisions in our relationship, my partner tends to structure and lead the discussion.			
25. My partner lays out the options more than I do when we discuss decisions in this domain.			
26. My partner tends to bring up issues in this domain more often than I do.			
27. <i>My partner generally steers the discussions we have about decisions in this domain.</i>		Poor	—
28. <i>After the fact, I sometimes realize my partner influenced me without my noticing when making decisions in this domain.</i>	Poor	Poor	—

Note. [Blank] = performed well, no issues; Fair = showed weak contribution to structural validity in one version of the Relationship Power Inventory (RPI); Poor = showed weak contribution to structural validity on multiple versions of the RPI; *Dropped from the final RPI measure*. EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis.

partner (e.g., “When we make decisions, my partner gets the final say”). This resulted in 28 total items (see Table 2).

Participants

For Study 2, we recruited two groups of individuals in romantic relationships on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, an online “marketplace for work” where people complete surveys and other tasks. In the first group, which consisted of 316 individuals, each participant completed a 30-min survey online (anonymously), which included the domain-specific version of the RPI containing all 28 provisional items. Each participant was paid \$.50 for completion (the typical rate for this website). The participants

were on average 32.1 years old ( $SD = 10.93$ ), and the majority of them were female (56.7%) and White (73.4%). The participants’ romantic relationships had lasted for an average of 6.74 years ( $SD = 7.53$  years) at the time of the study, and 65.6% were living with their romantic partner.

The second group of 315 participants completed a 15-min survey that included the Overall RPI containing all 28 provisional items, and they were paid \$.40 for participating. The participants were on average 32.11 years old ( $SD = 10.42$ ), and the majority of them were male (50.9%) and White (73.4%). The participants’ romantic relationships had lasted for an average of 6.83 years

( $SD = 7.40$  years) at the time of the study, and 67.2% were living with their romantic partner.

### Measures

All participants completed the following measures.

**Demographic information.** Participants reported their age, sex, and race/ethnicity; their partner's age and sex; their cohabitation status (i.e., living together or not); and the length of their relationship.

**Relationship power.** Participants in the first group completed only the Relationship Domains RPI using the complete (28 item) pool (see Table 2). First, participants were shown the 10 domains identified in Study 1 (with example issues) and were asked to pick the 4 domains that were most relevant, important, and frequently discussed in their relationship. Participants next weighted each of the domains they chose so the sum of the weights would equal 100. They were instructed to choose and weight domains based on not only how frequently issues arose in their relationship within that domain, but also on how important and/or impactful those decisions were. Next, they answered the 28 original items (see above) for each of the 4 domains. Each item was rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). These ratings were reverse scored for the partner items before averaging with the self items, so that higher scores on the scale were associated with greater power (reported by the respondent) in the relationship.

Participants in the second group completed the Overall RPI, which asked about their power in the relationship in general rather than in reference to a specific domain (e.g., "I have more influence than my partner *in my relationship*"). Each of the 28 items was rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*), with ratings reverse scored for the partner items.

**Relative influence.** The Influence Meter is a one-item pictorial measure of relative influence within a relationship. The amount of

influence is indicated by relative levels of circles signifying "you" and "your partner" on a vertical continuum ranging from *most influence* to *least influence* (Oyamoto, Fuglestad, & Snyder, 2010).

**Mutuality of dependence.** Mutuality of Dependence is a six-item measure of how dependent an individual is on his or her relationship for the fulfillment of various needs (e.g., companionship, sexual needs) relative to the partner (Le & Agnew, 2001). Each item is rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*my partner relies more*) to 5 (*about equal*) to 9 (*I rely more*;  $\alpha = .73$  in the general scale sample;  $\alpha = .74$  in the full scale sample).

**Social desirability.** The Crowne and Marlowe (1960) Social Desirability Scale measures desirable responding with 10 true–false items. The alphas were .52 in the general scale sample and .55 in the full scale sample.

**Social dominance orientation.** The Social Dominance Orientation scale (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) measures preference for inequality between groups based on agreement with eight statements about social equality (rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale;  $\alpha = .92$  in the general scale sample;  $\alpha = .93$  in the full scale sample).

**Traditional gender norms.** Traditional gender roles were assessed by seven items compiled from previous measures of gender norms (Deason, Fillo, & Federcio, 2015;  $\alpha = .74$  in the general scale sample;  $\alpha = .79$  in the full scale sample).

## Results

### Interitem correlations

We first tested whether the provisional items created for the RPI were associated with one another by conducting zero-order correlations between all 28 items. To examine associations between items within a specific domain, we ran these correlations for the three most common domains selected: Finances (selected by 65.5% of participants), Future Plans (selected



by 64.8%), and How to Spend Time Together (selected by 57.4%). We chose these domains because they had large sample sizes ( $n > 181$ ), providing us with more stable correlation estimates. On average across these three domains, items were highly correlated within the self-outcome power ( $rs > .50$ ) and within the partner-outcome ( $rs > .47$ ) subscales. Item 22 ("I can make my partner come around to what I want when making decisions in this domain without him/her noticing what I am doing") and Item 28 ("After the fact, I sometimes realize my partner influenced me without my noticing when making decisions in this domain") were less correlated with the other process power items ( $rs < .45$ ), but correlations between the other self-process ( $rs > .57$ ) and partner-process ( $rs > .57$ ) items were similarly high. Self-outcome and partner-outcome power items were negatively associated, with correlations ranging between  $-.01$  and  $-.32$ . Self-process and partner-process items were also generally negatively associated, although Item 22 was positively correlated with the partner-process items.

