

RUNNING HEAD: HONESTY & DECEPTION RELATIONSHIP RULES

IN THE GAME OF LOVE, PLAY BY THE RULES:  
IMPLICATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP RULE CONSENSUS OVER HONESTY AND  
DECEPTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

By

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In the game of love, play by the rules: Implications of relationship rule consensus over honesty and deception in romantic relationships.

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implications of relationship rule consensus over the meanings of honesty and deception in romantic relationships. Relationship rules are implicit understandings developed over time that guide individuals' behavior in relationships, but they are often ambiguous and unspoken. Honesty and deception rules are particularly vulnerable to different interpretations given that honesty is held to such high esteem, yet deception is common in relationships. Since deception becomes a salient source of conflict when discovered, coordination of these rules should be linked to relational quality.

In part one of the study, in-depth interviews helped identify what rules individuals supported in their relationships, which were incorporated into a survey taken by couples in part two. The survey assessed direct and meta-perspectives on the rules, as well as conflict and satisfaction. The results supported many of the findings from previous interpersonal perception studies: couples perceived agreement more than they agreed on the rules, and they agreed to a greater extent than they understood one another's perspectives. Additionally, perceived agreement, agreement, and understanding were all linked to relational quality (i.e., higher satisfaction and lower conflict). A unique finding was that when rules were categorized as either rigid (absolute) or flexible (contingent), the rigid rules were both endorsed more in relationships and linked to conflict to a greater extent than the flexible rules.

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### **Introduction**

In close relationships, individuals establish expectations of how others should (and should not) act in a given role and context. These rules that help make the social world predictable are fluid, mutually negotiated, and exist in one's perception (Tiegs, 2004; Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). Romantic couples develop "rules" to guide perceptions and meanings assigned to specific behaviors related to conflict management, interaction, time allocation, affection, and so forth. In relationships, rules are "prescriptions that, if obeyed, should reduce the destructive nature of some conflicts" (Roloff & Miller, 2006, p. 105).

The coordination of these rules is an ongoing process. However, the fact that much of the time they are not explicitly discussed means that individuals can easily fall short of their partners' expectations or perceive a shared understanding when there may not be. Discrepancies, depending on how they are evaluated, can have serious consequences for the growth or outcome of the relationship (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001). Furthermore, people are not as accurate in their interpretations of others' behavior and inner thoughts as they typically believe (Acitelli, Kelly, & Weiner, 2001; Sillars, 1983), and coordinating shared meaning between relational partners is both complex and ambiguous (Sillars, 1985).

As a result of the ambiguity of the concepts, coordinating the meanings of "honesty" and "deception" and their associated behaviors is particularly vulnerable to misunderstandings and thus discrepancies. Cultural norms reflect the notion that honesty is one of the most important traits individuals seek in potential romantic partners (Rogers, 1989); individuals must feel they can trust one another for relationships to succeed. The irony of "honesty" and "deception" is that they are typically viewed as black and white concepts and used to categorize others' behavior accordingly, but this does not reflect reality. Romantic partners often have strong, idealized

views regarding deception: telling the truth is viewed positively, and lying is considered manipulative, malignant, and unacceptable. However, research reveals that deception and honesty lie on opposite sides of a spectrum of truth, with many grey areas of variance and interpretation (Levine, Asada, & Lindsey, 2003; Seiter, Bruschke, & Bai, 2002; Kaplar & Gordon, 2004). Many studies also highlight that deception is used quite frequently in interpersonal relationships (Metts, 1989; McCornack, 1997; Burgoon & Levine, 2010). However, while deception obviously can be detrimental and cause conflict, other research supports that it sometimes serves positive functions in relationships (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Honesty is held to very high esteem in romantic relationships, yet most people are not “honest” in the absolute sense. Furthermore, deception is subtle and mostly undetected, so people lack awareness of its occurrence.

Thus, the specific acts that constitute deception and honesty are subject to very different interpretations. When examining honesty and deception through the lens of relationship rules, it may not be obvious to both partners when one has broken a “rule.” Moreover, individuals potentially apply standards regarding honesty to actual situations in quite different ways when pragmatic concerns make it difficult to be completely honest (Metts, 1989; Petronio & Reiersen, 2009) such as attempting to maintain the relationship itself. Although many couples have agreed (and thus, constructed an implicit relationship rule) that lying is wrong, individuals may interpret and enact “lying” in very different ways. While one partner may adopt a stance that requires “full and complete disclosure” in the relationship, the other partner may believe that only “salient information” about particular issues needs to be disclosed, perhaps to be tactful or to avoid conflict. Paradoxically, sometimes not disclosing something *leads* to a conflict, and conflict dealing with deception tends to be quite explosive. On the other hand, a conflict arising from

different interpretations of acceptable behavior may actually help clarify subjective (mis)understandings and create shared meaning to be applied to future situations.

Consequently, couples may believe they have established strong ideals about deception in the relationship, but these rules are ambiguous because “deception” is not always defined in the same way, individuals’ actions tend not to reflect “complete honesty” when pragmatic concerns come into play, and most deception goes undiscovered. In rare occasions when it is discovered, however, it has the potential to become a source of deep conflict because it is treated as if a clear, black-and-white rule has been broken.

Coordinating shared rules and meaning, especially regarding honesty and deception, is quite complicated and multifaceted – and significant for relationships. The focus of the current study is to examine the types of rules individuals endorse and the importance of rule consensus about the meanings of honesty and deception in romantic relationships. The study investigates the extent to which relational partners agree on the rules, perceive agreement, and reach actual (differential) understanding. These interpersonal perception variables are examined as predictors of relationship satisfaction and conflict. First, a look at the literature on deception, disclosure, interpersonal perception, relationship rules and standards, conflict, and deception is necessary to build upon insights from past research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Relationship Rules as Structure for Relationships**

Relationships operate on the basis of expectations, rules, and shared understanding of meanings. Examining the research on interpersonal perception, relationship rules and related concepts helps illustrate how individuals “structure” their personal lives, and builds a framework

for looking at how romantic partners conceptualize the ambiguous concepts of honesty and deception. Relationship rules are essential because they help make relationships predictable and stable.

Researchers refer to rules, ideals, lay theories, and standards to describe ways individuals manage their expectations in relationships. The focus of the current study is on relationship rules, or expectations that relational partners have for each other in specific relationships. Rules assign meaning to particular behaviors; thus, they are more operationally concrete than other terms for the purposes of this study. Rules are influenced by ideals, which are ideas about what constitutes model relationships and what “perfect” relational partners should be like. Although ideals are frequently unmet, what is important is how people evaluate the discrepancies. Lay theories are a set of general principles about how relationships should operate, making certain kinds of information salient. Some scholars use the term “standards” interchangeably with “rules,” and “ideals.” Standards seem to encompass more than rules, and act like abstract goals that gloss over diverse conceptions of how one should act. For example, one could have a standard for “honesty in the relationship,” but also adhere to many specific rules describing behaviors that support that standard. Ultimately, however, these concepts describe the cognitive structures through which information is “filtered” in relationships, and thus will be reviewed together.

Individuals are constantly sifting and sorting information, categorizing it according to previously established cognitive structures, but most of this is not conscious and occurs automatically. Lay theories, or more general beliefs about aspects of relationships such as intimacy, passion, and individuality (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996) make certain types of events more salient, guide the way events are processed, influence behavior, and help frame the actions

of one's partner. Incoming information is filtered through the knowledge structures, and any inconsistencies (usually negative events and unexpected outcomes) motivate conscious, attributional processing.

Relationship rules are fluid, mutually negotiated, and exist in one's perception. The endorsement of rules creates feelings of stability and predictability (Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993), and they are strongly related to relational quality (Afifi & Joseph, 2010). Rules are "beliefs about what relationships and partners should be like" (Roloff & Miller, p. 101). As such, they also encompass desired behavior ("we should talk daily"), as well as inappropriate behavior, such as cheating or lying. Relational partners have to work to coordinate shared understanding of behaviors, since meaning is subjective (Tiegs, 2004). Since these standards are partly a joint product of the couple, "each partner has the capacity to test and stretch the relationship theories by the other" (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996, p. 19).

Rules serve as guidelines for a wide variety of behaviors that promote predictability, and encompass a variety of qualities. Some rules are broad, and others refer to specific desirable or undesirable behaviors. In a comprehensive study of rules and expectations in romantic relationships, West (2006) found that some described emotional aspects of the relationship (loyalty, fidelity, help, support) and others outlined day-to-day functioning of a relationship (roles and time allocation expected). In one study, most of the rules important to participants were restrictive, rather than prescriptive (Honeycutt et al., 1993). That is, the rules identified actions that were *not* acceptable rather than focusing on the kinds of behaviors they would like to see in the relationship. An example of a more specific realm of rules are privacy rules, which regulate boundaries for information regarding who has the right to know the particular information and who it can (and cannot) be shared with (Petronio & Reirson, 2009). Establishing



“taboo topics” is one manifestation of privacy rules. For most couples, a tension exists because both openness and privacy are important values. Managing what types of information and how much should be shared is a salient concern for romantic partners, and in this study, will be conceptualized in terms of rules about privacy and disclosure.

Beliefs about relationships are a product of internalizations of personal experiences as well as information from networks and the larger social context. Relationship rules regarding how to initiate, sustain, and dissolve romantic relationships are communicated through one’s social network in the form of gossip, teasing, praise, blame, anger, and reprimanding (Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein, 2001). In addition to the influence of networks, experiences in past relationships (such as being “dumped”) might also influence the qualities of one’s rule repertoire, such as how flexible the rules are (Campbell et al., 2001). Thus, we view others’ behavior through a lens colored by both our own experiences and beliefs and what we observe and hear from others.

