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Conflict Resolution Styles in Gay, Lesbian, Heterosexual Nonparent, and Heterosexual Parent Couples

Preliminary psychometric data are presented for two inventories that assess conflict in couples. The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI) is a self-report measure that assesses a dysfunctional style of couple conflict resolution. The Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) has complementary self-report and partner-report versions that assess four personal conflict resolution styles for each member of the couple. Subjects were both partners of 75 gay, 51 lesbian, 108 married nonparent, and 99 married parent couples. Findings for each inventory are presented regarding the factor structure of items, the internal consistency of composite scores, the 1-year stability of composite scores, the relation between couple members' composite scores, and the link between composite scores and relationship satisfaction, change in satisfaction, and relationship dissolution. Generally, results warrant further examination of the IAI and CRSI as measures of conflict for couples.

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All couples have to deal with conflict. Further, how that conflict is managed is linked to relationship satisfaction, change in relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability (Gottman, 1994; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Noller & White, 1990). To date, perhaps the most productive method for studying relationship conflict has been to code videotapes of partner conversations for small samples of couples in a laboratory setting (e.g., Gottman, 1994). Without denying the value of these behavioral observations—in particular, for assessing sequences of couples' interactional styles during conflict—the present study is based on the premise that self-report and partner-report methodologies are also valuable ways to study couple conflict and may complement observational methodologies.

One of the major limitations of observational studies of couple conflict is that they utilize very small, nonrepresentative samples. In fact, some of the inconsistent findings in observational studies regarding the types of conflict resolution strategies that are linked to declines in relationship satisfaction over time have been attributed to biased samples (Gottman, 1993). The availability of psychometrically sound self-report and partner-report measures of conflict resolution would help address this limitation by providing researchers with one method by which the link between conflict

resolution and both relationship maintenance and relationship dissolution could be studied in large, representative samples.

Some measures of couple conflict are available, including self-report measures of couple conflict resolution patterns (e.g., the Problem-Solving Communication scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory; Snyder, 1981), self-report measures of individual conflict resolution styles (e.g., the Marital Coping Inventory, Bowman, 1990), and self-report and partner-report measures of each partner's conflict resolution styles (e.g., the Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory; Boyd & Roach, 1977) as well as sequences of partners' conflict resolution styles (e.g., the Communication Patterns Questionnaire; Christensen, 1988). However, no measure of couple conflict resolution could be found that was brief, was based on a coherent conceptual framework, and had comprehensively documented psychometric properties. Documenting psychometric properties include validating the measure against the major relationship outcomes used in behavioral observations in this area of study—relationship satisfaction, change in relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman et al., 1993).

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to present such preliminary psychometric data for two brief nonobservational measures of couple conflict. The first measure—the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI)—assesses how the couple handles conflict, whereas the second measure—the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI)—assesses each partner's individual style of handling conflict.

The IAI is an 8-item self-report measure that assesses each partner's view of how the respondent and his or her partner as a couple handle arguments. The IAI is based on the conceptual position that "ineffective arguing" is a global, unidimensional couple interactional pattern. Signals of such a pattern include fighting over repetitive issues, knowing how an argument is going to end even before it is over, ending the argument without resolving the issue at hand, and ending the argument with neither partner feeling that they have been given a fair hearing (Markman, 1987; Snyder, 1981). This pattern is important because it has been found to be one key aspect of both relationship maintenance and relationship stability (Gottman, 1994; Heavey et al., 1993; Markman et al., 1993).

Unlike the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI) which focuses on a particular pattern of *couple* communication, the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) is based on the conceptual position that relationship maintenance and relationship stability are affected by each partner's *individual* style of resolving interpersonal conflict (Bowman, 1990; Boyd & Roach, 1977; Gottman, 1994; Heavey et al., 1993). Four styles were included in the inventory, including positive problem solving (e.g., compromise and negotiation), conflict engagement (e.g., personal attacks and losing control), withdrawal (e.g., refusing to discuss the issue further and tuning the other partner out), and compliance (e.g., giving in and not defending one's position). These four distinct problem-solving styles have been identified primarily on the basis of behavioral observations (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) and are important because they have been linked to changes in relationship satisfaction as well as to relationship dissolution (Gottman, 1994).

Because both partners complete the CRSI, information about each partner's conflict resolution styles is available from two sources of information—the self and the partner. That is, the CRSI involves both partners completing two sets of ratings. In the first set (the 16-item CRSI-Self), respondents rate the frequency with which they use each of four conflict resolution styles. In the second set (the 16-item CRSI-Partner), respondents use a parallel set of items to rate the frequency with which their partners use the same four conflict resolution styles.

One innovative feature of the present study is that the initial psychometric data of interest were obtained from both partners in gay and lesbian cohabiting couples as well as from both spouses in heterosexual married couples. In view of evidence that couples with children argue more frequently than those without children (McGonagle, Kessler, & Schilling, 1992), heterosexual couples were divided into those who had children living with them and those who did not. The availability of data from both members of four types of couples provided the opportunity to assess the generalizability of psychometric findings not only across diverse types of couples but also across both members of these couples.

The preliminary psychometric data reported in this article concern limited aspects of the reliability, concurrent criterion-related validity, and predictive criterion-related validity (Anastasi, 1988) of the IAI, the CRSI-Self, and the CRSI-Partner

as individual measures. If these measures are reliable and valid at the individual level, then the foundation would be laid for using information from both partners at the couple level in further investigations of conflict resolution.

The specific psychometric properties examined for each inventory include the extent to which (a) the underlying factor structure of inventory items is meaningful (i.e., a one-factor structure for the IAI and a four-factor structure for the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner), (b) the internal consistency of composite scores is high, (c) composite scores are stable over time, (d) there is some overlap between couple members' composite scores that tap the same construct, and (e) composite scores predict relationship satisfaction, change in relationship satisfaction, and relationship dissolution. Finally, in view of the limited data available on how the conflict resolution strategies of gay/lesbian couples differ from those of heterosexual couples (Kurdek, in press), the four types of couples are compared on IAI, CRSI-Self, and CRSI-Partner scores for descriptive purposes.

Method

Subjects

The 75 gay and 51 lesbian couples were participants in the first year (1990) of an on-going longitudinal study of relationship quality in gay and lesbian couples. Because partners in gay and lesbian couples do not have any formal role identifications (such as "husband" and "wife"), partners in these couples were randomly identified as "first partner" or "second partner." Couples were recruited through requests for participants published in gay/lesbian periodicals and newsletters as well as through personal contacts. None had children living with them.