Interitem correlations were also examined for the Overall RPI. Correlations were high between items on the self-outcome subscale ( $rs > .43$ ;  $rs > .53$ , with Item 7 discarded). Correlations were similarly high on the partner-outcome subscale when Items 15 and 16 were excluded ( $rs > .69$ ). Items on the self-process and partner-process subscales were also high when Items 22 and 28 were removed ( $rs > .50$  for both process subscales). Self-outcome and partner-outcome subscale items tended to be uncorrelated, except for Items 7, 15, and 16 ( $rs$  ranged from  $-.17$  to  $.13$ ). Self-process and partner-process items on the general subscale tended to be negatively correlated, except for Items 21 and 28 ( $rs > -.12$ ). In addition, the individual items within and between subscales on both the specific domains and the general versions of the RPI were associated as expected, with a few exceptions (see Table 3).

#### *Exploratory factor analysis*

We expected that the subscales of the RPI would load on different factors, but they would

be correlated. Thus, to assess the structure of the RPI provisional item pool more completely, we factor analyzed the items from the three most popular domains (Finances, Future Plans, and How to Spend Time Together) using principal components analysis with an Oblimin rotation. The factor analyses of the Finance domain and the Future Plans domain each produced four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The How to Spend Time Together domain had five factors. The Finances and Future Plans analyses revealed that self-outcome and partner-outcome loaded on their own factors and the two process power subscales loaded on the same factor in opposite directions, whereas the How to Spend Time Together analyses showed that each of the expected subscales loaded on their own factor. In each of these analyses, the extra factor tended to contain only items that were less highly correlated with the rest of the scale, namely Item 7 ("My partner typically accepts what I want in this domain"), Item 8 ("My partner tends to give in to my preferences when we disagree about issues in this domain"), Item 15 ("I typically accept what my partner wants in this domain"), Item 16 ("I tend to give in to my partner's preferences when we disagree about issues in this domain"), Item 22, and Item 28. The factor structure after dropping this extra factor explained on average 73.3% of the variation in the items for each domain (range = 71.7%–74.3%). Factor loadings within each of the subscales tended to be high. The items with the lowest loadings for their predetermined factors (or those that tended to cross-load onto other factors) were Items 7, 15, 16, 22, 27, and 28. The rest of the items had high loadings ( $> .53$ ) on their expected factor and low loadings ( $< .40$ ) on the other factors.

Similarly, principal components analysis with an Oblimin rotation on the Overall RPI resulted in five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, but the fifth factor had high loadings only for items that were less related to the other items in their subscale, such as Items 7, 15, and 16. When forced to generate four factors, the four-factor structure was very similar to that obtained for the specific domains of Finances or Future Plans, with self-outcome

and partner-outcome each loading on their own factor, self-process and partner-process loading in opposite directions on one factor, and the last factor consisting of bad items. This structure explained 69.78% of the variance in the items. The items that loaded lower on their predetermined factor (or cross-loaded onto other factors) were Items 7, 8, 15, 16, 20 ("I tend to bring up issues in my relationship more than my partner does"), 22, 27, and 28. Based on these analyses and the interitem correlations, Items 7, 8, 15, 16, 22, 27, and 28 were excluded from further consideration for inclusion in the RPI.

### *Confirmatory factor analysis*

As a more stringent test of the structure of the RPI, we next conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the domain-specific items from the Finances, Future Plans, and How to Spend Time Together domains as well as the Overall RPI. The CFAs indicated that the items loaded onto four factors representing the four subscales of the RPI, which were nested within two higher order factors, representing the self's power (self-outcome and self-process factors) and the partner's power (partner-outcome and partner-process factors; see Figure 2). Model fit statistics were lower than satisfactory for all three domains, so the item with the lowest loadings, Item 21 ("I generally steer the discussions my partner and I have about decisions in this domain"), was removed from the model. Based on modification indices, covariance paths were also added between Items 17 and 20 and Items 24 and 25. The model with the remaining 20 items and these additional paths produced acceptable model fit statistics for all three domains (see Table 4).

The same model was then run for the 21 items from the Overall RPI. Once again, model fit was unsatisfactory, so Item 21 was removed and the two covariance paths described above were added. The model with the remaining 20 items produced acceptable model fit statistics (see Table 4).