Ideals, or standards of how individuals believe relationships should function *at their best*, also inform individuals’ beliefs about how relationships should function and impact how individuals evaluate the relationship. From a social-cognitive perspective, ideals function as knowledge structures that are available to draw from to make evaluations and decisions about the relationship (Fletcher, Simpson, & Giles, 1999). When ideals are measured up against perceptions of the reality of the relationship, the difference can serve both evaluative and regulatory functions depending on what is more salient: the need to see one’s partner positively or the need for accuracy in assessing the situation. Fletcher et al. (1999) found that qualities of an ideal relationship clustered into three factors: warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and

status-resources. The more consistent perceptions of one's partner and relationship were with ideals, the more positively individuals viewed their relationships.

Discrepancies between rule-guided expectations for behavior and reality are generally problematic for romantic partners. Relationship rules are utilized as an anchor for expectations in relationships, motivating individuals to take action when they perceive discrepancies. Some claim that the actual standards are less important than how upset individuals become when they were *not* met (Roloff & Miller, 2006). In romantic relationships, individuals whose standards are fulfilled are more satisfied than those whose standards are not fulfilled (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997; Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher et al., 1999). In addition, congruency between family communication standards and reports of actual behavior is associated with individuals' satisfaction with their families (Caughlin, 2003). Thus, discrepancies lead to dissatisfaction in both romantic relationships and in families. However, a few factors complicate this association.

For one, gender may play a role. Men and women draw from different belief systems in their relationships, such that women as caretakers are affected by and respond more to their partner's expectations. In general, men and women rated the importance of various standards around the same, but women perceived that these standards were fulfilled less often than men (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). In addition, standard discrepancies may depend on how flexible an individual is in terms of the fulfillment of those standards. Campbell et al. (2001) examined whether the flexibility of ideal standards (the degree to which relationship can fall below ideals) moderated the relationship between ideals and relationship judgments utilizing the ideal partner scales from Fletcher et al. (1999). Partner discrepancies are important because they afford individuals the opportunity to evaluate the quality of the relationship, explain what happens, and make necessary adjustments. The more flexible the partner, the more likely he or she is to

maintain positive impressions of his/her partner even when there is a discrepancy. Therefore, those with lower flexibility should be less satisfied. The study found additional support that smaller discrepancies between ideals and perceptions of reality translate into more positive relationship quality. However, *flexibility of ideals* was indeed an important moderating variable: participants reported the highest relationship quality when partners matched their ideals closely and when they were less flexible. The lowest quality was related to large discrepancies and also *less* flexibility. Perhaps if individuals are meeting every ideal in their partners' minds, flexibility is less necessary. What follows, then, is that flexibility of rules and expectations might be very important to relationship qualities when partners do *not* meet certain ideals. The current study will continue to probe the effects of the flexibility of relationship rules on various outcomes.

A related issue that some scholars have been interested in is the role that *extreme ideals* have in romantic relationships. Results have been mixed as to whether extreme or unrealistic standards are positively or negatively associated with satisfaction and marital adjustment, so Kohn and Sayers (2005) examined if the difference might be moderated by the status of the couple (discordant versus nondiscordant). They hypothesized that couples with the lowest and highest relationship satisfaction would report the most extreme standards. Results provided some support, revealing that the most satisfied and the least satisfied wives reported the most extreme standards; however, this trend did not apply husbands even after the analysis controlled for the extent to which ideals were unmet. This finding again suggests that there may be some gender differences among the fulfillment of standards. Similarly, Caughlin (2003) found that *distressful ideals* were associated with family dissatisfaction, even after the results controlled for the ideals that were unmet.

Rules, standards, and ideals are the information structures that individuals draw upon in their relationships, but it is also necessary to understand the cognitive processes by which they utilize that information and coordinate it with their partners.

### **Interpersonal Perception**

Although relationship rules help establish the foundation for stability and predictability in relationships, interpersonal perception explains how relational partners can misunderstand them. Research on perception suggests that romantic partners can potentially have very different interpretations of events, even when provided with the same information. Interpersonal perception refers to both perceptions of the self and the other. Each individual has a direct perspective reflecting his or her own thoughts and beliefs (i.e., “I believe that white lies are wrong”) as well as a meta-perspective of what the other person thinks (i.e., “I believe that my partner thinks that white lies are wrong”)(Laing, Philipsen, & Lee, 1966). If direct perspectives align, a couple has reached *agreement*, whereas direct and meta-perspectives must align to reach *understanding* (Sillars, 1985). That is, for romantic partners to understand each other, they must be able to gauge the positions of that other person and accurately recognize their perspectives. However, there are many reasons to suggest that couples may *perceive agreement* when it is simply not there, basing their thoughts and actions upon this foundation. Research demonstrates that perceived agreement tends to be quite high, as partners tend to overestimate the extent to which they share perspectives. This inflates understanding scores because partners tend to assume they are similar and sometimes they actually are similar. “Raw” understanding scores are therefore higher than understanding scores that are corrected for agreement (“differential understanding”). Thus, relational partners tend to overestimate agreement and tend not to

recognize divergent perceptions in each other (Sillars, Folwell, Hill, Maki, Hurst, & Casano, 1994).

Additionally, the deeper the relationship, the more likely individuals will take mental shortcuts in making inferences regarding their partners, decreasing their accuracy in their ability to do so. Over time, individuals gather more information about each other and use it to make the relationship predictable. Having an abundance of information, however, can be misleading. Individuals may overestimate understanding because they are emotionally invested in the outcomes (Sillars, 1985). As a result, they do not necessarily seek out or pay attention to the information needed to understand each other in a given situation, but tend to jump ahead and assume they already correctly understand their partner. Individuals acquire mutual knowledge over time and mentally refer to it to create context in conversations with specific others, but one of the problems is that they never really *know* for sure that the other person is accessing that same knowledge (Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994). This means that relational partners may take different “mental shortcuts” in a conversation although they have assumed they share the same thought pattern.

Duck (2002) uses the metaphor of “hypertext” to emphasize that all communication is naturally extensive and refers to layers of meaning not present in the conversation. This is greatly amplified for those in close relationships. Even close friends (although much better than strangers) are a long way from true empathic understanding (Ickes, 2003). Relational partners essentially assume that they know more than they do about each other, giving less weight to information available in the immediate context and more weight to stable characteristics. Having more immediate information available in a conversation greatly increases empathic understanding for strangers, but it does not make much of a difference for friends, since friends

tend to attribute actions to stable characteristics (Ickes, 2003). Even more compelling is the finding that empathic accuracy actually declines over the course of marriage, likely because “understanding” the other is based on more of a stereotyped view of that person. Once partners have formed impressions and believe they can predict each other, they are not constantly looking for information that does not fit that schema unless it is grossly inconsistent (Sillars, 2011). When something is contradictory and a conflict arises, character flaws are generally to blame rather than contextual variables. In summary,

Interpersonal perception in ongoing relationships is especially complex because each individual may simultaneously be each other’s most knowledgeable and least objective observer. Consequently, although two people may know each other intimately, they can still represent an extreme case of incongruent perception. (Sillars, 1985, p. 280)

Hence, relational partners gather bits of information about each other from the time they first meet to create somewhat unwavering images of each other and each other’s capabilities. However, this can distort perceptions because explanations of events become oversimplified and attributed to stable traits as well as to the context beyond the “here and now.” Again, there are many reasons to believe that relational partners can have very different perceptions of events and of each other, even in committed and invested relationships.

Another factor that helps create divergent perceptions and perspectives is simply the involvement of emotion. Obviously, events become more emotional when they center around a value salient and central to the core of the relationship, such as trust – or a violation of expectations of trust. Individuals tend to utilize self-serving attributional biases when emotionality is high: “Strong, negative emotions are seen as leading to less accurate, more one-sided, and more negative perceptions of the partner. Therefore, the potentially volatile nature of

intimate conflict may produce extreme examples of imperceptivity” (Sillars, 1985, p. 283). That is, when an individual is in a highly emotional state, the resources necessary to perspective-take are greatly depleted (Kaplar & Gordon, 2004). When considering how emotionally arousing it is to even imagine a partner lying, it is clear that misunderstandings about the meaning of honesty in a relationship have the potential to escalate. A conflict is emotional from the start, so emotionality and narrow perspectives can create a reinforcing cycle: partners see less and less of the “whole” picture, become more upset, and continue to narrow their “visions,” amplifying increasingly polarized viewpoints. Even emotion built up over time can have this sort of effect, given that dissatisfied couples tend to be wrong more often than satisfied couples when inferring their partners’ intentions (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992).

To further complicate potential misunderstandings, much of relational functioning happens automatically and at the implicit, unspoken level. Individuals tend to believe that talking about issues is the most obvious way to reach intersubjective understanding. Interestingly, however, explicitly talking about issues and disclosing things does *not* necessarily lead to greater understanding (Sillars, 2002). Also, the way individuals attempt to understand others is not communicatively straightforward: “Empathic accuracy in the real world is almost never the product of such an elaborate concatenation of cognitive contingencies. Instead it is typically more implicit than explicit, more intuitive than deliberate, and more immediate than delayed” (Ickes, 2003, p. 91). Much of how individuals make sense of relationships and their partners is internal and unspoken.

More specifically in terms of relationship expectations, researchers have discovered that couples are unlikely to verbally articulate such things as rules unless an individual’s behavior actually breaks the harmony of acceptable actions (Honeycutt et al., 1993). As a result, a rule

becomes much more salient to couples once it is broken than when it is actually being adhered to. This comes as no surprise, but it would explain why it is indeed possible that rules about deception are not always conceptualized the same way between relational partners (even if they believe this to be true). There is generally no need to explicitly talk about what would be considered “lying” or “deception” until an accusation takes place. When this type of misunderstanding is acknowledged, a conflict may ensue because individuals have limited abilities to predict the other’s perspective (Sillars, 2011).