Most gay subjects were white (92% of first partners and 95% of second partners), and employed (81% of first partners and 80% of second partners). The most frequent (28%) level of education for first partners was a doctoral degree, whereas the most frequent (44%) level of education for second partners was college graduation. The modal annual personal income was between $50,000 and $54,999 for each partner. Most lesbian subjects were white (94% of first partners and 92% of second partners) and employed (90% of first partners and 92% of second partners). The most frequent level of education (35% of first partners and 33 % of second partners) was college graduation. The modal annual personal income was between $50,000 and $54,999 for first partners and between $25,000 and $29,999 for second partners. One-year follow-up data (year 1 to year 2) were available for 66 gay couples and 46 lesbian couples, 2-year follow-up data (year 1 to year 3) were available for 60 gay and 42 lesbian couples, and 3-year follow-up data (year 1 to year 4) were available for 51 gay couples and 38 lesbian couples. By year 4, 13 couples (6 gay, 7 lesbian) had dissolved their relationships.

The 207 heterosexual couples were drawn from the fifth annual wave (year 5, 1990–1992) of data collection in an ongoing longitudinal study of newlywed couples. The IAI and CRSI were introduced in the year-5 surveys. Couples were initially recruited from marriage licenses published in the *Dayton Daily News* (see Kurdek, 1993, for further details on subject recruitment and attrition). At year 5, 108 couples reported that children did not live with them whereas 99 couples reported that they did. One-year follow-up data (year 5 to year 6) were available for 92 of the year-5 nonparent couples and 81 of the year-5 parent couples. At the time of writing, 7 couples (3 nonparent, 4 parent) had dissolved their marriages in the interval between the year-5 and the year-7 assessment. (The year-7 assessment is still in progress.)

At year 5, most nonparent heterosexual respondents were white (96% of husbands and 98% of wives) and employed (88% of husbands and 82% wives). The modal level of education for each spouse (37% of husbands and 45% of wives) was college graduation. The modal annual personal income was between $40,000 and $44,999 for husbands and between $20,000 and $24,999 for wives. At year 5, most parent heterosexual respondents were white (93% for husbands and 96% for wives) and employed (97% for husbands and 76% for wives). The modal level of education for each spouse (40% of husbands and 49% of wives) was college graduation. The modal annual personal income was between $35,000 and $39,999 for husbands and less than $5,000 for wives. Parent couples had a total of 131 children (72 girls). Most couples (71%) had one child. The mean age of all children was 1.97 years (SD = 1.75).

Mean scores (and standard deviations) for the demographic variables (year 1 for gay/lesbian couples and year 5 for nonparent/parent couples) of age, education, and annual personal income are presented by couple member within each of the four types of couples in Table 1. Information regarding months living together (averaged over

TABLE 1. MEAN DEMOGRAPHIC SCORES FOR COUPLE MEMBERS BY TYPE OF COUPLE

	Gay		Lesbian		Nonparent		Parent	
Score	P1	P2	P1	P2	H	W	H	W
Age								
M	42.26	40.70	40.29	40.03	36.37	34.76	31.58	29.18
SD	12.02	11.58	9.15	8.19	11.72	11.42	4.95	3.71
Education								
M	6.45	6.10	6.29	6.31	5.57	5.80	5.82	5.60
SD	1.40	1.18	1.18	1.19	1.16	0.95	1.16	0.97
Personal income								
M	7.86	7.50	8.00	7.94	8.84	6.95	8.69	4.73
SD	3.20	3.01	3.09	2.91	3.56	4.04	3.36	3.58
Months living together								
M	127.78		85.48		57.34		55.27	
SD	101.09		63.84		17.02		9.47	
Dyadic Adjustment Score								
M	113.50		118.55		115.19		112.02	
SD	11.96		10.65		11.02		12.25	
n	75		51		108		99	

Note: Maximum scores for education and income were 8 and 18, respectively. P1 = first partner, P2 = second partner, H = husband, W = wife.

both couple members) is also given for each of the four types of couples, as is the mean Dyadic Adjustment Scale score (Spanier, 1976) averaged over both couple members. Because mean Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores for all of the couple types fell above the distress cutoff score of 100 (cf. Sabourin, Lussier, Laplante, & Wright, 1990), it can be concluded that these couples on the average were not experiencing clinical levels of relationship distress. Nonetheless, as shown by standard deviations for the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, there was ample variability in levels of distress reported for each type of couple. For the total sample, this score ranged from 66 to 146.

For descriptive purposes, the equivalence of the four types of couples on background scores was assessed. Using the couple as the unit of analysis, the four types of couples were compared on the following couple scores (derived by averaging couple members' scores) in a one-way (type of couple) MANOVA: age, education, personal income, and months living together. The resulting effect was significant ($F[12, 984] = 13.49$, $p < .001$). Univariate analyses indicated that the four types of couples differed on age, education, personal income, and months living together ($F[3, 329] = 25.19$, 10.45, 4.55, and 31.32, respectively, $p < .01$). Generally, the gay and lesbian couples were older, had higher levels of education, had higher levels of personal income, and lived together more months than the heterosexual couples. Because of these differences, couples need to be compared with caution.

Procedure

Each couple was sent two identical surveys which included (among other measures) a statement of informed consent, a measure of demographic variables, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (as a measure of global relationship satisfaction), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the IAI, the CRSI-Self, and the CRSI-Partner. To promote honest responding, partners were directed to complete their surveys privately and not to discuss their answers with each other until the forms had been completed and returned in separate postage-paid envelopes. If completed surveys were not returned by both couple members one month after mailing, a letter prompting a response was sent. In this letter, subjects were also given an opportunity to indicate if they had separated/ divorced or chose to withdraw from the study. Three prompt letters were sent. If no response was made to the third letter, subjects were notified that they would not be contacted further, but were asked to provide information on couple status (i.e., still living together or separated/divorced).

Alignment of Data by Time of Assessment for Dissolution Analyses

Of interest in the dissolution analyses were data obtained from dissolved couples during their last preseparation year of cohabitation. For example, if a couple indicated at year 2 that they had separated sometime following the year-1 assessment, their year-1 data represented their last presepara-

tion year of cohabitation. Because couples reported having dissolved their relationships at different years in the study, comparisons between intact and dissolved couples needed to control for the year in the study during which the last preseparation data from the dissolved couples were obtained. This control was accomplished by identifying what proportion of the dissolved couples had last preseparation data at each time of assessment and then randomly sampling the intact couples so that an identical proportion of intact couples was represented at each time of assessment.