### *Alphas within subscales*

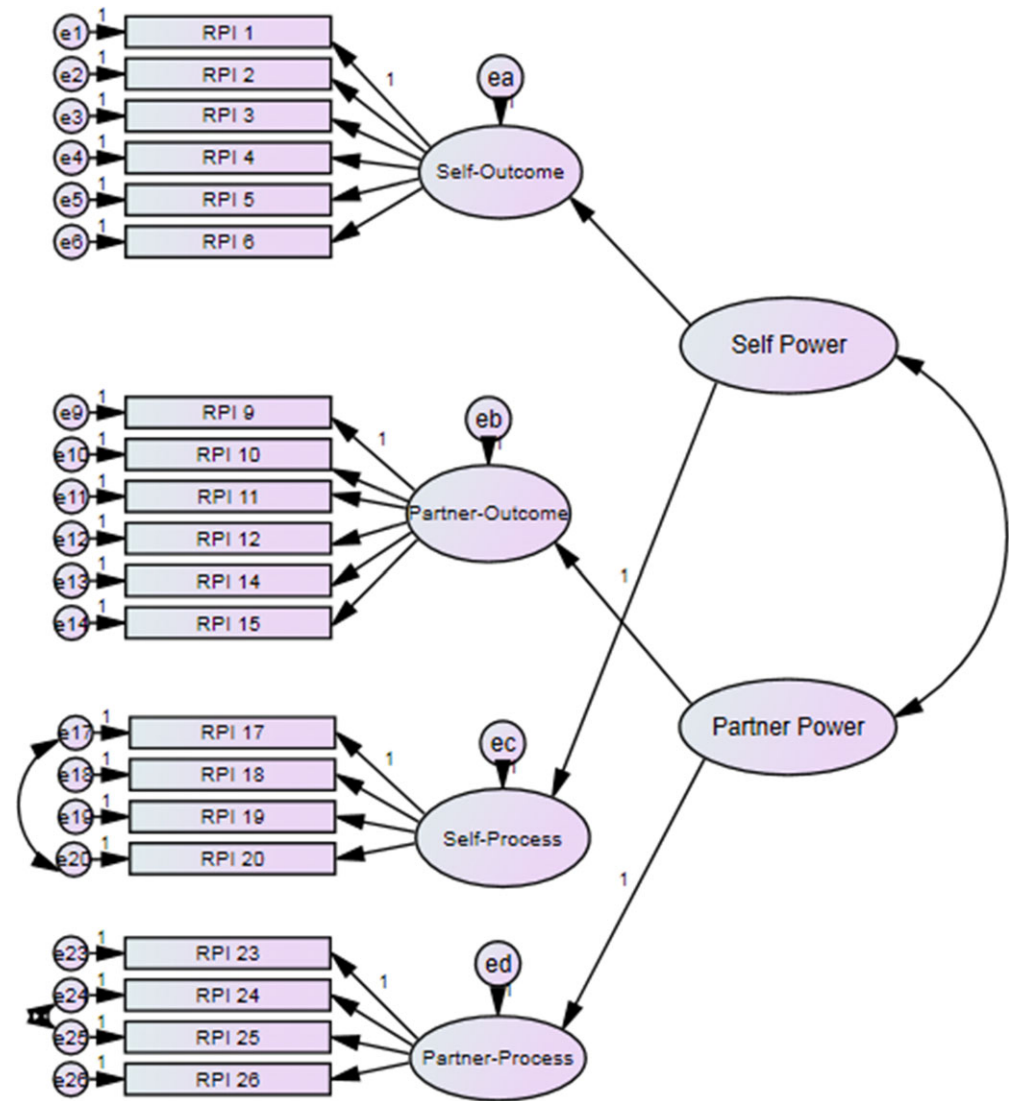
Based on the interitem correlations and factor analyses, we selected 20 items for the

Relationship Domains RPI (see Appendix A): Items 1–6 for the self-outcome power subscale, Items 9–14 for the partner-outcome subscale, Items 17–20 for the self-process subscale, and Items 23–26 for the partner-process subscales. We calculated the alphas for the Finances, Future Plans, and How to Spend Time Together domains and averaged them to test the reliabilities of the subscales within specific domains. The average alphas were .93 for self-outcome, .94 for partner-outcome, .89 for self-process, and .91 for partner-process. None of the subscale alphas for these three domains were below .87. For the Overall RPI (see Appendix B), which contains the same 20 items phrased about the relationship in general, the alphas were .94 for self-outcome, .95 for partner-outcome, .85 for self-process, and .87 for partner-process.

### *Convergent and divergent validity analyses*

To test the convergent and divergent validity properties of the RPI, we correlated both the Overall and the Relationship Domains versions of the RPI with the other self-report measures collected in Study 2. To create the Overall RPI power score, the partner items on the Overall RPI were reverse scored and the 20 items were then averaged together. To create the Relationship Domains RPI score, ratings were reverse scored for the partner items and then averaged within each domain. Following this, a weighted average was computed to generate a Relationship Domains RPI score based on the weights assigned to each domain by each participant. We then correlated both of these power scales with the two proxy measures of power (the Influence Meter and mutuality of dependence), and with social dominance orientation, desirable responding, and gender beliefs.

The Overall RPI and the Relationship Domains RPI both produced similar patterns of correlations (see Table 5). As predicted, both correlated significantly with the Influence Meter, but unexpectedly neither was correlated with mutuality of dependence (but see Footnote 2). Also as predicted, neither RPI power measure was correlated with socially desirable responding. Overall RPI power was marginally correlated with social dominance



**Figure 2.** Study 2: Confirmatory factor analysis model structure. RPI=Relationship Power Inventory.

orientation and gender role beliefs, such that individuals who reported having more overall power in their relationship scored somewhat lower on social dominance orientation and held somewhat more egalitarian gender role beliefs. Relationship Domains RPI power was unassociated with both gender role beliefs and social dominance orientation.

To test whether participant sex moderated the link between power and gender role beliefs, we ran regression models predicting Overall and Relationship Domains

power from gender role beliefs, participant sex, and the interaction between the two. None of these terms were significant predictors of the Relationship Domains RPI ( $bs < .20$ ,  $p < .55$ ), but the interaction term was a marginally significant predictor of overall power ( $b = .17$ ,  $p = .06$ ), such that males reported having somewhat more power than females when they held less egalitarian gender role beliefs, but more equal levels of power when they held more egalitarian gender role beliefs.

**Table 4.** Study 2: Confirmatory factor analysis model fit statistics

RPI version	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	RMSEA
Finances from Relationship Domains RPI	3.23	.906	.083
Future plans from Relationship Domains RPI	2.687	.912	.072
How to spend time together from Relationship Domains RPI	2.982	.872	.078
Overall RPI	4.41	.889	.106

*Note.* CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; RPI = Relationship Power Inventory.