As far as relationship rules about honesty and deception, it is unclear if it is more important for relational partners to have similar perspectives to begin with or to understand each other’s (potentially differing) perspectives. Acitelli, Kelly, and Weiner (2001) examined the extent to which congruence on relationship ideals is the result of stereotypes about what makes a successful relationship or if it is unique knowledge that is developed between partners. Their study distinguished between *similarity* – the extent to which marital ideals were alike – and *understanding* – the extent to which partners knew each others’ perspectives. While they did find that stereotypes strongly influenced marital ideals, understanding was *not* related to relationship satisfaction or duration. On the other hand, similarity was associated with both relationship satisfaction and duration, supporting the notion that similarity in ideals may be more important or more influential than understanding. Indeed, the more similar married partners’ relational expectations are, the happier they are (Kelly & Burgoon, 1991). To have similar ideals likely means that the partner is more predictable to the other person, since that person’s thoughts and behaviors are more like one’s own. Sillars, Pike, Jones, and Murphy (1984) found that those who had more similar perspectives tended to understand each other better, but only in terms of raw understanding, not in terms of differential understanding. Clearly, individuals with who are more



similar to begin with will start from an easier place in reaching understanding. These multi-faceted findings about similarity and understanding of one's partner suggest that further exploration is warranted, but indicate collectively that aligning expectations is linked to relational qualities.

In some cases, and especially related to sensitive information (such as deception), individuals may be motivated to *not* understand their partners. "Motivated misunderstanding" can occur because one's attention is sometimes limited to processing the information that best aligns with preexisting goals (Sillars, 2011). What this means is that if one of Lindsey's goals is to view Ross as an open and honest person, her perception could be limited such that she ignores behavioral cues that signal otherwise. Ross could be omitting details or acting strangely and Lindsey might not even consciously pick up on these behaviors because they do not "fit" with her belief that Ross is an open and honest person. Therefore, a misunderstanding is not always just a lack of information, but is also related to how individuals filter the incoming information – consciously and unconsciously. An inaccurate understanding of a partner's behavior can sometimes serve positive functions for the relationship. Individuals create accounts to explain their own and others' behavior, to "render events comprehensible and manage uncertainty but also to justify the self, persuade the partner, explain events to external audiences, and so forth" (Sillars, 1985, p. 17). The key is that the way individuals selectively pay attention to certain cues is partly determined by their goals, which allows them to frame a situation in a particular way.

### **Disclosure**

Throughout the complex processing of relational information, one particular area that may become problematic is in managing the tension between a desire to have both openness and privacy when dealing with the disclosure of sensitive information. Many view secrecy in a

relationship as inherently harmful, but this is not an accurate depiction of how most relationships function. Relational partners commonly disclose and keep secrets concurrently, so they should not be viewed as opposites that cannot coexist: *both* contextual disclosure and contextual secrecy are important predictors of marital satisfaction (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Similarly, in Baxter et al.'s (2001) diary study, 10% of the rules dealt with the values of openness and honesty, generally communicating that that one should *always* be honest. In contrast, 7% of the rules discussed informational discretion, stressing that one should *not* disclose everything to a romantic partner. Indeed, one of the most highly endorsed rules is that partners should respect each other's privacy (Rolloff & Miller, 2006).

People utilize multiple criteria to develop privacy rules. Communication Privacy Management purports that privacy rules are developed based on a person's cultural values, gender, their motivation to keep something private or reveal it to others, their assessment of risk-benefits, and situational/contextual variables (Petronio & Reiersen, 2009). Problems can sometimes arise with respect to these boundaries, however. Given the friction between openness and closedness in relationships, some avoidance is necessary in relationships, but it can also be dissatisfying (Afifi & Joseph, 2010). A cycle can be reproduced where avoidance leads to relational dissatisfaction; furthermore, people avoid talking about things with their partners *because* they are dissatisfied. According to the "standards for openness hypothesis," avoidance will be more dissatisfying for women than men because women have been socialized to maintain and identify problems in their relationships (Afifi & Joseph, 2010). Furthermore, the discrepancy between standards they have with their partner about openness and how much they perceive their partner is open predicts dissatisfaction. In cases where relational partners are avoiding each other

because they are dissatisfied, they are no longer managing this tension between privacy and openness in an effective way.

On the other hand, sometimes not disclosing something is motivated by a desire to maintain positive interactions with one's partner. Sometimes relational partners consciously avoided certain topics as a way to protect the health of the relationship (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). This idea contradicts popular beliefs, as most people do not see secrecy as compatible with marriage. However, many of the communicative behaviors in a relationship deal with distance-regulating (Rogers, 1998) rather than a "disclose all" open-door policy. Additionally, the decision of whether to disclose something is multi-faceted and the process can differ immensely between individuals. Afifi, Olson, and Armstrong (2005) explain that in making this decision, one can choose to: protect the self, protect the other, or protect the relationship. Their model asserts that the risk assessment, which partially determines one's self-efficacy and thus the decision to reveal the secret, is influenced by the valence of the secret, with relational closeness moderating this decision. Clearly, deciding whether to disclose or withhold information is not as simple as one just being "honest" all the time, as many factors come into play. Another implication of the model is that there are times where withholding a secret or piece of information is motivated by a desire to *protect* the partner or the relationship, not necessarily to hurt or undermine trust. In sum, while disclosure is indeed an important component of close relationships, full and complete disclosure does not accurately depict how relationships function.

Some research has probed the complexity behind the motivations for keeping secrets. Caughlin and Vangelisti (2009) observe that individuals are trying to manage multiple and competing goals when evaluating whether to reveal secrets or not. Many times, this decision depends on a risk/reward analysis (Kelly & Macready, 2009; Green, Derelega, & Mathews,

2006) where an individual is engaging in perspective-taking and anticipating how something will be perceived by another. Motivation is key: the reasons one person attributes to the partner for keeping a secret (or disclosing one) should predict the quality of the relationship (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009). Again, this relates back to perception – the secret-keeper could choose to reveal the secret for reasons similar to what the receiver perceives, or for very different reasons. Disclosing information can be therapeutic for an individual, but it can also be detrimental – depending on how a confidant responds (Kelly & Macready, 2009). If an individual perceives that his or her partner will be supportive, he or she might reveal a secret; conversely, if that individual anticipates criticism or disapproval, he or she could be motivated to keep the secret.

These contradictory social forces seem to put an individual in a bind when it comes to how much is acceptable and desirable to share in a romantic relationship. Relational partners are faced with the “tension between wanting to be open about one’s thoughts and feelings and the need to be closed or refrain from disclosing certain items” (Afifi & Joseph, 2010, p. 343). The literature on relationship rules and interpersonal perception also suggests that maintaining honesty is more complex than is commonly believed. Next, to more broadly situate difficulties with disclosure, research on deception enhances an understanding of how and why deception occurs in relationships.

### **Deception**

Patterns of constraint (control) and patterns of predictability (trust) are basic and necessary properties of relationships (Rogers, 1998). Thus, promoting honest behaviors and defining deceptive behaviors is important for relationship quality. However, as noted above, much of our understanding about these topics is likely based on taken-for-granted assumptions

and is generally unspoken. Deception is commonplace, and does not usually take the form of bold-faced lying:

Deception comes in a variety of guises, from flat-out lies, elaborate fabrications, misdirection and exaggerations, to evasions, equivocations, concealments, omissions, strategic ambiguity and deflections, spoofing and phishing, to more subtle misdirection and camouflage. (Burgoon & Levine, 2010, p. 202)

Some research suggests that the most common form of deception is withholding information or avoidance (Cole, 2001; Burgoon & Levine, 2010). In Peterson's (1996) study, "white lies" were most common, and blatant lies were least common. Additionally, deception is often conceptualized in terms of veering from an objective truth, but some types of information simply cannot be cleanly categorized to begin with, such as emotion. While most of the reported deception in Mett's (1989) study involved factual information, over a third involved emotional information. Research demonstrates that much of the time, individuals lie not to intentionally hurt another but rather to save face, avoid conflict, control the level of intimacy, as well as a variety of other relational goals (Seiter, Bruschke, & Bai, 2002). Consequently, most relationships involve routine deception.

Individuals often attempt to manage many goals when facing the decisions of whether to be honest or to deceive. Since people prefer to use less effortful modes of information processing as opposed to more effortful modes, the question remains as to whether truth-telling or lying is more cognitively efficient. Many believe that deception is more cognitively demanding than telling the truth. However, in some contexts, deception is actually *more* efficient; thus, it can be the easier choice (McCornack, 1997). Efficiency would explain why it is so commonly used in romantic relationships – it is often simpler than being completely open and

truthful. Overall, though, individuals are reluctant to tell lies unless the truth poses an obstacle for one's goals (Levine, Kim, & Hamel, 2010). Thus, individuals prefer not to deceive, but frequently do so anyway.

**Theoretical Explanations for Deceptive Relational Communication.** Because individuals may deceive one another in various ways aside from bold-faced lies, the conceptualization of what constitutes deception is complex. Relational partners might violate or adhere to relationship rules about deception in several ways, given that deception in relationships comes in various forms. One comprehensive theory examining the types of deceptive messages is Information Manipulation Theory (IMT) (McCornack, 1992). IMT rests upon the notion that people tend to assume others as being as informative as possible, so unless signaled otherwise, they assume truthfulness. It would not really be very sensible or comfortable to assume in every interaction that people are liars by default. People evaluate what the "relevant" information is in a given situation, especially when the information being requested is sensitive. According to IMT, messages can be manipulated in terms of the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. In his theory of conversational implicature, Grice (1975) describes these four conversational maxims that allow one to successfully cooperate in an interaction. The quantity maxim compels individuals to share the amount of information expected in the exchange. The quality maxim says that individuals are expected not to make false claims. The relation maxim says that individuals should respond in a way that is relevant to the conversation. Finally, the manner maxim says individuals should avoid ambiguity and strive for conciseness. Accordingly, quality violations are when one distorts the sensitive information; this is what one would typically consider deception (i.e., the "bold-faced lie"). This type of deception is probably considered unacceptable by most couples' standards. In the other three types of deceptive

communication, though, the information provided by the respondent can indeed be “truthful,” so there is room for competing perspectives.