Of the gay and lesbian couples, 3 (2 gay, 1 lesbian) dissolved their relationships during year 1, 4 (2 gay, 2 lesbian) during year 2, and 6 (2 gay, 4 lesbian) during year 3. The proportion of gay couples separating during year 1, year 2, and year 3 was .33, .33, and .33, respectively. Corresponding proportions for lesbian couples were .14, .29, and .57. The 51 intact gay couples and the 38 intact lesbian couples were randomly selected in numbers determined by these proportions; e.g., 17 gay couples at year 1, 17 gay couples at year 2, and 17 gay couples at year 3. The phrase "time-sampled assessment" will be used throughout this paper to refer to the data of dissolved and intact couples that were aligned by time of assignment with the proportionately same number of intact couples.

Of the heterosexual couples, 4 (2 nonparent, 2 parent) dissolved their relationship during year 5, and 3 (1 nonparent, 2 parent) dissolved their relationship during year 6. The proportion of nonparent couples separating during year 5 and year 6 was .67 and .33, respectively. Corresponding proportions for parent couples were .50 and .50. The 105 intact nonparent couples and the 95 intact parent couples were randomly sampled in numbers determined by these proportions, for example, 70 nonparent couples at year 5 and 35 nonparent couples at year 6.

Demographic Variables

Participants provided information regarding age, race, education (represented by eight intervals ranging from completion of less than seventh grade to the award of a doctorate), employment status, and annual personal income (represented by 18 intervals ranging from $5,000 or less to $80,000 or more). They also reported the number of months they had lived with their partner.

Relationship Satisfaction

Because of recommendations that relationship satisfaction be broadly evaluated so as to avoid overlap in the assessment of relationship quality and its correlates (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987), relationship satisfaction was assessed by the three-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986). This scale requires subjects to rate how true (1 = not at all true, 9 = extremely true) three statements are. These statements are global evaluations of the relationship ("I am satisfied with my relationship"), the partner ("I am satisfied with my partner in his/her role as my partner"), and the relationship with the partner ("I am satisfied with my relationship with my partner"). Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score was .98 for first partners/husbands and .97 for second partners/wives.

The Ineffective Arguing Inventory

Based on descriptions of the characteristics of ineffective arguing (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, 1987; Snyder, 1981), eight IAI items were generated. These are presented in the Appendix. Items 5, 6, and 7 were adapted from the Problem-Solving Communication scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1981). All remaining items were originally designed for the IAI. For each item, respondents indicated how much they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that each statement fit their relationship. Specific instructions for completing the IAI are also given in the Appendix.

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory: Self-Report and Partner-Report

Descriptions of positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance presented by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) were used to generate 16 items (four items for each of the four conflict resolution styles) for each of two parts of the CRSI. In the first part (CRSI-Self), subjects indicated how frequently (1 = never, 5 = always) they used each of 16 styles to deal with arguments and disagreements with their partner. These styles are presented in the Appendix. In the second part (CRSI-Partner), they used a parallel set of items to indicate how frequently their partners used the 16 styles. Specific instructions for completing each part of the CRSI are also given in the Appendix.

Results—Psychometric Properties of and Descriptive Data for the IAI

Factor Structure

The factor structure of the eight IAI items was assessed for each couple member (member 1 = first partners/husbands and member 2 = second partners/wives) for the total sample, with subsequent analyses examining whether the pattern obtained for each member from the total sample characterized that obtained for each of the four types of couples. Given the expectation that IAI items tapped a unidimensional construct, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the goodness-of-fit of a one-factor model.

Throughout this study, analyses that assessed the extent to which actual data fit proposed models used LISREL VII (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). As is common in LISREL analyses, three measures were used to assess the fit of each tested model (Bentler, 1990; Bollen, 1989). (a) The chi-square assesses the probability that the model fully accounts for all covariances among the observed scores. However, because virtually any deviation from perfection may produce a statistically significant chi-square with a large sample, two other fit indices were used that are independent of sample size. (b) The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) reflects the relative amount of covariances accounted for by the model. Finally, (c) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) reflects the extent to which the model improves on a null model that assumes complete independence among all scores, and corrects for the underestimation of model fit often noted in small samples (Bentler, 1990). For the GFI and CFI, values over .90 are desirable.

For the member-1 IAI scores, the single-factor model resulted in acceptable levels of fit (χ^2 [20, N = 333] = 55.84, $p < .01$; GFI = .96; and CFI = .97). To examine whether this one-factor model generalized across first members in the four types of couples, a second model was tested in which the one-factor structure was postulated to be invariant across type of couple (cf. Byrne, 1985). This model also resulted in an acceptable level of fit (χ^2 [80, N = 333] = 127.12, $p < .01$; GFI = .91; CFI = .96).

For the member-2 IAI scores, the single-factor model also resulted in acceptable levels of fit (χ^2

Table 2. Mean IAI, CRSI-Self, and CRSI=Partner Scores by Couple Member and Type of Couple

	Gay (n = 75)		Lesbian (n = 51)		Nonparent (n = 108)		Parent (n = 99)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Ineffective arguing								
First partner/husband	17.16	6.19	15.92	5.93	16.79	5.81	18.09	6.55
Second partner/wife	16.78	5.21	15.66	6.13	16.64	7.06	17.92	6.43
Conflict resolution style: self-report								
First partner/husband								
Positive	15.13	2.58	15.80	1.57	14.88	2.53	14.81	2.26
Conflict engagement	7.46	2.64	7.84	2.78	7.18	2.30	7.70	2.77
Withdrawal	9.36	2.88	8.56	2.31	8.92	2.86	8.63	2.69
Compliance	8.13	2.66	7.88	3.09	7.83	2.34	7.73	2.36
Second partner/wife								
Positive	15.10	2.06	14.96	2.02	15.13	2.21	14.43	2.24
Conflict engagement	8.26	2.81	7.90	2.45	7.94	2.62	8.25	2.93
Withdrawal	9.20	3.05	8.94	2.81	8.40	2.84	8.98	2.34
Compliance	7.85	2.68	8.00	2.59	7.97	2.95	7.60	2.37
Conflict resolution style: partner-report								
First partner/husband								
Positive	14.74	2.89	15.49	2.30	14.63	2.62	14.08	2.69
Conflict engagement	8.02	2.68	8.00	2.74	7.63	2.63	8.15	3.13
Withdrawal	9.40	3.14	9.51	2.81	8.81	3.02	9.22	3.18
Compliance	7.74	2.70	7.68	2.98	7.83	2.27	7.83	2.57
Second partner/wife								
Positive	15.14	2.43	15.88	2.44	14.65	3.06	14.03	2.70
Conflict engagement	7.91	2.75	7.54	2.54	7.47	2.77	8.15	3.18
Withdrawal	9.45	3.13	8.62	2.64	9.35	3.64	9.77	3.63
Compliance	8.37	2.97	7.96	2.87	7.71	2.93	7.20	2.85

Note: The maximum value for the IAI score was 40. The maximum value for each CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner score was 20.