**Table 5.** Study 2: Correlations between Relationship Power Inventory (RPI) and convergent/divergent variables

Measure	<i>r</i> with Overall RPI	<i>r</i> with Relationship Domains RPI
Influence meter	-.55***	-.38***
Mutuality of dependence	.049	-.03
Social desirability	.078	-.01
Social dominance orientation	-.10 <sup>†</sup>	.02
Egalitarian gender role beliefs	.10 <sup>†</sup>	-.05

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10. \*\*\**p* < .001.

*Discussion*

Study 2 confirmed that the final set of 20 RPI items are structurally valid and consistent with our theoretical expectations. Items within domains are highly correlated, as expected, and the items within subscales have high alpha values. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using an oblique rotation indicated that the subscales loaded together, primarily on the factors representing each subscale. Because we expected that self and partner power and outcome and process power would be correlated factors, these results are not surprising. Although EFA suggested that self-outcome and partner-outcome power tend to be orthogonal to one another and to process power, process power appears to be more bipolar, with either the individual or the partner controlling the decision-making process. More importantly, CFA also confirmed the existence of four subscales (self-outcome, partner-outcome, self-process, partner-process), which form two higher order factors representing the self's and the partner's power in the relationship. In sum,

this evidence reveals that both the Overall and the Relationship Domains versions of the RPI are structurally sound and make sense theoretically.

Our tests of convergent and divergent validity in Study 2 yielded supportive albeit somewhat mixed results. On the supportive side, the Influence Meter—a measure of the equality of influence between relationship partners and the measure closest to our core definition of power (Simpson et al., 2015)—was highly correlated with both power measures. Socially desirable responding was unrelated to RPI scores, suggesting that socially desirable responding is not shaping individuals' responses to the RPI. The gender role beliefs measure revealed a marginally significant interaction pattern with sex in the expected direction, showing that men who held more traditional beliefs about gender roles reported having more power in general. Viewed together, these findings suggest that our RPI scales have some good convergent and discriminant validation properties.

A few findings, however, did not align with our hypotheses. Mutuality of dependence was

uncorrelated with both versions of the RPI. However, it was significantly correlated with both versions of the RPI in another, independent sample.<sup>2</sup> What might account for this weaker than anticipated connection? Mutuality of dependence is a source of power that has roots in interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and the principle of least interest (Waller & Hill, 1951). To our knowledge, the connection between being the less dependent partner in a relationship and being more powerful has been documented in only one study to date (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). In that study, inequalities in dependence were measured by a single item that asked participants to rate their relative emotional involvement in the relationship compared to their partner. The mutuality of dependence measure that we used in Study 2 asked participants to report how much they (in relation to their partner) rely on the relationship to fulfill different needs. This specific operationalization of relative dependence may be more tenuously linked to power in relationships. Furthermore, other sources of power (e.g., expertise, gender roles, finances) could have a greater effect on power dynamics than mutuality of dependence (see Simpson et al., 2015). These rather mixed findings highlight the need to measure power directly and to not rely on proxy measures when studying it in relationships.

Social dominance orientation was also not significantly associated with power, even though we initially thought it might have a small positive correlation with our RPI scales. The Study 2 sample, however, scored very low on social dominance ( $M = 2.75$  out of a possible 7,  $SD = 1.39$ ). Not having individuals who felt strongly that social hierarchies should be maintained could have limited our ability to detect small positive correlations between RPI scores and social dominance.

These findings, when considered in their entirety, provide initial evidence for the construct validity of the RPI. Nevertheless, we

conducted Study 3 to provide further validation evidence, focusing on the predictive validity of the RPI scales.

### Study 3

To validate the RPI further, in Study 3 we tested how self-reports of power on the RPI predicted behavior during romantic couples' decision-making discussions. We observed couples' power dynamics in two decision-making discussions: one in which the male partner held relatively more power than his partner, and one in which the female partner held relatively more power than her partner. We predicted that RPI scores would predict coder ratings of both outcome power and process power in these discussions. We also compared the Overall and Relationship Domains versions of the RPI to determine whether the complexity of choosing, weighting, and answering questions about process and outcome power for specific relationship domains added predictive power (in terms of predicting actual behavior in couples' decision-making discussions), or whether a simpler (Overall) RPI measure is sufficient. In addition, we also compared the relations between power behavior and measures of power in the relationship as a whole with measures of power in the specific domain discussed, to see if the level of specificity affected the predictive power of the relationship power measure.

Furthermore, we measured the test–retest reliability of the RPI in Study 3 by comparing responses on a background survey to a follow-up survey conducted 3 months later. We expected that individuals would pick mostly the same domains at both assessment time points and would give domains similar weights. We also anticipated that there would be relatively high correlations between relationship domains and overall power measured at the two time points.

### Method

#### Participants

Eighty-eight romantic couples were recruited from the community around a large Midwestern university. To be eligible, couples had to

2. In the sample used in Study 3, mutuality of dependence correlated  $-.17$  ( $p = .02$ ) with relationship domains power and  $-.15$  ( $p = .03$ ) with overall power, such that feeling more dependent on one's partner than they were on you was associated with holding less power, as expected.



be heterosexual and either cohabitating for at least 1.5 years or married. Of the 88 couples, 67.6% were married, 8.5% were engaged, and 22.2% were cohabitating (but not married or engaged). The average relationship length was 7.44 years ( $SD = 7.20$ ). The average age of participants was 30.98 years ( $SD = 9.18$ ), and 80.1% were White/Caucasian. Couples were paid \$70 for completing the study.