First, in a quantity violation, the amount of information presented is what is tweaked. That is, one may only share part of the amount of information that is relevant to the conversation. Metts (1989) found that this kind of omission is the most likely when individuals are not prompted to provide an explanation for something, whereas falsification is more common when prompted. A relation violation would be diverting the conversation from the risky information, thereby failing to address what is relevant. Finally, manner violations occur when one provides an answer that is ambiguous, one that could possibly be interpreted in a number of ways (McCornack, 1992). For example, Emily might say, “Kyle, why didn’t you call me last night?” Kyle could respond with, “Oh, sorry...I just got really busy doing some stuff...” Perhaps in this scenario, Kyle was actually out with another girl, and that is the reason he did not call. His ambiguous response, however, is completely “truthful;” he was, indeed, busy. Building upon this research, Interpersonal Deception Theory purports that individuals are *strategic* when creating deceptive messages, and can alter message style and content along the lines of five dimensions: completeness, directness/relevance, clarity, personalization, and veridicality (truthfulness) (Burgoon, Buller, Guerrero, Afifi, & Feldman, 1996). Because the creation of a distorted message is relatively easy (and strategic), deception is quite common – and thus, relational rules are likely violated quite frequently.

***Partner-motivated deception.*** Whereas many relationship rules may accurately represent behavior, specific rules about deception do not necessarily operate in the same way. A closer look at deceptive behaviors specifically related to disclosure suggests that rules about honesty may be commonly violated. While withholding information could be considered deceptive

according to some couples' relationship rules, it is often advantageous for the relationship. Furthermore, complete disclosure is *not* the norm for the communicative behaviors of couples (Cole, 2001). Positive relational deception strategies that aim to improve, enhance, or repair relationships might include deception as a way of avoiding conflict (O'Hair & Cody, 1994; Peterson, 1996), maintaining face (McCornack, 1997), or promoting intimacy.

As a result, deception in the form of manipulating or withholding information is often practiced to preserve the relationship. Many researchers have focused on the risk of revealing information to others, noting that disclosure does not always serve a positive function (Cole, 2001). Secrecy – not just disclosure – should also contribute to relationship satisfaction (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Often times, kind-hearted lies are told to those individuals are closest to, as opposed to self-centered lies, which occur frequently with acquaintances (DePaulo, Morris, & Sternglanz, 2009). These kind-hearted lies are told to improve someone else's situation, make them feel better, or help them accomplish a goal. Clearly, deceiving a partner can sometimes be positive for the relationship. Deception in some studies is motivated by partner-focused reasons most frequently, with self-interests secondary (Metts, 1989). This contradicts the notion that lying is a selfish act and illustrates that one's strategy is not always motivated by selfish desires.

Some factors motivate a person to deceive for positive reasons, but sometimes an individual is simply motivated to *avoid telling the truth*. While truth telling may bolster feelings of intimacy between partners, a negative reaction from one's partner (when revealing the truth) can just as easily persuade an individual to distort or deceive in the future (Cole, 2001). Avoiding other negative events such as punishment, embarrassment, and consequences also motivates deception (O'Hair & Cody, 1994).



Withholding information can also be used as a tool to steer clear of a potential conflict. Research has documented that conflict avoidance sometimes serves a positive function when it is “selectively rather than universally” used (Roloff & Ifert, 2000, p. 161). Presumably, many individuals utilize deception in order to avoid conflict. However, problems may arise because there may not be consensus among the relational partners about what is considered an unimportant conflict. Individuals often have different ideas about what “relevant content” should be revealed in a difficult or ambiguous situation. Another way to situate deception as conflict avoidance is through the lens of “motivated misunderstanding” as discussed above (Sillars, 2011). This concept suggests that individuals in invested relationships might, as a form of cognitive defense, attend (or not attend) to certain cues based on what information aligns with one’s goals and allows the individual to make sense of the situation in a particular way. That is, if certain cues – even if they are extremely relevant to the situation or the relationship – may be ignored because they arouse cognitive dissonance that the individual is motivated to avoid. In terms of the goals of this study, one example of how this phenomenon might unfold is if someone observes his/her partner exhibiting behaviors that might be indicative of deception. One goal an individual generally has in romantic relationships is to view his or her partner in a positive light, and as “truthful.” Because these behaviors do not align well with these particular goals, individuals may be motivated to not attend to cues or avoid acknowledging them as meaningful. Certainly, this can serve protective functions for the relationship, but has the potential to be problematic if an individual ends up avoiding a needed confrontation.

In summary, deceptive communication is relatively common in everyday conversation and in close relationships, and it does not necessarily require intense cognitive effort. Further, a

large percentage of everyday messages could be categorized as deceptive (McCornack, 1997), and deception is not always selfishly motivated.

***Deception detection.*** While the debate has raged for some time now, most recent research illustrates that people are not very successful at detecting deception and generally assume that the truth is being told (McCornack, 2008). This points to the likelihood that violations of relationship ideals are mostly undetected. On the other hand, individuals tend to *think* that they have the ability to detect when our partners are lying. In Burgoon and Levine's (2010) meta-analysis of deception detection accuracy, they report that people are generally *less* than 50% accurate in their attempts – a number below chance. Similarly, integrated results from 206 documents revealed that individuals were only 54% accurate in distinguishing lies from truths (Bond & DePaulo, 2006). Cole's (2001) study investigated how deception varies within relationships and how deception is related to relational functioning, illustrating more complications. First, one's deceptive behavior was positively associated with the belief that one's partner was dishonest. The reverse is also true: believing a partner had behaved deceptively triggered a desire to retaliate. However, while participants *assumed their deceptive behavior matched*, this was not the case. Interestingly, participants indicated that they actually told more lies than they thought their partners told them (Cole, 2001). In some respects, this perspective is functional for the relationship, since it is comforting for individuals to believe that their partners are more honest than them, rather than less honest – and it also supports the finding that individuals perceive that they can understand their partners. Collectively, these findings point to the likelihood that individuals naively believe their partners rarely lie, and also believe that they will be able to detect them if they do. Experimental studies also support the idea that people are not very good deception detectors. In an experiment that compared the detection abilities of

conversational partners versus observers, participants displayed a strong truth-bias and thus, were less accurate at detecting deception than observers. Interestingly, even after the participants were informed that deception had been manipulated in the experiment, the results persisted – and many *still* continued to believe they were not being lied to (Buller, Strzyzewski, & Hunsaker, 1991).

***Deception rules as a source of conflict.*** While relationship rules related to deception are likely vague and dissimilar between relational partners, when behavior is labeled as deception, it is treated as if an obvious, shared rule was violated. While deception is very common but rarely detected, when it *is* discovered, it has the potential to cause significant relational harm and lead to conflict. The paradox is that deception is often used to avoid conflict. So, telling the “whole truth” may lead to conflict; however, the discovery of a distorted message may also lead to conflict. Some have noted that for these reasons, deception is best understood as a form of in-the-moment problem solving, rather than “the product of premeditated deceptive intent” (McCornack, 1997, p. 121).

Even if it is perceived as problem solving, though, relational transgressions such as the discovery of deception challenge romantic bonds. Hurtful events such as deceit produce uncertainty in a relationship (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). The knowledge of being deceived by one’s partner can also motivate one to utilize deceptive communication more frequently (Cole, 2001). This can lead to a downward spiral of deception, conflict, and uncertainty. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) highlight a study done by Feeney (2004), which found that the types of hurtful events that are most salient in a relationship are criticism, active dissociation, passive dissociation, infidelity, and deception. In their own study, they found that when the event was perceived as a highly negative violation of expectations, it was associated with lower relational

quality and higher destructive communication (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). The more the relational partners assume the rules to be shared, the more painful and upsetting it will be when they are broken.

However, not all relational transgressions are evaluated in terms of the same severity. In a series of three studies, Afifi and Metts (1998) found that both positive and negative violations represented a diverse array of behaviors that provided information about either the quality of the partner or the state of the relationship. "Unexpected relationship events," such as de-escalation or uncharacteristic relational behavior (i.e., deception), were generally more important to individuals than "behaviors of the partner," such as criticism or transgressions. Their findings support previous literature that has found that negative relationship violations increase uncertainty, but they found the reverse to be true also – positive violations actually decreased uncertainty. Overall, though, it is clear that any violation of relationship expectations changes one's future perception of the partner and the relationship – even by a small degree – in meaningful ways. There are reasons suggested by these studies to believe that perceptions of honesty and deception are perhaps both more fragile and more powerful than other relational values and actions.

***Perception and deception.*** Specifically, the process by which deception is perceived and understood in the context of a close relationship is complex, and individuals assign meaning to others' deceptive acts based on a variety of factors. One reason the current study is needed is that the attributions individuals make regarding deceptive behaviors can motivate change (or conflict) in the relationship. That is, these attributions are salient to individuals and powerful, reflecting the biases discussed above related to interpersonal perception. Kaplar and Gordon (2004) compared lie-teller and lie-receiver narratives to try to see if motivations behind the lie and

perceived motivations (of the lie-receiver) were similar or different. Unsurprisingly, they found that lie tellers said their lies were more altruistically motivated than the lie receivers, and that lie receivers said the lies were more egoistically motivated by lie tellers. Lie receivers also tended to perceive that the lies were told to deliberately hurt them. In summary: “We were able to make sense of two seemingly contradictory conclusions that characterize the lying literature: that people lie to their partners out of love and caring and that people become enraged when learning that their romantic partner lied to them” (Kaplur & Gordon, 2004, p. 502).