TABLE 3. CRONBACH ALPHAS FOR IAI, CRSI-SELF, AND CRSI-PARTNER SCORES BY COUPLE MEMBER AND TYPE OF COUPLE

	Gay		Lesbian		Nonparent		Parent	
	P1	P2	P1	P2	H	W	H	W
Ineffective arguing	.88	.89	.89	.86	.89	.89	.89	.86
Conflict resolution style: self-report								
Positive	.82	.78	.81	.76	.85	.77	.75	.68
Conflict engagement	.85	.81	.83	.72	.77	.80	.81	.82
Withdrawal	.79	.86	.65	.81	.83	.79	.76	.66
Compliance	.83	.86	.89	.87	.80	.86	.77	.80
Conflict resolution style: partner-report								
Positive	.87	.88	.91	.84	.87	.89	.88	.84
Conflict engagement	.86	.87	.80	.84	.85	.85	.88	.87
Withdrawal	.85	.84	.81	.82	.85	.86	.86	.87
Compliance	.81	.88	.90	.86	.83	.89	.80	.87

Note: P1 = first partner, P2 = second partner, H = husband, and W = wife.

[20, N = 333] = 72.01, $p < .01$; GFI = .95; and CFI = .97). A second model that postulated that the one-factor structure was invariant across second members for the four types of couples also resulted in an acceptable level of fit (χ^2[80, N = 333] = 122.09, $p < .01$; GFI = .92; CFI = .92).

In sum, whether the source of information was member 1 or member 2 of the couple, the IAI conformed to a one-factor structure. Consequently, composite IAI scores were derived for each member of the couple by summing the eight relevant IAI items. Relevant means and standard deviations are presented for each couple member within each of the four types of couples in Table 2.

Differences Among Types of Couple

A one-way (type of couple) MANCOVA on the member-1 and member-2 IAI scores with age, education, personal income, and months living together as covariates yielded a nonsignificant type of couple effect. Thus, the four types of couples were equivalent in level of ineffective arguing.

Internal Consistency

Cronbach's alphas for the IAI scores are presented by couple member within each of the four types of couple in Table 3. Values were large in size and comparable across the four types of couple, ranging from .86 to .89.

1-Year Stability

The stability of each couple member's IAI score was assessed over 1 year for subsamples of the gay, lesbian, nonparent, and parent couples. Relevant Pearson correlations are presented by couple member within each of the four types of couple in Table 4. In each instance, coefficients were significant and moderate in size, ranging from .63 to .84.

TABLE 4. 1-YEAR STABILITY COEFFICIENTS FOR IAI AND CRSI SCORES BY TYPE OF COUPLE

	Gay		Lesbian		Nonparent		Parent	
	P1	P2	P1	P2	H	W	H	W
Ineffective arguing	.75	.63	.66	.67	.65	.74	.84	.78
Conflict resolution style: self-report								
Positive	.58	.63	.62	.46	.63	.50	.50	.73
Conflict engagement	.63	.61	.77	.83	.71	.83	.74	.78
Withdrawal	.60	.71	.61	.75	.81	.79	.64	.49
Compliance	.67	.61	.76	.75	.65	.73	.71	.60
Conflict resolution style: partner-report								
Positive	.61	.62	.75	.58	.59	.68	.71	.74
Conflict engagement	.73	.80	.75	.83	.73	.78	.80	.79
Withdrawal	.59	.73	.63	.69	.63	.79	.75	.69
Compliance	.71	.64	.70	.54	.66	.68	.74	.75

Note: P1 = first partner, P2 = second partner, H = husband, and W = wife. For all r values, $p < .001$.

TABLE 5. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME SCORES AND IAI AND CRSI SCORES BY TYPE OF PARTNER

	Time-1 Satisfaction				Change in Satisfaction				Dissolution			
Time-1 Score	P1	P2	H	W	P1	P2	H	W	P1	P2	H	W
Ineffective arguing	–.64**	–.62**	–.71**	–.70**	–.22**	–.26**	–.18**	–.28**	.41**	.26**	.18**	.32*
Conflict resolution: self-report												
Positive	.19*	.28**	.30**	.37**	.18	.11	.16*	.14*	–.17*	–.20*	–.09	–.13*
Conflict engagement	–.22**	–.32**	–.31**	–.34**	–.08	–.30**	–.08	–.18**	.17*	.23*	.15*	.25*
Withdrawal	–.29**	–.26**	–.37**	–.47**	–.19*	–.14*	–.07	–.14*	.27**	.18*	.12*	.06
Compliance	–.19*	–.07	–.20**	–.23**	–.21**	.07	–.01	–.03	–.04	–.13	.00	–.20*
Conflict resolution: partner-report												
Positive	.09	.27**	.37**	.19**	–.03	.31**	.19**	.15**	–.27**	–.08	–.13*	–.27*
Conflict engagement	–.22**	–.35**	–.22**	–.34**	–.02	–.17*	–.16*	–.14*	.31**	.14	.22**	.32*
Withdrawal	–.34**	–.21**	–.27**	–.22**	–.07	–.20*	–.23**	–.05	.13	.07	.07	.05
Compliance	–.15*	–.06	–.04	–.06	–.01	–.04	–.05	.02	.04	.18*	–.13*	–.04

Note: P1 = gay/lesbian first partner, P2 = gay/lesbian second partner, H = nonparent/parent husband, and W = nonparent/parent wife. Time-1 values are Pearson correlations, change in satisfaction values are partial correlations, and dissolution values are point-biserial correlations.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Validity

Four predictions were tested regarding those aspects of the validity of the IAI score that are of interest here. If the IAI score is valid, then (a) one couple member's IAI score should correlate positively with that of the other couple member (i.e., each couple member's score should tap the same couple-level construct), (b) each couple member's IAI score should correlate negatively with his or her own global relationship satisfaction, (c) for each couple member, a high IAI score should predict negative change in his or her own global relationship satisfaction over time, and (d) for each couple member, a high IAI score should predict relationship dissolution.

Findings relevant to each of these four predictions are presented in turn. Because gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples were assessed at different points in the development of their relationships and over different time intervals, analyses were performed separately for the gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent couples. In analyses not presented here, findings regarding predictions (a) through (c) above were not moderated by type of couple (gay vs. lesbian or nonparent vs. parent). Consequently, findings are presented for the combined gay/lesbian couples and for the combined nonparent/parent couples.