### Measures

*Relationship domains power.* Both partners completed the Relationship Domains RPI (see Appendix A). They were asked to select at least five domains that were most important and relevant to their relationship and then weight them based on their importance and frequency from 0 to 100, with the sum of the weights having to equal 100. Items were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*), with ratings reverse scored for the partner items. We then multiplied each domain mean by the domain weight provided by each partner.<sup>3</sup>

*Overall power.* Both partners also completed the Overall RPI (see Appendix B), which assesses power in the relationship in general (e.g., "I have more influence than my partner *in my relationship*"). Items were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*), with ratings reverse scored for the partner items. Interitem reliability was high ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

### Procedure

After both partners had independently completed the power measures as part of a background Internet survey approximately 1 week prior to the lab study, each couple (both partners) came to the lab to have two decision-making discussions about two current issues in their relationship. The domains to be discussed were chosen by the researcher before

the lab session. The discussions involved different domains in which one partner held more power than the other (e.g., each couple discussed a domain in which the male had relatively more power in one discussion, after which the couple discussed another domain in which the female had relatively more power in the next discussion, or vice versa).<sup>4</sup> The order of the discussions was randomly assigned.

For each discussion, the couple entered the videotaping room, were given their assigned domain for that discussion, and were then shown some example issues (see Table 2). They were asked to think of an issue in the assigned domain in which they needed to make a decision together. They were asked to think of a specific, nonhypothetical issue. The issue did not have to be contentious, and the couple could have talked about it before as long as they had not yet made a decision about the issue. Prior to discussing the issue, each partner privately completed prediscussion measures about his or her feelings and perceptions of the partner's feelings regarding the issue. Following this, the couple returned to the videotaping room and were given 5 min to discuss the issue while it was videotaped. They were encouraged to try to reach a final decision (if possible) or at least propose a possible plan of action to resolve the issue.

Immediately after the discussion, the partners were separated to complete post-discussion measures in private rooms. These measures asked each partner about his or her feelings and behavior and perceptions of the partner's feelings and behavior during the discussion. Each partner also reported his or her current feelings about the relationship. Before starting the next discussion, partners viewed a slideshow for 2 min to help them relax before having the next discussion. The

3. It is not appropriate to report alphas for the domain-specific RPI, as items across domains are not necessarily expected to hang together. This statistic, therefore, is not useful for this type of domain-specific measure.

4. The domains were identified by comparing the average score on each domain previously rated by each partner. For the two discussions, we first tried to identify a domain in which both partners agreed one partner held more power, and then chose the domain with the largest power difference. If there was no such domain, we chose a domain in which one partner reported a large differential. For both discussions, a back-up domain was also selected (the second-best match for the criteria for that discussion) in case the couple could not think of a current issue in the originally selected domain.

purpose of the slideshow was to decrease any emotional spillover between discussions.

The couples were contacted 3 months after completing the lab session to complete a follow-up survey. One hundred and forty-three individuals completed the follow-up survey (80.3% of the sample). These participants were 49.7% male, 79% White, and their average age was 31.26 ( $SD = 9.45$  years). The average relationship length was 7.86 years ( $SD = 7.66$  years). Those who completed the follow-up survey were younger than those who did not ( $t = -2.45$ ,  $p = .015$ ), but the groups did not differ in terms of relationship length or relationship quality.

### *Behavioral coding*

Each of the videotapes from each couple was independently coded by five extensively trained coders. Coders were blind to one another's ratings and all self-report data from each couple. Coders coded for the amount of outcome and process power displayed by each partner during each discussion. *Outcome power* was defined as the extent to which the rated individual controlled the final decision in the discussion and how much he or she forced the final decision to conform to his or her preferences instead of the partner's preferences. *Process power* was defined as the extent to which the rated individual brought up ideas or points to discuss, laid out pros and cons, or otherwise structured and led the conversation. Outcome and process power were rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*no power*) to 5 (*total power*), with half-point ratings allowed. Interrater reliabilities were high for both outcome power (intraclass correlation [ICC] = .79 for women and .79 for men) and process power (ICC = .81 for women and .80 for men).

## *Results*

### *Behavioral analyses*

To test whether the RPI predicted actual decision-making behavior and outcomes, we correlated each partner's RPI scores for the domain that was discussed with the behavioral codes of outcome and process power from each discussion. As expected, RPI scores from

the specific domain discussed significantly and positively predicted coder ratings of both outcome power ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and process power ( $r = .20$ ,  $p = .001$ ), providing strong predictive validity evidence for the RPI.

Next, we tested whether the more complex Relationship Domains RPI explained more (additional) variance in the observer-rated behavioral outcomes than was explained by just the Overall RPI. To do so, we averaged outcome and process power scores separately across the two videotaped discussions and calculated an overall power behavioral rating. We then correlated the Relationship Domains RPI and the Overall RPI with the averaged coder ratings of process and outcome power. The Relationship Domains RPI weighted composite was highly correlated with the Overall RPI power scale ( $r = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, they were both equally (and significantly) correlated with coder-rated outcome power, but were insignificantly correlated with coder-rated process power. When Relationship Domains power was included in regression analyses with Overall power predicting outcome and process power from the two discussions, it did not have a significant effect above and beyond overall power ( $b = .001$ ,  $p < .28$ ). These results suggest that the Overall and Relationship Domains versions of the RPI are equally strong predictors of behavior, and that the Relationship Domains RPI does not have additional predictive effects above and beyond the Overall RPI.