Again, this supports the idea that people choose to deceive for reasons they deem appropriate and acceptable, but are quick to judge others’ deception as being malignantly motivated. Similarly, victims and perpetrators of aversive interpersonal behaviors have different perceptions of those behaviors (Kowalski, Walker, Wilkinson, Queen, & Sharpeet, 2003). This is not shocking, but illustrates how divergent interpretations of the same event can be in a relationship. In an examination of the victim and perpetrator narratives of seven aversive interpersonal behaviors, victims perceived betrayal, lying, teasing, and arrogance more negatively than perpetrators (Kowalski et al., 2003). People are not always accurate at perspective-taking likely because their ideals about honesty are instead rooted in a cultural standard that is unattainable. For this reason, rules about honesty – and this form of a double-standard – can quickly flare up into conflict.

Other research has pointed out that individuals’ perceptions of others’ actions are not quite as dichotomous (deceptive versus truthful) as often believed. In the research, lying is generally categorized as either deliberately deceptive or not, but this does not take into account the various ways that people can be deceptive and thus, individuals’ perceptions of those specific acts (Levine et al., 2003). Levine et al. (2003) found that individuals’ evaluations of others’

deceptive acts varied according to the violation type and lie importance (severity) in response to hypothetical scenarios. That is, participants' moral judgments of the deceptive acts fluctuated based on the type of deception and the importance of that violation. For example, an omission of low importance was rated as only moderately deceptive. On the other hand, quality violations (see McCornack, 1997), no matter the severity, were rated as definitely deceptive, as well as any violation type that had serious negative consequences. This study demonstrates that perceptions of deceptive acts are multidimensional, and that deceptiveness is better conceptualized as a continuous scale as opposed to "the truth" versus "a lie."

The degree to which deception is perceived to be socially acceptable can also vary according to communicators' motivations, relationships, and cultures. In one study, *motive* was the most influential factor in how participants determined how acceptable a deceptive act was (Seiter et al., 2002). For example, lies told to affiliate, benefit others, and protect privacy were judged to be quite acceptable. Culturally, the Chinese viewed lies to benefit others, affiliate, protect privacy, avoid conflict, manage impressions, and protect self as more acceptable than Americans. However, these acceptability ratings were based on the receiver being aware of the motivation behind the lie. As the interpersonal perception literature highlights, individuals have limited ability to perspective-take, especially in a highly emotional state. Therefore, while some might endorse the idea that certain types of deception are acceptable, it is unlikely that they will apply these considerations unless they have the knowledge of *why* someone may choose to deceive, aside from selfish motives.

Even before a lie is told, though, some suggest that people may have some preconceived notions about behavior according to sex, based on an evolutionary perspective. Benz, Anderson and Miller (2005) looked at attributions of deception in dating situations based on previous

research that has shown that men and women lie about things that make them desirable to the opposite sex. This study did not examine actual deception, but rather the *perceptions* about what deceptive behavior occurs as evaluated by the opposite sex. They found that women believe that men deceive about financial status and level of commitment, and men believe that women deceive about attractiveness, supporting evolutionarily relevant aspects of selecting a mate. It did not, however, support previous research that demonstrated that men are judged to be more deceptive than women. Thus, individuals' expectations about their partners and attributions of their behavior, and specifically deceptive behavior, are influenced by a large number of factors including sex.

Again, the tendency to view lying and telling the truth as opposite behaviors does not reflect the reality of people's actions or how people *perceive* and evaluate the actions of others. In summary, a variety of factors impact the attributions and judgments individuals make about others' deceptive behavior including: the role in the situation, the severity of the lie, the type of deceptive behavior, motivation behind the lie, and biological sex.

**Rules regarding honesty and deception.** This study's focus on deception and honesty represents a specific slice of the larger phenomenon of relationship rules. Relationship rules underlie patterns of behavior and allow individuals to coordinate meaning in relationships. But because relationships largely function at the implicit level, it is likely that they are not explicitly agreed upon. The literature on interpersonal perception suggests that relational partners have the potential to have very divergent perspectives, but perceive that each other's perspectives are similar. Clearly, slippage can occur where relational partners fail to coordinate meaning, leading to a variety of outcomes. There are countless types of rules that could be investigated, but this study focuses specifically on rules about honesty and deception for a few reasons.

Honesty is a value without behavioral referents, but alludes to standards of behavior our society holds in high esteem. Deception does have behavioral referents, but these (as noted above) are open to interpretation by individuals. Clearly, deception encompasses much more beyond the dichotomy of “telling the truth” versus “telling a bold-faced lie.” Scholars note that deception is more common than assumed; as a result, rules about honesty are likely commonly violated in personal relationships. Honesty and deception rules are good examples of emotional rules that people take very seriously, despite their ambiguous in nature. What drives this study is a desire to understand the ambiguity of a significant emotional event (deception) that individuals regard as clear and unmistakable. The cultural ideal of “complete honesty” in relationships stipulates one thing: healthy relationships should not contain deceptive acts. Reality, however, stipulates another: deception occurs frequently and is one way in which individuals function day-to-day as well as one strategy they utilize to maintain relationships. Conflict can either be avoided through deception or, on the other hand, caused by it.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

The ambiguity of deception in the repertoire of a couple’s relationship rules is twofold: 1) individuals have different conceptions about what actually *constitutes* deception; and 2) Individuals have different ideas about when it is *acceptable*. When rules (believed to be understood) about deception and honesty are violated, they can have dramatic consequences for relationships. In general, as noted by the literature, people tend to overestimate the extent to which they understand one another. Therefore, deception rules are among the most salient to romantic partners, and also have the potential to be the *least* shared.

The question remains as to whether individuals actually do coordinate meaning about these rules, or whether they just *think* that they do – and whether this predicts anything



meaningful about the relationship itself. This study uses interpersonal perception variables as a lens to study not only direct perspectives but also meta-perspectives of one's partner. Therefore, the research questions first assess the differences between perceived agreement, actual agreement, and differential understanding to investigate meta-perspectives on these types of rules.

RQ1: To what extent do couples *agree* on relationship rules about honesty and deception?

RQ2: To what extent do couples *perceive agreement* on relationship rules about honesty and deception?

RQ3: To what extent do couples have *differential understanding* with each other regarding relationship rules about honesty and deception?

Previous research has revealed that discrepancies between relational partners' standards can be problematic. Additionally, those whose beliefs are more similar tend to report greater satisfaction with the relationship. As alluded to above, understanding may play a more complex role. This study attempts to replicate some of these findings within a specific category of rules through measuring interpersonal perception variables. Given the salience of the value of honesty in relationships and the consequences related to discovered deception, the current study seeks to understand the connection between rule coordination and both relationship satisfaction and conflict. Therefore, the study will address the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ4: Does agreement predict relationship satisfaction?

RQ5: Does agreement predict conflict in the relationship?

RQ6: Does perceived agreement predict relationship satisfaction?

RQ7: Does perceived agreement predict conflict in the relationship?

RQ8: Does differential understanding predict relationship satisfaction?

RQ9: Does differential understanding predict conflict in the relationship?

Based on previous work, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Couples will have higher perceived agreement than actual agreement on relationship rules about honesty and deception.

H2: Differential understanding will be lower than both perceived agreement and actual agreement.

In addition, research has indicated that the properties of rules themselves might have implications for how they are understood and expressed in relationships. Campbell et al.'s (2001) work was drawn upon as a model for this study, given the similarities of the observations from the preliminary study to their work. As mentioned in the literature review, Campbell et al. (2001) investigated whether the flexibility of standards moderated the relationship between discrepancies and relationship satisfaction. Those who are more flexible should accept greater discrepancies between ideals and perceptions of the partner, whereas less flexible individuals should find this less tolerable.

The current study will also utilize dating couples for dyadic analysis, but will differ in a few key ways. First, rather than investigating a broad spectrum of ideals (rules, in this case), this study narrows the focus to rules specifically surrounding conceptions of honesty and deception. Secondly, this study has identified rules from interviewees in the preliminary studies to develop measures. Campbell et al. (2001) measured "ideal flexibility" through scale questions that asked participants to indicate the extent to which a romantic partner would have to match his/her ideal partner in order to have a successful and happy relationship. The current study hopes to take a less abstract approach by instead pre-coding the rules for flexibility and then allowing participants to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the rules. This should

indirectly indicate the extent to which their repertoire of rules about honesty and deception is more or less flexible:

RQ10: Are the interpersonal perception variables associated with rigid rules or flexible rules better predictors of satisfaction in the relationship?

RQ11: Are the interpersonal perception variables associated with rigid rules or flexible rules better predictors of conflict in the relationship?

Because rigid rules are less ambiguous and offer relational partners a better sense of predictability, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H3: Perceived agreement, agreement, and differential understanding will be greater for rigid rules than for flexible rules.

## Methods

### Study 1

First, a pilot study was conducted to identify typical relationship rules pertaining to honesty and deception, and develop the questionnaire for the main study.

**Participants.** Participants in romantic relationships were recruited for the study from an upper level communication class at a large western university. Nine participants completed open-ended interviews, which followed a semi-structured format. In order to qualify for the study, participants needed to be comfortable discussing honesty and deception as it pertained to a current or recent relationship. Interviewees were awarded extra credit in their class for participating.