Correlation between couple members' IAI scores. As expected, couple members' IAI scores were positively related. Pearson's r was .64 for gay/lesbian couples and .55 for heterosexual couples, ($p < .01$). The intraclass correlation coefficient for the gay/lesbian couples was the same as the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Concurrent relation between the IAI score and relationship satisfaction. Pearson correlations between each couple member's IAI score and his or her global relationship satisfaction score are presented in Table 5 for each couple member within the gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples. All correlations were significant and were moderate in size, ranging from –.62 to –.71. As predicted, in all cases, couple members who reported frequent ineffective arguing also reported low relationship satisfaction.

Predicting change in relationship satisfaction from the time-1 IAI score. The relation between the time-1 IAI score and change in each couple member's relationship satisfaction was assessed by partial correlations in which the relation between the time-1 IAI score and time-2 relationship satisfaction was assessed with controls for time-1 relationship satisfaction. For the gay/lesbian couples, the change interval was 3 years, whereas for the nonparent-parent heterosexual couples it was 1 year.

The difference between the time-1 satisfaction score and the time-2 satisfaction score ranged from –18 to 12 ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 3.39$) for gay/lesbian first partners, from –13 to 12 ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 3.68$) for gay/lesbian second partners, from –10 to 14 ($M = -0.44$, $SD = 3.26$) for husbands, and from –8 to 14 ($M = -0.01$, $SD = 3.46$) for wives. Thus, there was ample variability in the extent of change over time. As shown in Table 5, all partial correlations regarding the link between the time-1 IAI score and change in relationship satisfaction were negative and significant, but were modest in size, ranging from –.18 to –.28. As expected, in each instance, a high time-1 IAI score predicted a decrease in time-2 relationship satisfaction.

Predicting relationship dissolution from the time-sampled IAI score. Finally, the relation between the time-sampled IAI score and relationship dissolution was assessed by computing point-biserial correlations between the time-sampled IAI score for each couple member and relationship dissolution (0 = not dissolved, 1 = dissolved). Values are presented by couple member in Table 5. Although all values were positive and significant, they were modest in size, ranging from .18 to .41. As expected, for each couple member within the two types of couple, frequent ineffective arguing predicted relationship dissolution.

Results—Psychometric Properties of and Descriptive Data for the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner

Because the psychometric issues examined for the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner were identical, relevant findings for the two measures are integrated by issue. Within each issue, findings for the CRSI-Self are presented before those for the CRSI-Partner.

Factor Structure

CRSI-Self. The factor structure of the 16 CRSI-Self items was assessed for each couple member (member 1 = first partners/husbands and member 2 = second partners/wives) for the total sample,

with subsequent analyses examining whether the pattern obtained for each member from the total sample characterized that obtained for each of the four types of couples. Given that the CRSI-Self was designed to measure self-reports of four distinct conflict resolution styles, the factor structure of the 16 couple CRSI-Self items for each couple member was assessed by a confirmatory factor analysis. In this analysis, CRSI-Self items were restricted to load on only one of four factors (e.g., the four positive problem-solving items loaded only on a single positive problem-solving factor and the four conflict engagement items loaded only on a separate single conflict engagement factor). Correlations among the four factors were allowed.

LISREL analyses indicated an acceptable level of fit for the four-factor model (for member 1, χ^2 [98, N = 333] = 218.84, $p < .01$, GFI = .92, and CFI = .96, and for member 2, χ^2 [98, N = 333] = 273.13, $p < .01$, GFI = .91, and CFI = .94). To examine whether the four-factor model for each couple member generalized across the four types of couples, an additional model was tested in which the four-factor structure for each couple member was postulated to be invariant across the four types of couple. This model also resulted in acceptable levels of fit for both member 1, (χ^2 [392, N = 333] = 560.49, $p < .0$,; GFI = .85, and CFI = .95, and member 2, (χ^2[392, N = 333] = 584.93, $p < .01$, GFI = .87, and CFI = .92). In sum, the CRSI-Self items conformed to the predicted four-dimensional structure.

Consequently, four composite CRSI-Self scores were derived for each couple member by summing the ratings given to the four items relevant to the positive problem-solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance scores. Means and standard deviations for each score are presented by couple member for each of the four types of couples in Table 2. For descriptive purposes, correlations among the CRSI-Self scores are presented by couple member for the combined gay/lesbian and the combined nonparent/parent couples in Table 6.

CRSI-Partner. LISREL analyses were also used to examine how well the CRSI-Partner items conformed to a four-factor structure for each couple member from the total sample, as well as how well the pattern obtained for each member from the total sample characterized that obtained for

TABLE 6. PEARSON CORRELATIONS AMONG CRSI-SELF SCORES AND AMONG CRSI-PARTNER SCORES BY TYPE OF COUPLE AND PARTNER

	Positive	Conflict Engagement	Withdrawal	Compliance
Self-report				
Gay/lesbian	—	–.34**	–.51**	–.27**
Conflict engagement	–.43**	—	.43**	–.11
Withdrawal	–.37**	.33**	—	.39**
Compliance	–.21**	.20*	.23**	—
Nonparent/parent heterosexual				
Positive	—	–.50**	–.35**	–.20**
Conflict engagement	–.48**	—	.43**	.10
Withdrawal	–.37**	.44**	—	.40**
Compliance	–.15*	.29**	.41**	—
Partner report				
Gay/lesbian				
Positive	—	–.53**	–.44**	–.10
Conflict engagement	–.45**	—	.56**	.09
Withdrawal	–.36**	.42**	—	.36**
Compliance	–.15	.18*	.37**	—
Nonparent/parent heterosexual				
Positive	—	–.58**	–.53**	–.09
Conflict engagement	–.51**	—	.51**	.13*
Withdrawal	–.43**	.48**	—	.35**
Compliance	–.08	.10	.44**	—

Note: For gay/lesbian couples, values for first partners are below the diagonal and those for second partners are above the diagonal. For nonparent/parent heterosexual couples, values for husbands are below the diagonal and those for wives are above the diagonal.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

each of the four types of couples. LISREL analyses indicated an acceptable level of fit for the four-factor model for first members (χ^2[98, N = 333] = 236.73, $p < .01$, GFI = .91, and CFI = .95), and for second members (χ^2[98, N = 333] = 184.89, $p < .01$, GFI = .93, and CFI = .97). Acceptable levels of fit were also obtained for models that postulated that the four-factor structure was invariant across type of couple. (For member 1, χ^2[392, N = 333] = 633.37, $p < .01$, GFI = .85, and CFI = .92, and for member 2, χ^2[392, N = 333] = 521.34, $p < .01$, GFI = .87, and CFI = .96.) In sum, the CRSI-Partner items also conformed to the predicted four-dimensional structure.