### *Reliability analyses*

There was high test-retest reliability between the first and second assessments, which were conducted 3 months apart. Both Overall RPI power scores ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Relationship Domains RPI power scores ( $r = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were highly correlated across the two assessments. Participants selected many of same domains for both assessments. On average, individuals made 3.69 changes in domain choices ( $SD = 2.03$ ).<sup>5</sup> Weights given to domains across assessments were also

5. Changes were counted so that whenever a participant chose a domain on the follow-up they had not chosen before *or* if they did not choose a domain on the

highly correlated, except for the When/How Much Time Together domain ( $r = .14$ ,  $p = .11$ ; for the other  $r$ s,  $M = .46$ ,  $SD = .17$ ,  $p$ s  $< .006$ ).

### Discussion

Study 3 showed that the RPI has good predictive validity. As hypothesized, self-reports of power were significantly and positively associated with behavioral ratings of both process and outcome power in the discussions in which romantic partners reported having different amounts of power. These validation effects, though statistically significant, were somewhat limited in their magnitude. Several factors might explain this finding. For example, there could have been slight mismatches between the target of the self-report measure of power and behavior within a specific domain. The RPI assessed power with regard to a given domain in the relationship, whereas the behavioral codes assessed power with regard to a *specific issue* related to that domain. Some domains are fairly broad, and although an individual may typically hold more power than his or her partner within that domain, the power dynamics for a specific issue could be slightly different. Some issues also cut across multiple domains in a relationship (e.g., a discussion about whom to invite to your wedding is likely to bring in the family and friends domain as well as the financial domain), which may attenuate the connection between self-reports about a domain and behavior regarding a specific issue in that domain. Considering all of these complicating factors, Study 3 still provides clear support for the predictive validity of the RPI, and in combination with the convergent and divergent validity findings of Study 2, offers additional support regarding the construct validity of the RPI.

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follow-up that they had chosen previously, it counted as 1 change. For example, if someone dropped one domain and chose another in its place, it would count as 2 changes. The maximum number of changes possible was 10 (choose 5 domains in the background survey and the other 5 in the follow-up).

Study 3 also provides good evidence regarding the predictive power of the Relationship Domains (including the specific domains within that measure) in relation to the other versions of the RPI. As expected, the domain-specific RPI scales were stronger predictors of behavior than the more general (i.e., Relationship Domains and Overall) RPI scales, suggesting that the added complexity of asking about power within specific domains is useful in predicting behavior better within a given domain. However, the highly complex Relationship Domains RPI was not any more strongly associated with outcome or process power behavior rated by coders than the Overall RPI, and it did not provide any additional predictive power for behavior. The Overall and Relationship Domains RPI scales were also highly correlated with one another. This suggests that when researchers are most concerned about assessing the general power dynamics in a couple's relationship and have limited time or resources, using the 20-item Overall RPI is a good substitute.

Finally, we found high test–retest reliability for the RPI. Participants tended to choose many of the same domains and gave them similar weights across the two assessments, which were conducted approximately 3 months apart. Furthermore, partners' ratings of the power dynamics in their relationships, as indexed by the Overall and Relationship Domains versions of the RPI, were also highly correlated across the two assessments. This indicates that the RPI is also a highly reliable scale in terms of test–retest reliability.

We tested the reliability of the RPI on a sample of long-term couples (i.e., married or cohabitating). Such couples already should have worked out the power dynamics for most of the important issues in the different issue domains, meaning that their power dynamics should have been fairly stable (Simpson et al., 2015). However, there could be relationship changes that might lower the test–retest reliability of the RPI. For example, couples that experience major life changes such as those that lead to new domains becoming relevant or irrelevant to the relationship (e.g., becoming a parent and having parenting become an important and relevant domain) or those in which

other sources of power become irrelevant (e.g., one partner losing a job, which causes him or her to lose status outside the relationship and be unable to make financial contributions to the relationship) are likely to experience changes in power dynamics (Simpson et al., 2015). It was not feasible to measure these kinds of changes in the current study, given that a wide range of experiences could potentially affect power dynamics. Nevertheless, the RPI had high test–retest reliability, even without controlling for these potential relationship changes.

## General Discussion

The close relationships field has been in need of a comprehensive, well-validated self-report measure of power in romantic relationships. In this article, we present the development of and validation evidence for the RPI. The RPI improves on past power scales by measuring an individual's ability to both use and resist power, and it taps two unique and important components of power: process and outcome power. We developed two versions of the RPI, a more detailed and lengthy Relationship Domains version and a briefer and broader Overall version, both of which use the same basic items. To develop these measures, we first identified 10 major decision-making domains that romantic couples regularly encounter, ranging from finances to how to spend time together to parenting. The importance, frequency, and relevance of these domains to relationship partners was confirmed using both top-down (deductive) and bottom-up (inductive) rating techniques. From there, we identified the most structurally sound items to include in the RPI from a larger pool of items, dropping items that did not correlate with other items designed to be related or did not load on their expected factor. We demonstrated the construct validity of the Relationship Domains RPI and the Overall RPI by showing they are associated with power-relevant self-report and behaviorally rated measures, documenting convergent validity, and showing that both versions of the RPI are not correlated with unrelated measures or some potential confounds (discriminant validity). Finally, we documented

good test–retest reliability for both the Overall RPI and Relationship Domains versions of the RPI over a 3-month period.

Across our three studies, we used samples of dating, cohabitating, and married individuals to ensure that the RPI assesses power in different types of romantic relationships. We also recruited participants from both the community and from Amazon's Mechanical Turk to increase the diversity of our sample, giving us confidence that the RPI can be used in a fairly broad array of populations. However, further testing of the RPI in a greater range of cultures, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes is encouraged.