**Procedure.** The participants were assured confidentiality and provided informed consent. Audio-recorded interviews ranged from between 20 minutes and 50 minutes. During the

interview, participants were asked about what rules in their relationship they could identify in the relationship surrounding honesty and deception. Whenever possible, they were asked to give examples to illustrate the rules they identified. Furthermore, they were asked about the kinds of things that are okay to keep from their partner, what must be shared between them, and how they came to form these rules. Also, they were asked if any rules they identified had been a source of conflict in the relationship. Throughout the interview, whenever a “relationship rule” or new idea was identified, the researcher engaged in *member checks* by rephrasing what the interviewee had said and seeking approval in order to validate meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The interviews were audio-recorded with participant informed consent. All interviews were transcribed and coded by the author, yielding 67 pages of transcription notes. The author identified categories for relationship rules through a process of open-coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Eleven rules were identified that were the most salient and frequent among participants.

**Follow-up generalizability checks.** The researcher then developed an electronic survey using these rules to assess the generality of these rules with an additional group of participants. The survey included scale questions, closed-ended questions, and open-ended contingency questions. Students were asked to answer four questions about each of the eleven rules. The first two utilized a five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the rule and the extent to which they thought their partners would agree with the rule. The next question asked them if they had discussed the rule before, and if so to describe the outcome of the discussion. Finally, they were asked if this rule had been a source of conflict in their relationships, and if so, they were given space to describe the conflict. The open-ended responses were used to support and contrast the findings from the interview section of the study. Because of the small sample size, these open-

ended responses were more useful than the quantitative findings from the scale questions, and aided in the addition of more rules.

The researcher reviewed interview transcripts a second time to identify additional rules beyond the 11 rules initially extracted to expand the original list. The purpose was to ensure that the questionnaire developed for the main study would capture a wide range of rules that individuals identify with in their relationships. The second round of coding yielded an additional 14 rules, for a new total of 25 rules.

The rules identified in the preliminary studies were diverse and covered a variety of relational topics related to honesty and deception. In general, rules supported by relational partners indicated something about what should be disclosed and what could be kept secret. To clarify, because “honesty” is a value, it is not quantifiable except through behaviors that are recognized as indicating something meaningful about honesty. Therefore, in this study, various degrees of disclosure and secrecy represent the communicative expressions of how individuals define honesty (and what constitutes deception).

A third pre-study was conducted to ensure that the list of rules was as comprehensive as possible. Participants from one undergraduate class read through a list of the 25 rules identified in the interviews, and were asked to determine if there were rules that applied to their relationships that were not listed (regardless of whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the rules in the list). They were left space to write their own rules. The researcher then analyzed the additional rules in conjunction with the previously identified rules to identify overlap and meaningful differences and additions. Some rules were deleted because of overlap, and others were added to the list if they provided a new type or quality of rule. With the additions from the third pre-study, the researcher identified a total of 44 rules (see Table 1 for full list of rules).

**Rule coding.** In these preliminary studies, the *nature* of the rules identified varied by a distinct overarching property: *flexibility*. That is, some rules were extremely rigid (low on flexibility), such as “my partner should never lie to me under any circumstances.” Other rules reflected a more flexible idea of how honesty should be operationalized in the relationship, such as, “if it’s not affecting the relationship directly, we don’t necessarily have to share it.” This distinction echoes other research, such as Kohn and Sayers’ (2005) work that coded relationship standards on the dimension of extremeness. To receive a high rating on extremeness, the rule contained “the use of extreme or rigid words as cues, such as: *always, never, nothing, must, has/have to, every, everyone, anything, same, totally, completely, absolutely, or fully*” (p. 320). In contrast, non- extreme standards included none of these extreme key words.

Therefore, the researcher distinguished between “rigid” and “flexible” to code the rules on flexibility. A flexible rule allows for some interpretation and judgment on behalf of the partner; it may cover a range of behaviors rather than specifying one in particular. These types of rules sound similar to the non-extreme standards mentioned above. A rigid rule is not ambiguous; it states exactly what he/she expects from the partner.

To test face validity of the flexible/rigid distinction and screen for ambiguous items, five graduate students in the communication studies department were presented with these definitions and the rules, and asked to classify in a forced-choice format whether the rule was flexible or rigid. The coders agreed with the researcher’s classification of rules as flexible versus rigid a high percentage of the time, with the lowest coder at 91% and the highest coder at 98%. The coding for one rule was switched, given that coders’ judgments consistently differed from the researcher’s initial categorization. The rest of the rules were identified by coders as flexible or

rigid in a manner consistent with the researcher's classification and were included as such in the questionnaire for the main study.

The development of the rules instrument serves two functions in the study. First, it measures the flexibility of relationship rules pertaining to deception/honesty. Secondly, it serves as a basis for assessing interpersonal perceptions (agreement, perceived agreement, understanding) about relationship rules.

## Study 2

**Participants.** Participants and their romantic partners (male:  $n = 74$ ; female:  $n = 74$ ) were recruited from several undergraduate communication courses at a large western university. Participants were offered extra course credit in exchange for participation. To qualify for the study, both members of dating couples needed to come together to campus to answer separate questionnaires reporting on rules about honesty and deception. Seventy-four couples' data (148 usable surveys) were utilized for analysis. The sample was restricted to couples that had been dating for a minimum of three months.

Couples in the sample had been together ranging from between three months to 34 years in total ( $M = 48.45$  months/4 years). 2.7% ( $n = 2$ ) of participants reported dating casually, 5.4% were engaged ( $n = 4$ ), 24.3% were married ( $n = 18$ ), and the majority were dating exclusively (67.6%,  $n = 50$ ). The females in the sample were between ages 18 and 54, with an average age of 24.94. The males in the sample were between ages of 18 and 58, with the average age at 26.35. 97.3% of the females were Caucasian ( $n = 72$ ), 1.4% were Hispanic ( $n = 1$ ), and 1.4% were Native American ( $n = 1$ ). 91.9% of the males were Caucasian ( $n = 68$ ), 5.4% were Hispanic ( $n = 4$ ), and 2.7% were Native American ( $n = 2$ ).

**Procedure.** Qualified couples were asked to come to a building on campus at a specified time. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form, and was reminded that participation was voluntary and confidential. Informed consent forms were stored separate from the data. Relational partners were placed in separate areas while completing the survey. Individuals were instructed to answer the first part of the survey according to his or her own beliefs, and in the second part, according to how he or she believed his or her partner would answer. Participants were offered contact information for counseling and psychological services on campus if they needed. Once the data was collected, it was entered into PASW SPSS for analysis.

**Measures/Materials.** The questionnaire for the current study (Appendix B) included 144 questions. The first 44 items are Likert-type items that asked the participant to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the relationship rules. The next section was structured in the same way with the same 44 items, but instructed the participant to indicate the extent to which they believe his or her *partner* would agree or disagree with the rules (meta-perspective). Twenty-three of the rules were pre-classified as having the property of “flexible”, while the other twenty-one rules were “rigid.”

Five questions assessed *attributional confidence*, adapted from Clatterbuck’s (1979) Attributional Confidence Scale. Two of the original seven questions were removed because they are not relevant to the current study. Internal consistency reliability, based on Cronbach’s alpha, was high for both females ( $SD = 9.98$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ), and for males ( $SD = 10.66$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Relationship satisfaction* for females ( $SD = 1.12$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) and males ( $SD = .93$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ) was measured utilizing Huston, McHale, and Crouter’s (1986) Marital Opinion Questionnaire.



The measure included 9 Likert-type scale items that each had different anchors such as “miserable”/“enjoyable” and “hopeful”/“discouraging” ranging from 1 to 7.

*Conflict* was measured by five Likert-type scale items that asked, “To what extent have you and your partner had disagreements that upset one or both of you about...” followed by 5 different issues related to honesty and deception (“...keeping secrets from each other?”). The items were anchored by “not at all” to “great extent.” The index was internally consistent for females ( $SD= 0.77$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ) and males ( $SD= 0.81$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

One single-item scale, adapted from Fletcher et al. (1999), measured *ideal flexibility*, or the extent to which a current partner would need to match one’s ideal partner in order to be happy and successful in the relationship. This answer was indicated by selecting from 10 intervals of percentages (0-10%, 11-20%, etc.).

Seven *commitment level* items were included from Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew’s (1998) Investment Model Scale to assess global commitment. These items were also Likert-type questions ranging from “do not agree at all” (0) to “agree completely” (8) and included items such as, “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.” These indexes were internally consistent for females ( $SD= 1.20$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ) and males ( $SD= 1.58$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

Twenty- five questions from the “Family Type Questionnaire” were included from Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s (2002) Revised Family Communication Patterns Instrument (RFCP). These questions assessed various aspects of the participant’s relationship with his or her parents and family using a Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The questionnaire breaks down into two different indexes, the family conversation orientation and the family conformity orientation. Both conversation orientation (females:  $SD= 0.69$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ , males:  $SD= 0.68$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) and conformity orientation (females:  $SD= 0.84$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ , males:

$SD = 0.70$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ) proved to be internally consistent. These family type indexes will be used for later analysis beyond the scope of this thesis project.

**Analysis.** The questionnaire elicited both direct and meta-perceptions of agreement with relationship rules about honesty and deception. Before comparing between couples, it was first necessary to compute interpersonal perception scores based on within-dyad calculations. These require clarification before interpreting the results.

Agreement, perceived agreement, “raw” understanding, and differential understanding were calculated based on the scale items assessing rule endorsement and perceived partner rule endorsement. Agreement was calculated as the within-dyad correlation between direct perceptions of rules by each relational partner. To calculate within-dyad correlations, items for rule endorsement were treated as equivalent to cases and separate correlations were calculated for each dyad (see Michela, 1990). Perceived agreement was the correlation between one partner’s direct perception and the meta-perception of that same partner (assessing the other). Raw understanding was calculated as the correlation between one partner’s perception of the other and the other’s direct perceptions. Differential understanding was calculated using a within-dyad partial correlation that controlled for agreement. Differential understanding scores were derived from the partial correlation between one partner’s perceptions of the other (meta-perception) and the other’s direct perceptions, controlling for the partner’s direct perspectives. The influence of projection on understanding scores is factored out in this calculation, which corrects scores that are inflated by individuals who simply assume similarity with their own perspectives (see Sillars, 1985 for further explanation).