Consequently, four composite CRSI-Partner scores were derived for each couple member by summing the ratings given to the four items relevant to the positive problem-solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance scores. Means and standard deviations for each score are presented by couple member for the four types of couples in Table 2. For descriptive purposes, correlations among the CRSI-Partner scores are presented by couple member for the combined gay/lesbian and the combined nonparent/parent couples in Table 6.

Differences Among Types of Couple

CRSI-Self. A one-way (type of couple) MANCOVA on the member-1 and member-2 scores, with age, education, personal income, and months living together as covariates, yielded a nonsignificant type of couple effect. Thus, the four types of couples were equivalent in self-reported conflict resolution styles.

CRSI-Partner. A one-way (type of couple) MANCOVA on the member-1 and member-2 scores, with age, education, personal income, and months living together as covariates, yielded a significant type of couple effect (F[24, 960] = 1.64, $p = .02$). Subsequent univariate ANCOVAs indicated that the four types of couples differed on second members' ratings of the positive problem solving and compliance of their partners (F[3, 325] = 3.85 and 2.86, $p < .05$). Student Newman-Keuls comparisons indicated that gay second partners and lesbian second partners rated their respective partners as using positive problem solving more frequently than did married wives with children who rated their husbands, and that gay second partners rated their respective partners as using compliance more frequently than did married wives with children who rated their husbands.

Internal Consistency

CRSI-Self. Cronbach's alpha was computed for the positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance CRSI-Self scores for each couple member within each of the four types of couple. These values are presented in Table 3 and were moderate in size, ranging from .65 to .89.

CRSI-Partner. Cronbach's alpha values are also presented in Table 3 for the positive problem-solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance CRSI-Partner scores. Values were moderate in size, ranging from .80 to .91.

1-Year Stability

CRSI-Self. The Pearson correlations assessing the stability of the four CRSI-Self scores over a 1-year period are also presented in Table 4. All coefficients were significant and moderate in size, ranging from .46 to .83.

CRSI-Partner. The Pearson correlations assessing the stability of the four CRSI-Partner scores over a 1-year period are also presented in Table 4. All coefficients were significant and moderate in size, ranging from .54 to .83.

Validity

Four issues relevant to the validity of each couple member's CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores were examined. The first issue addressed the extent to which the CRSI-Self scores and the CRSI-Partner scores regarding the same target couple member overlapped. If the two sets of CRSI scores are valid, then, for each couple member, the CRSI-Self scores and the CRSI-Partner scores regarding the same target couple member should be positively correlated.

The second, third, and fourth issues addressed, for each couple member, the extent to which each set of CRSI scores was correlated with that couple member's global relationship satisfaction, was correlated with change in that couple member's global relationship satisfaction, and predicted relationship dissolution, respectively. Based on previous studies (Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey et al., 1993) using behav-

ioral observations of the four conflict resolution strategies of interest, only conflict engagement consistently has been linked to each relationship outcome. Accordingly, it was predicted that each partner's CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner conflict engagement score would be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, would predict a decrease in relationship satisfaction, and would predict relationship dissolution. Findings for the other three conflict resolution styles were also conducted in an exploratory vein.

In analyses not presented here, findings regarding each of the four issues of interest were not moderated by type of couple. Consequently, findings are presented for the combined gay/lesbian and for the combined nonparent/parent heterosexual couples.

The correspondence between self-ratings and partner ratings of the same couple member target. The issue addressed here was the extent to which CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores relevant to the same couple member overlapped. Given the design of the CRSI, information regarding each couple member's four conflict resolution styles was available from two sources, the self and the self's partner. Because the same target was evaluated, one would expect that the self-score and partner score would be positively correlated.

Self-partner correlations for the positive problem-solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance styles are presented in Table 7 for the combined gay/lesbian couples and the combined nonparent/parent heterosexual couples. Whereas there was moderate overlap between couple members' conflict engagement, compliance, and withdrawal scores (r ranging from .29 to .63), there was only modest overlap between couple members' positive problem-solving scores (r ranging from .07 to .26). (The intraclass correlation coefficients for the gay/lesbian couples were nearly identical to the Pearson correlation coefficients.)

Concurrent relations between CRSI scores and relationship satisfaction. Pearson correlations between each couple member's CRSI-Self scores and his or her global relationship satisfaction score are presented by the gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples in Table 5. As expected, for both types of couples, conflict engagement was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from –.22 to –.34). Further, for both types of couples, positive problem solving was significantly positively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from .19 to .37) and withdrawal was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from –.26 to –.47). Finally, for first partners, husbands, and wives, compliance was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from –.19 to –.23).

TABLE 7. PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PARALLEL CRSI-SELF AND CRSI-PARTNER SCORES BY COUPLE MEMBER

Score	P1	P2	H	W
Positive	.19*	.26**	.07	.21**
Conflict engagement	.63**	.60**	.55**	.55**
Compliance	.44**	.47**	.44**	.34**
Withdrawal	.42**	.29**	.54**	.38**

Note: P1 = gay/lesbian first partner, P2 = gay/lesbian second partner, H = nonparent/parent husband, and W = nonparent/parent wife.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Pearson correlations between each couple member's CRSI-Partner scores and his or her own global relationship satisfaction score are presented for the gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples in Table 5. As expected, for both types of couples, conflict engagement was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from –.22 to –.35). Further, for both types of couples, withdrawal was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction (r ranging from –.21 to –.34), and positive problem solving was significantly positively related to relationship satisfaction for only second partners, husbands, and wives (r ranging from .19 to .37). Finally, findings involving compliance were generally nonsignificant.

Predicting change in relationship satisfaction from CRSI scores. The relation between time-1 CRSI-Self scores and change in relationship satisfaction was assessed by partial correlations in which the relation between the time-1 CRSI-Self scores for each couple member and time-2 relationship satisfaction for each couple member was assessed with controls for time-1 relationship satisfaction. For the gay/lesbian couples, the change interval was 3 years, whereas for the nonparent/parent heterosexual couples it was 1 year.

As shown in Table 5, coefficients involving change in one's own relationship satisfaction were significant in only half of the instances and, when significant, were modest in size (r ranging

from –.30 to .14). Conflict engagement predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction for only second partners and wives. Regarding the other conflict resolution styles, positive problem solving predicted positive change in relationship satisfaction for husbands and wives, withdrawal predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction for first partners, second partners, and wives, and compliance predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction for only first partners.