### *Guidelines for use*

The RPI is designed for use with romantic dyads, but not for other types of close relationships. The RPI is validated only with reference to romantic couples, and power may function differently in other relationship contexts. Parent–child relationships, for example, have normative and fairly stable power differences, which might stem from other sources and lead to different outcomes, and power may be less salient or based on other domains for friendship partners. Furthermore, different versions of the RPI may be better suited for different contexts and research goals, so recommendations for choosing which version to use are outlined below.

The most specific version of the RPI is the 20 questions that assess a single domain within the Relationship Domains RPI (e.g., financial power). These very specific reports of power within a given domain often may not generalize to the relationship as a whole. If, however, a researcher is trying to make predictions about power or power-relevant behavior, emotions, or cognitions regarding a single issue or context, then this level of specificity can be helpful. In Study 3, the reports of power within the specific domain being discussed were more predictive of power behavior than either of the more general versions of the RPI were (the Relationship Domains RPI and the Overall RPI). In addition, researchers can also introduce new domains based on their research interests and goals. For example, someone

studying safe sex behavior might want to add a sexual decisions domain to tap power dynamics related to that domain more directly.

The full Relationship Domains version of the RPI, in which participants choose and weigh the important decision making and then report on power within each domain separately, provides both a specific view of power in a given domain as well as a more general view of power across the relationship. Given its scope, the Relationship Domains RPI can be used by researchers who want to assess power dynamics both across the relationship as a whole and within specific domains. This measure is the most comprehensive one, and it gives researchers the greatest flexibility in focus and breadth, which could be useful in studies where power is the key or central concept.

On the downside, the Relationship Domains RPI is complex and time consuming to complete. Researchers who only want to assess power generally in the relationship may prefer to use the briefer and much simpler 20-item Overall RPI. The Overall and Relationship Domains RPI scales are highly correlated and show similar levels of construct validity and test-retest reliability, suggesting that the Overall RPI is a good substitute for the Relationship Domains RPI when researchers have limited time or resources to devote to the measurement of power in their studies.

### *Future directions*

How can the RPI be used to advance our understanding of power, influence, and related close relationship processes? The DPSIM suggests some key questions that the RPI can address (see Figure 1). According to the DPSIM, the characteristics of both partners and their daily interactions can be major sources of power, often leading each partner to have different power bases to various degrees. These power bases shape the way partners influence each other, or may bypass the need for influence altogether. The outcomes of each partner or the relationship depend in part on the power each partner holds and how it is enacted. By looking carefully at this model, one can identify several potential directions for research using the RPI.

For instance, what are the sources of power in relationships? Many potential power sources have been identified in the theoretical literature. Interdependence theory and the principle of least interest, for example, point to inequalities in dependence as a key determinant of power (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Waller & Hill, 1951), whereas resource theory focuses on money and expertise as power sources (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). These sources are frequently treated as proxy measures of power, but little if any empirical research has determined which sources are most important to—or are even related to—power in relationships. Because the RPI measures power directly (rather than its sources), it can be used to determine which theoretical sources are most strongly associated with power in a given relationship.

We also know very little about the structure of power in relationships. There are likely to be two basic structural dimensions on which power varies across most couples. The first dimension is equality: To what extent do partners in a relationship hold equal power, or is there a power discrepancy between them? The second dimension is stability: How similar are power dynamics across different domains within a relationship? By mapping out this two-dimensional space, we can conceptualize four types of power structures a couple might have. One partner could consistently have more power in every relationship domain (low equality, high stability), both partners could have equal levels of power in every domain (high equality, high stability), partners could hold power in different domains but have equal power on average across domains (high equality, low stability), or there could be fluctuations in power for partners across domains, but one partner has more power overall (low equality, low stability). The Relationship Domains RPI can assess these two dimensions separately so these structures can be studied. It might also be informative to determine how these power dynamics develop. For example, could having communal norms or trusting your partner to act in your best interest lead couples to have a more transactive, high equality-low stability power structure? Similarly, these different structures could produce different types of relational outcomes. Equality, for instance,



may be more important for relationship satisfaction than stability, and both dimensions may affect partners' influence tactic use and effectiveness.

Although power has been discussed as a potential moderator of a number of relationship processes, few studies have actually tested for power moderation effects, mainly due to the lack of a good self-report power measure. Simpson (2007), for example, suggests that power could impact the development of trust in relationships. Couples in which a powerful individual frequently takes advantage of his or her less powerful partner may have more difficulties developing trust, while couples in which a powerful partner acts more benevolently may develop stronger, more trusting relationships. Another potentially fruitful area for examining power as a moderator could be physiological responses to relationship conflict. Less powerful partners should be more stressed by conflict and put more resources into regulating their responses in order to appease their partner, but these stress responses might be reduced if their more powerful partners are highly responsive and constructive during conflict interactions. Considering the effects of power by using the RPI could shed new light on important qualifications regarding critical relationship processes.

This is even true of areas in which power should be very important, such as influence strategy use and effectiveness. We have some knowledge about the effectiveness of different influence strategies (e.g., Oriña, Wood, & Simpson, 2002; Overall et al., 2009), but we do not know much about how individuals choose which strategies to use or what moderates their effectiveness. Power is likely to shape the influence strategies that individuals use as well as the effectiveness of these strategies, and measuring power in conjunction with influence strategies ought to increase our understanding of when, why, and how romantic partners influence one another.