## Results

### Descriptive Characteristics and Summary Ratings

Table 2 reports the descriptive characteristics of the participants' relationships. The mean *attributional confidence* score (assessed by a percentage from 0 - 100%) was 88.0% for females and 85.9% for males. Overall, individuals in the sample believed they could, to a great extent, predict the attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of their partners. *Satisfaction* scores were relatively similar between females ( $M = 5.76, SD = 1.13$ ) and males ( $M = 5.78, SD = .93$ ) on a scale ranging from 1 to 7. Most participants reported being relatively satisfied with their relationships, with males being slightly more satisfied.

On a scale ranging from 1 – 4, participants on average reported a moderate level of *conflict* related to honesty and deception (females:  $M = 1.86, SD = .78$ ; males:  $M = 1.91, SD = .81$ ). Based on the mean scores, males tended to perceive slightly more conflict in the relationship than females. On a 0 – 8 scale of commitment, most participants reported being committed to their partners (females:  $M = 6.80, SD = 1.20$ ; males:  $M = 6.66, SD = 1.58$ ). Based on the single-item scale of *ideal flexibility* (females:  $M = 7.81, SD = 2.73$ ; males:  $M = 7.88, SD = 2.26$ ), participants on average wanted their current partners to match between 61 – 80% of their “ideal partner” in order to have a happy and successful relationship with their current partners.

### Flexible Rules and Rigid Rules Scaled Variables

In order to answer the research questions regarding the role of flexibility/rigidity of relationship rules, the rules were (based on previous coding) separated into two groups: flexible rules and rigid rules. To determine the internal consistency of the rigid and flexible rule items, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated separately for both groups of rules. The flexible rules, comprised of 23 items, had high reliability for females ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The flexible rules also had

high reliability for males ( $\alpha = .82$ ). For rigid rules, one rule: “My partner is not allowed to check my personal stuff such as text messages or my computer without permission” was deleted from both the male and female scales given its negative correlation to other items and because Alpha improved with its deletion. The remaining 20 rigid rules had acceptable reliability as a scale for females ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and males ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

### **Interpersonal Perceptions**

A look at the interpersonal perception (mean) scores (Table 3) reveals some interesting trends among the variables and begins to answer the research questions. The interpersonal perception variables captured the extent to which couples agreed on the rules, the extent to which they perceived agreement, and the extent to which they understood each other’s perspectives. Again, agreement, perceived agreement, and understanding were based on within-dyad correlations, calculated separately for each couple, which were then averaged across all the couples in the sample to produce an aggregate score for each interpersonal perception variable.

*RQ1* asked the extent to which couples *agreed* on relationship rules about honesty and deception. Agreement was calculated by correlating the female’s direct perspectives on the rules with the male’s direct perspectives on the rules for each couple. Essentially it is a measure of how similarly each couple’s beliefs align. Agreement scores were moderate ( $M = .46, SD = .17$ ) indicating that on average couples had somewhat similar perspectives on the relationship rules, but not to a great extent.

*RQ2* asked the extent to which couples *perceived agreement* about the relationship rules. Perceived agreement was calculated for females by correlating each female’s direct perspective with her meta-perspective. It was calculated for males by correlating each male’s direct perspective with his meta-perspective. Females ( $M = .55, SD = .21$ ) and males ( $M = .53, SD =$

.25) had moderate-to-high perceived agreement, and perceived agreement scores for both sexes were higher than agreement. ). Paired samples *t*-tests indicated that perceived agreement was significantly higher than agreement for females,  $t(73) = 3.98, p < .001$ , and males,  $t(73) = 2.46, p < .05$ . Together these findings support *hypothesis 1*, which predicted that perceived agreement would be higher than actual agreement for relationship rules about honesty and deception.

*RQ3* asked the extent to which couples showed *differential understanding* of relationship rules. Differential understanding is the extent to which an individual can predict his or her partner's beliefs with his or her own beliefs factored out. Thus, it is a measurement of how much individuals understand their partner's beliefs when these differ from their own. The reason for calculating differential understanding is that understanding scores can be inflated by an individual assuming that his or her partner has similar beliefs – and frequently this is true.

Calculating differential understanding (referred to as “understanding controlling for projection” in Table 3) first required calculating *raw understanding*. Raw understanding for females was the within-dyad correlation of each female's meta-perspective with the male's direct perspective. Conversely, raw understanding for males was the within-dyad correlation of each male's meta-perspective with the female's direct perspective. Female raw understanding ( $M = .42, SD = .19$ ) and male raw understanding ( $M = .43, SD = .21$ ) were roughly the same. When raw understanding scores were controlled for projection, the resulting *differential understanding* scores dropped considerably. To answer *RQ3*, the scores were low for both females ( $M = .21, SD = .21$ ) and males ( $M = .23, SD = .22$ ). This finding suggests that a large proportion of what an individual believes he or she knows about the partner's perspectives and beliefs is a reflection of his or her own self-perception. That is, individuals project their own views onto their partners, generally assuming more similar perspectives than truly exist (Sillars et al., 1994). Paired

samples *t*-tests indicated that agreement was significantly higher than differential understanding for females,  $t(73) = 7.61, p < .001$ , and males,  $t(73) = 7.10, p < .001$ . Perceived agreement was also significantly higher than differential understanding for females,  $t(73) = 9.00, p < .001$ , and males,  $t(73) = 7.75, p < .001$ . *Hypothesis 2* was thus supported, as differential understanding was lower than both perceived agreement and agreement.

So far, these results suggest that individuals perceive that they have the same beliefs more than they actually do, and furthermore, they understand each other less than they agree on these beliefs. When understanding scores were controlled for projection, the resulting lower scores suggest that individuals do not know where their partner's beliefs differ from their own as much as they "know" when their beliefs align.

Another way to examine understanding scores is to factor out stereotyping (see Kenny & Acitelli, 1994). That is, understanding scores may be inflated by individuals assuming that their partners support gender-stereotypical beliefs. To calculate understanding controlling for stereotyping, within-dyad partial correlations were computed between meta-perspectives and partner direct perspectives, controlling for the mean score for that gender across all the respondents (Kenny & Acitelli, 1994). For example, if a male believed that his or her partner would rate the rules in a way that was similar to the average of all the females in the sample, *understanding controlling for stereotyping* would be rather low. Female understanding controlling for stereotyping for females was zero. Male understanding controlling for stereotyping was only slightly higher ( $M = .14, SD = .22$ ). When both projection and stereotyping were factored out, understanding scores were negligible (females:  $M = -.10, SD = .27$ ; males:  $M = .06, SD = .20$ ).

### **Rigid Rules versus Flexible Rules**

Interpersonal perception scores were also calculated separately for rigid rules and flexible rules. *Hypothesis 3* predicted that agreement and perceived agreement would be higher on rigid rules than flexible rules. Agreement, perceived agreement, and differential understanding scores were considerably higher for both females and males on the rigid rules than for the flexible rules (see Tables 4 & 5). This was partial support for *hypothesis 3*. Rigid rule agreement was moderate ( $M = .49, SD = .20$ ) whereas flexible rule agreement was weak ( $M = .34, SD = .21$ ). A paired samples *t*-test indicated that rigid rule agreement was significantly higher than flexible rule agreement,  $t(73) = 4.54, p < .001$ . Female perceived agreement for rigid rules ( $M = .61, SD = .23$ ) and male perceived agreement for rigid rules ( $M = .53, SD = .26$ ) were both high whereas female perceived agreement for flexible rules ( $M = .44, SD = .25$ ) and male perceived agreement for flexible rules ( $M = .41, SD = .26$ ) were slightly lower. There was a statistically significant difference between rigid and flexible perceived agreement scores for females  $t(73) = 5.38, p < .001$  and for males  $t(73) = 3.49, p < .001$ . Female raw understanding scores for rigid rules ( $M = .45, SD = .22$ ) and male raw understanding scores ( $M = .39, SD = .26$ ) were higher than female raw understanding scores for flexible rules ( $M = .32, SD = .22$ ) and male raw understanding scores for flexible rules ( $M = .27, SD = .23$ ). However, differential understanding was the same for males on the flexible rules and rigid rules ( $M = .14, SD = .25$ ). For females, differential understanding was actually slightly higher for the flexible rules ( $M = .27, SD = .23$ ) than for rigid rules ( $M = .24, SD = .31$ ). Given that the differential understanding scores were so low, it was not surprising that neither females' nor males' differential understanding scores demonstrated statistically significant differences. Overall, *hypothesis 3* received partial support. The interpersonal perception variables of agreement and perceived agreement were greater for rigid

rules than for flexible rules, whereas there was no difference in differential understanding for the two sets of rules.

### **Predictors of Satisfaction and Conflict**

*Correlational analyses.* Pearson correlations were calculated to answer several of the remaining research questions (Table 6). *RQ4* asked if rule agreement predicted relationship satisfaction. There was a significant correlation between rule agreement and average (couple) satisfaction,  $r = .37, p < .001$ . Broken down by gender, there were also significant correlations between agreement and female satisfaction,  $r = .28, p < .05$ ., as well as agreement and male satisfaction,  $r = .34, p < .01$ .

*RQ5* asked if rule agreement predicted conflict in the relationship. There was a significant negative relationship between rule agreement and average (couple) conflict,  $r = -.42, p < .001$ . When breaking conflict scores down by gender, agreement on rules was a significant predictor of male conflict,  $r = -.43, p < .001$ , and female conflict,  $r = -.30, p < .01$ .