The relation between time-1 CRSI-Partner scores and change in relationship satisfaction was also assessed by partial correlations in which the relation between the time-1 CRSI-Partner scores for each couple member and that couple member's own time-2 relationship satisfaction was assessed with controls for that couple member's time-1 relationship satisfaction. As shown in Table 5, coefficients involving change in one's own relationship satisfaction were significant in only half of the instances and, when significant, were modest in size (r ranging from –.23 to .31). Conflict engagement predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction for second partners, husbands, and wives. Regarding the other conflict resolution styles, positive problem solving predicted positive change in relationship satisfaction for second partners, husbands, and wives, withdrawal predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction for second partners and husbands, and compliance failed to predict change in relationship satisfaction in all instances.

Predicting relationship dissolution from time-sampled CRSI scores. The relation between the time-sampled CRSI-Self scores and relationship dissolution was assessed by computing point-biserial correlations between the time-sampled CRSI-Self scores for each couple member and relationship dissolution (0 = not dissolved, 1 = dissolved). Values are presented by couple member for the gay/lesbian couples and for the nonparent/parent heterosexual couples in Table 5. Values were significant in a little more than half of the instances, and, when significant, tended to be modest in size (r ranging from –.20 to .27). As expected, high conflict engagement scores predicted relationship dissolution for both types of couples. Regarding the other conflict resolution styles, low positive problem-solving scores predicted relationship dissolution for first partners, second partners, and wives, high withdrawal scores predicted relationship dissolution for first partners, second partners, and husbands, and compliance scores generally failed to predict relationship dissolution.

The relation between the time-sampled CRSI-Partner scores and relationship dissolution was also assessed by computing point-biserial correlations between the time-sampled CRSI-Partner scores for each couple member and relationship dissolution (0 = not dissolved, 1 = dissolved). Values are presented by couple member for gay/lesbian couples and for nonparent/parent heterosexual couples in Table 5. Values were significant in only half of the instances, and, when significant, tended to be modest in size (r ranging from –.27 to .32). The expectations that high conflict engagement scores would predict relationship dissolution was supported for first partners, husbands, and wives. Regarding the other conflict resolution styles, low positive problem-solving scores predicted relationship dissolution for first partners, husbands, and wives, withdrawal failed to predict relationship dissolution, and high compliance scores predicted relationship dissolution for second partners, whereas low compliance scores predicted relationship dissolution for husbands.

Discussion

This study was based on the premise that information regarding conflict in couples can be meaningfully assessed by self-report and partner-report methods. Preliminary psychometric data were presented for two new measures. The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI) is a self-report measure that assesses the extent to which couple members perceive that they and their partners engage in a pattern of arguing that has been linked to adverse couple functioning (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, 1987; Snyder, 1981). The Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) uses self-reports and partner reports to assess the frequency with which couple members use each of four types of conflict resolution strategies (positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance) identified by previous work as being linked to relationship outcomes (e.g., Bowman, 1990; Boyd & Roach, 1977; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman et al., 1993).

Although this study is notable in that longitudinal data were available from both partners from gay couples, lesbian couples, nonparent heterosexual couples, and parent heterosexual couples, there are at least five major limitations to this

study. First, the current measures were not validated against actual observations of couple conflict resolution. Second, the findings at best generalize to only predominantly white and well-educated couples who are willing to invest time in a longitudinal project and to gay and lesbian couples who in addition are willing to disclose their sexual orientation. Third, validity-related findings that correlated self-report measures could be inflated due to shared method variance. Fourth, only limited aspects of construct validity were examined; in particular, discriminant validity was not assessed. Finally, given the low rates of relationship dissolution, the analyses relevant to relationship dissolution likely suffered from low statistical power. Below, the psychometric properties of the IAI and the CRSI that were investigated in this study are reviewed, differences among the four types of couples are noted, and needed areas of study are highlighted.

The IAI

Although brief, the IAI does a reasonable job of sampling content regarding the ineffective arguing pattern. Consistent with previous findings regarding interpartner agreement in heterosexual couples (Jacobson & Moore, 1981), partners in both gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples showed moderate overlap in their individual appraisals of the extent to which their relationship involved a pattern of ineffective arguing. For each couple member, psychometric properties of the IAI generalized across the four types of couples studied. Specifically, for each couple member in the four types of couples, the IAI items conformed to a one-factor structure and the single composite score derived from these items was internally consistent and stable over a 1-year period.

Consistent with evidence that relationship dynamics are similar for gay/lesbian and heterosexual couples (Kurdek, in press), the four types of couples did not differ in level of ineffective arguing. Further, for each couple member in gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples, the composite IAI score correlated negatively with relationship satisfaction, predicted negative change in relationship satisfaction, and predicted relationship dissolution. In short, for diverse types of couples, the IAI was reliable and possessed face validity, and the limited evidence regarding concurrent criterion-related validity and predictive criterion-related validity was promising.

The most obvious direction for future work with the IAI is to link it to actual observations of couples resolving conflict. Because the IAI assesses global impressions of a particular conflict resolution style, it is likely that links between it and scores derived from observations of couples during very brief, issue-specific interchanges would be slight. Nonetheless, even evidence of slight overlap would further enhance the validity of the IAI. Further, because the IAI when administered to both members of the couple provides two sources of information regarding the same phenomenon, studies using structural equations could use both couple members' IAI scores as indicators of a latent ineffective arguing variable (cf. Cook & Goldstein, 1993).

Alternatively, both couple members' scores could be averaged in line with the principle that aggregating information over different sources of information generally heightens reliability (Epstein, 1986; Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983). In fact, in analyses not presented here, the psychometric properties of IAI items that were averaged over both couple members were assessed. These findings paralleled those obtained for each couple member. That is, these averaged items conformed to a one-factor structure; the single composite score derived from these items was internally consistent, stable over a 1-year period, correlated negatively with relationship satisfaction, predicted change in relationship satisfaction, and predicted relationship dissolution.

The CRSI

The CRSI uses self-report and partner-report measures to assess four conflict resolution styles for each couple member—positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. Although based on only four items, each CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner subscore does a reasonable job of sampling behaviors previously identified as being characteristic of each conflict resolution strategy (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Thus, both the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner possess face validity.

Reliability data for both the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner generalized across type of couple as well as across couple member. Specifically, for each member within each type of couple, CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner items conformed to an expected four-factor structure, and the four compos-

ite scores derived from these items were internally consistent and stable over a 1-year period.

Given that parallel CRSI-Self scores and CRSI-Partner scores for the same target couple member tended to be moderately related for the conflict engagement, compliance, and withdrawal styles across type of couple, some evidence regarding the convergent validity of each measure was also obtained. The fairly low overlap between the CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores regarding the positive problem-solving style across type of couple may be due to a self-presentation bias. That is, partners may be prone to distort their own (or their partners') use of a conflict resolution style that is regarded as highly desirable. It is also possible that aspects of positive problem solving may be more ambiguous than those of the other conflict resolution styles.