Finally, power should not necessarily remain stable in romantic couples over time. There are several key transition periods in relationships when it may be especially important to measure power multiple times in order to model how it changes both within each

partner and between the two partners. Couples may want to rebalance their power dynamics or one partner may see these transitions as opportunities to gain more power in their relationship, and these changes in power could have many important downstream consequences. For example, domains that were once controlled by only one partner but have become domains that the couple must negotiate, such as partners having to split household tasks or having newly shared finances when first moving in together, could lead to changes in power dynamics within the relationship. Likewise, when new power domains are introduced, such as during the transition to parenthood, general levels of power in the relationship may change or power across domains may need to be rebalanced in order to maintain a desired dynamic. Alternatively, when power domains are no longer relevant, such as when parenting couples become "empty nesters," or when other sources of power are removed, such as during retirement, partners may need to renegotiate their power structures. Because the RPI has good test-retest reliability across at least short periods of time, it can accurately detect these changes and allow them to be measured and modeled by researchers.

In conclusion, over 70 years after Russell's (1938) assertion about the centrality of power in social science, we still know surprisingly little about how power is developed, structured, and carried out in close relationships, nor do we understand the consequences of having and lacking power for individuals and their relationships. We hope that the RPI will spark renewed interest and quality research on these key topics, and will help to increase our understanding of the importance of power in close relationships.

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## Appendix A

### The Relationship Power Inventory: Relationship Domains Version

Couples frequently need to make decisions together. However, different couples have different relationship domains, or general categories of issues, that are most important to them. Below is a list of 10 common decision-making domains for romantic couples.

Choose the 5–7 domains that are most important in your relationship. Then rate how important each of those four domains is relative to one another in terms of a percentage. The higher the percentage you assign to a domain, the more important that domain should be. In making your ratings, consider not only how frequently issues come up in that domain but also how significant or impactful issues in that domain are to you and your partner. Ratings for the 5–7 domains must sum to 100%.

For each statement, rate how true it is of you and your partner in your relationship regarding issues in this domain.

Family and Friends (e.g., whose family to spend Thanksgiving with, whose friends to hang out with this weekend)	%
Finances (e.g., setting up a household budget, how to invest money)	%
Future Plans (e.g., where to move, what job to take)	%
How to Spend Time Together (e.g., what to do this weekend, what to do for your anniversary)	%
Parenting (e.g., how many kids to have, how to discipline children)	%
Purchases (e.g., what kind of car to buy, what renovations should be made on the house)	%
Relationship Issues (e.g., communication issues, if/when to get married)	%
Religion (e.g., what holidays to celebrate, how much time/money to invest in religious groups)	%
Vacations (e.g., where to go on vacation, what to do while on vacation)	%
When/How Much Time Together (e.g., when to spend time together vs. doing your own thing, how much time to spend together vs. working or seeing friends)	%

Domain: Family and Friends (e.g., Whose friends to spend time with, whose family to spend holidays with)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never		Sometimes				Always

1. I have more say than my partner does when we make decisions in this domain.
2. I have more control over decision making than my partner does in this domain.
3. When we make decisions in this domain, I get the final say.
4. I have more influence than my partner does on decisions in this domain.
5. I have more power than my partner when deciding about issues in this domain.
6. I am more likely than my partner to get my way when we disagree about issues in this domain.
7. My partner has more say than I do when we make decisions in this domain.
8. My partner has more control over decision making than I do in this domain.
9. When we make decisions in this domain, my partner gets the final say.
10. My partner has more influence than I do on decisions in this domain.

11. My partner has more power than me when deciding about issues in this domain.
12. My partner is more likely to get his/her way than me when we disagree about issues in this domain.
13. I am more likely than my partner to start discussions about issues in this domain.
14. When my partner and I make decisions in this domain, I tend to structure and lead the discussion.
15. I lay out the options more than my partner does when we discuss decisions in this domain.
16. I tend to bring up issues in this domain more often than my partner does.
17. My partner is more likely than me to start discussions about issues in this domain.
18. When my partner and I make decisions in this domain, my partner tends to structure and lead the discussion.
19. My partner lays out the options more than I do when we discuss decisions in this domain.
20. My partner tends to bring up issues in this domain more often than I do.

**Appendix B**

**The Relationship Power Inventory: Overall Version**

For each statement, rate how true it is of you and your partner generally in your relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never			Sometimes			Always

- 1. I have more say than my partner does when we make decisions in our relationship.
- 2. I have more control over decision making than my partner does in our relationship.
- 3. When we make decisions in our relationship, I get the final say.
- 4. I have more influence than my partner does on decisions in our relationship.
- 5. I have more power than my partner when deciding about issues in our relationship.
- 6. I am more likely than my partner to get my way when we disagree about issues in our relationship.
- 7. My partner has more say than I do when we make decisions in our relationship.
- 8. My partner has more control over decision making than I do in our relationship.
- 9. When we make decisions in our relationship, my partner gets the final say.

- 10. My partner has more influence than I do on decisions in our relationship.
- 11. My partner has more power than me when deciding about issues in our relationship.
- 12. My partner is more likely to get his/her way than me when we disagree about issues in our relationship.
- 13. I am more likely than my partner to start discussions about issues in our relationship.
- 14. When my partner and I make decisions in our relationship, I tend to structure and lead the discussion.
- 15. I lay out the options more than my partner does when we discuss decisions in our relationship.
- 16. I tend to bring up issues in our relationship more often than my partner does.
- 17. My partner is more likely than me to start discussions about issues in our relationship.
- 18. When my partner and I make decisions in our relationship, my partner tends to structure and lead the discussion.
- 19. My partner lays out the options more than I do when we discuss decisions in our relationship.
- 20. My partner tends to bring up issues in our relationship more often than I do.