Consistent with evidence obtained for the IAI, there was little evidence that the four types of couples differed in the frequency with which individual conflict resolution styles were used. The four types of couples were equivalent on all four CRSI-Self scores as well as on the conflict engagement and withdrawal CRSI-Partner scores. However, husbands with children were rated by their wives as relatively low in positive problem solving and gay second partners were rated by their partners as relatively high in compliance. Future studies are needed to determine if these few differences are reliable or are due to response biases.

Evidence regarding the concurrent and predictive criterion-related validity of the CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores was sought by assessing the extent to which CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores were concurrently linked to relationship satisfaction, predicted change in relationship satisfaction, and predicted relationship dissolution for gay/lesbian as well as for nonparent/parent heterosexual couples. Overall, patterns of findings were similar for these two types of couples, providing further evidence that the relationship dynamics for gay/lesbian and heterosexual couples are similar (Kurdek, in press).

However, interpretation of findings regarding the link between specific conflict resolution styles and relationship outcomes for any type of couple is complicated by the fact that previous studies using observational data from heterosexual couples (e.g., Gottman, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey et al., 1993) have not yielded strong and consistent findings regarding the link between relationship outcomes and the conflict resolution styles examined in this study. In particular, although negative and aversive conflict resolution styles—such as the conflict engagement style studied here—have been shown to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, to predict decreases in relationship satisfaction over time, and to predict relationship dissolution, findings regarding positive problem solving, withdrawal, and compliance have been inconsistent and frequently nonsignificant.

With regard to the concurrent link between both the CRSI-Self scores and the CRSI-Partner scores and relationship satisfaction, the most consistent pattern that emerged from this study was that couple members from gay/lesbian couples and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples who frequently used positive problem solving and infrequently used conflict engagement and withdrawal reported high relationship satisfaction. Overall, this pattern is consonant with that reported by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) and Heavey et al. (1993) for heterosexual couples. Findings regarding compliance were not as consistent, especially for the CRSI-Partner scores. Interestingly, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that observed compliance was nonsignificantly linked to husbands' and wives' satisfaction.

How did the CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores fare in predicting change in relationship satisfaction? Although specific findings varied by couple member, the general pattern for gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples was that frequent use of positive problem solving was linked to increases in relationship satisfaction, whereas frequent use of conflict engagement and withdrawal was linked to decreases in relationship satisfaction. Again, as with the concurrent findings just reported, compliance was the problem-solving style least likely to be related to change in relationship satisfaction.

Although the findings regarding withdrawal are consistent with the findings of Gottman and Krokoff (1989), those regarding positive problem solving and conflict engagement are not. Those authors found that positive problem solving was dysfunctional and that conflict engagement was functional when viewed in terms of longitudinal changes in marital satisfaction. However, Gottman (1993) reports that the purported longitudinal positive effects of conflict engagement did not hold for marital stability and speculates that the couples observed in the Gottman and Krokoff (1989) study may have been biased. Large-scale

prospective longitudinal studies are needed to shed further light on this issue.

With regard to relationship dissolution, the most consistent pattern to emerge from both the CRSI-Self and the CRSI-Partner scores across gay/lesbian and nonparent/parent heterosexual couples was that infrequent positive problem solving and frequent conflict engagement predicted dissolution. This pattern is entirely consistent with the view that unstable couples are more hostile than stable couples (Gottman, 1993, 1994). This finding is also of note because the link between CRSI scores and dissolution cannot be due to shared method variance because dissolution is a behavioral outcome measure not influenced by self-report and partner-report biases. Nonetheless, the small number of dissolved couples necessitates that these findings be viewed cautiously.

The finding that compliance was the one particular conflict resolution style least likely to be unrelated to relationship outcomes across type of couple deserves special comment. It may be that a partner's compliance takes on explanatory power as a relationship maintenance strategy only when it is examined in conjunction with the other partner's conflict resolution styles (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). For example, someone who gives in to the constructive observations of a partner may regard their relationship more positively than someone who gives in to the aversive rantings of a partner. Future work could examine the extent to which interactions between partners' CRSI scores—especially those involving compliance—explain variability in relationship outcomes above and beyond that accounted for by the individual sets of CRSI scores alone.

As with the IAI, future work with the CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner could validate the scores derived from these measures against actual observations of couple conflict resolution. Studies using structural equations could also use complementary pairs of CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores as indicators of each couple member's latent conflict resolution style variable (cf. Cook & Goldstein, 1993). Alternatively, both couple members' complementary CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner scores could be averaged. In fact, in analyses not presented here, the psychometric properties of items that were the mean average of parallel CRSI-Self items and CRSI-Partner items were assessed for each couple member. These findings paralleled those obtained for the separate CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner items for each couple member. That is, these averaged items conformed to a four-factor structure; the four composite scores derived from these items were internally consistent, stable over a 1-year period, correlated negatively with relationship satisfaction, predicted change in relationship satisfaction, and predicted relationship dissolution.

Note

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Appendix
Items on the IAI and CRI scales

The Ineffective Arguing Inventory

Instructions: Below are descriptions of the kinds of arguments people in relationships are likely to experience. Circle the number that indicates how much you agree that each statement fits your relationship (1 = Disagree Strongly, 5 = Agree Strongly).

1. By the end of an argument, each of us has been given a fair hearing. (R)
2. When we begin to fight or argue, I think, "Here we go again."
3. Overall, I'd say we're pretty good at solving our problems. (R)
4. Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved.
5. We go for days without settling our differences.
6. Our arguments seem to end in frustrating stalemates.
7. We need to improve the way we settle our differences.
8. Overall, our arguments are brief and quickly forgotten. (R)

The Conflict Resolution Inventory (Self-Rating)

Instructions: Using the scale 1 = Never and 5 = Always, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with your partner.

Conflict engagement

1. Launching personal attacks.
5. Exploding and getting out of control.
9. Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant.
13. Throwing insults and digs.

Positive problem solving

2. Focusing on the problem at hand.
6. Sitting down and discussing differences constructively.
10. Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us.
14. Negotiating and compromising.

Withdrawal
3. Remaining silent for long periods of time.
7. Reaching a limit, "shutting down," and refusing to talk any further.
11. Tuning the other person out.
15. Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested.

Compliance
4. Not being willing to stick up for myself.
8. Being too compliant.
12. Not defending my position.
16. Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue.

Note: Item numbers reflect item order in actual measure. (R) indicates item is reverse-scored. Instructions for the partner-rating portion of the CRSI were: Using the scale 1 = Never and 5 = Always, rate how frequently your partner uses each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with you.