*RQ6* asked if perceived agreement predicted relationship satisfaction. The Pearson correlation indicated that there was a weak but significant correlation between female perceived agreement and female satisfaction,  $r = .26, p < .05$ . There was a significant moderate association between male perceived agreement and male relationship satisfaction,  $r = .44, p < .001$ . These results hint that perceived agreement on relationship rules may impact males' relationship satisfaction more than females' satisfaction.

*RQ7* asked if perceived agreement predicted conflict in the relationship. Females' perceived agreement on the rules had a low but significant correlation with their reported conflict in the relationship,  $r = -.25, p < .05$ , whereas males' perceived agreement was moderately



correlated with their reported conflict,  $r = -.46, p < .001$ . Similar to actual agreement, perceived agreement was associated with conflict.

*RQ8* asked if differential understanding predicted relationship satisfaction. For both males,  $r = .07, n.s.$ , and females,  $r = .14, n.s.$ , differential understanding had a non-significant association with relationship satisfaction. Differential understanding on deception and honesty rules does not appear to predict relationship satisfaction in a meaningful way.

*RQ9* asked if differential understanding predicted conflict. For both males,  $r = .21, n.s.$ , and females,  $r = -.01, n.s.$ , differential understanding did not predict conflict.

*Regression analyses.* Based on the correlations, the interpersonal perception variables of agreement (*RQ4*) and perceived agreement (*RQ6*) are associated with relationship satisfaction. Correlations also suggest that the interpersonal perception variables of agreement (*RQ5*) and perceived agreement (*RQ7*) are associated with conflict. Differential understanding was not significantly associated with satisfaction (*RQ8*) or conflict (*RQ9*).

In order to examine these findings more closely, four hierarchical regression models (Tables 7-10) were performed to examine the individual contributions of the interpersonal perception variables to the outcome variables of satisfaction and conflict, controlling for other variables that may affect satisfaction and conflict. Two regression models were run for females: one with female relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, and one with female conflict as the dependent variable, and two were performed for males following the same pattern.

In each model, control variables (i.e., the length of the relationship and age) were entered as a block in the first stage of the regression. Agreement (female or male), perceived agreement, and (female or male) raw understanding were entered in the second block. It was not necessary to include differential understanding in the model, given that the contribution of each

interpersonal perception variable controlled for other interpersonal perceptions. Thus, the effects of understanding controlled for agreement and therefore, represent the influence of differential understanding.

The most notable finding from the regression models, as seen in Table 7, was that male conflict was predicted by male understanding when controlling for length of relationship, male age, agreement, and perceived agreement. For this particular model ( $p < .001$ ), the controls (age and length of relationship) only accounted for 5.2% of the variation in the model,  $F(1, 73) = 1.96, n.s.$ , whereas the interpersonal perception variables (agreement, perceived agreement, and raw understanding) explained 42.5% of the variance in males' reported conflict,  $F(2, 73) = 7.56, p < .001$ . Consistent with the zero-order correlations, agreement ( $\beta = -.33, p < .01$ ) and perceived agreement ( $\beta = -.49, p < .001$ ) were significantly, negatively associated with conflict. The Betas support the idea that both perceived agreement and agreement each have unique effects on conflict in the relationship. However, in the regression model predicting male conflict, the influence of understanding went from a negative Pearson correlation ( $r = -.19, n.s.$ ) to a significant and positive Beta ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ). This suggests that, for males, knowing when their partners' perspectives differed from their own was conflict-provoking. This regression model illustrates that differential understanding may play a unique role in influencing relationship characteristics. The model overall was significant at the .001 level.

As seen in Table 8, the results of the hierarchical regression with female conflict as the outcome variable were not as strong. The control variables (age and length of relationship) did not account for significant variation in female-reported conflict,  $F(1, 73) = .014, n.s.$ , and the interpersonal perception variables explained 10.2% of the variance in the dependent variable,  $F(2, 73) = 1.54, n.s.$  All of the Betas remained in the same direction as the zero-order

correlations, but agreement and perceived agreement dropped below statistical significance.

Among the interpersonal perception variables, the best predictor of female reported conflict was agreement ( $\beta = -.21, n.s.$ ), followed by perceived agreement ( $\beta = -.10, n.s.$ ) and then raw understanding ( $\beta = -.07, n.s.$ ).

Tables 9 and 10 provide summaries of the hierarchical regression models with male and female satisfaction as the dependent variables. The model for male satisfaction accounted for 22.7% of the variation among the scores. The first block of control variables did not contribute significantly to satisfaction,  $F(1, 73) = .071, n.s.$ , but the addition of the interpersonal perception variables made the model statistically significant  $F(2, 73) = 3.99, p < .01$ . Pearson correlations revealed that agreement, perceived agreement, and raw understanding were predictive of males' satisfaction, however, in the regression analysis, perceived agreement was the only variable that was statistically significant when controlling for the effects of the other variables ( $\beta = .32, p < .05$ ). Thus, perceived agreement best predicted male satisfaction with the relationship.

While the pattern of findings was similar, the strength of the effects was once again weaker for females. The control variables accounted for 1.7% of the variation in females' satisfaction, while the entire model accounted for only 14.8% of the variation in satisfaction scores,  $F(1, 73) = 2.36, p < .05$ . Although the model was significant as a whole, none of the individual predictor variables were statistically significant. Although Pearson correlations revealed that agreement, perceived agreement, and raw understanding were all associated with female satisfaction, the regression model indicated that their unique contributions were not statistically significant.

*RQ10* asked if the interpersonal perception variables associated with rigid rules (Table 11) or flexible rules (Table 12) were better predictors of satisfaction in the relationship.

Associations between agreement with flexible rules and satisfaction were weak and not statistically significant for males ( $r = .05, n.s.$ ) or females ( $r = .21, n.s.$ ). The same occurred with agreement with the rigid rules (males:  $r = .05, n.s.$ ; females:  $r = .16, n.s.$ ). Perceived agreement was not meaningfully associated with female satisfaction for rigid rules ( $r = -.03, n.s.$ ) or flexible rules ( $r = .08, n.s.$ ). For men, perceived agreement on flexible rules ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ) and rigid rules ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ) was related to satisfaction. Raw understanding and differential understanding scores, when separated by flexible and rigid, were not significantly correlated with satisfaction for men or women in the sample. For this reason, distinctions between rigid and flexible rules will not be made for these interpersonal perception variables. Based on these correlations, there was no evidence to suggest that interpersonal perceptions for flexible rules or rigid rules were better predictors of satisfaction.

*RQ11* asked if the interpersonal perception variables associated with rigid rules or flexible rules were better predictors of conflict in the relationship (Tables 11 & 12). Agreement with flexible rules was not a significant predictor of conflict for males ( $r = -.19, n.s.$ ) or females ( $r = -.05, n.s.$ ). However, agreement with rigid rules was significantly, negatively correlated with female-reported conflict,  $r = -.26, p < .05$ , and to a greater extent, male-reported conflict,  $r = -.42, p < .001$ . These results suggest that agreement on rigid rules was a better predictor of relationship conflict than agreement on flexible rules.

Females' perceived agreement on flexible rules was not significantly correlated with female-reported conflict ( $r = -.14, n.s.$ ), nor was females' perceived agreement on rigid rules ( $r = -.04, n.s.$ ). Males' perceived agreement on flexible rules had a small, significant correlation with male-reported conflict ( $r = -.19, p < .01$ ), whereas males' perceived agreement on rigid rules was moderately correlated with conflict ( $r = -.45, p < .001$ ). Raw and differential understanding,

when separated by flexible and rigid rules, did not significantly correlate with conflict for men or women in the sample. In sum, these results provide evidence that *agreement* on rigid rules is a better predictor of conflict in the relationship than flexible rules, but *perceived agreement* on rigid rules appears to be a better predictor only for males' conflict.

Given the difference between males' perceived agreement on rigid rules and flexible rules on conflict, an ordinary least squares regression model was performed to examine the unique effects of perceived agreement on rigid rules and flexible rules on males' conflict scores. The model indicated that 20% of the variability on male satisfaction scores could be explained by perceived agreement on rigid rules and perceived agreement on flexible rules,  $F(1, 73) = 8.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . The beta scores reveal that males' perceived agreement on rigid rules scores significantly predicted male conflict ( $\beta = -.43$ ,  $p > .001$ ), while perceived agreement on flexible rules did not ( $\beta = -.05$ , *n. s.*). The regression model provided further support that perceived agreement on rigid rules is a stronger contributor to male conflict than perceived agreement on flexible rules.

Taken as a whole, then, the interpersonal perception variables of the rigid rules were better predictors of conflict than interpersonal perceptions of flexible rules.

### **Additional Findings**

Aside from the interpersonal perception variables, it is useful to examine *rule endorsement* scores, or simply the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with rules. Both females and males tended to endorse the rigid rules more strongly than flexible rules. Mean scores (based on a 5-point Likert-type scale) for rigid rules were relatively similar between women ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .40$ ) and men ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .34$ ). The same was true for flexible rules between women ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) and men ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = .42$ ).

A few findings about variables related to perceived agreement are worth noting as well. Bivariate correlations revealed that *commitment* was positively related to female perceived agreement ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ), and even more to male perceived agreement ( $r = .40, p < .001$ ). Additionally, attributional confidence was positively related to female perceived agreement ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ), but not significantly related to male perceived agreement ( $r = .12, n.s.$ ).

Interestingly, females' differential understanding was positively associated with their *attributional confidence*,  $r = .35, p < .01$ , and *commitment*,  $r = .23, p < .05$ . Males' scores on attributional confidence did not correlate with their differential understanding scores,  $r = .05, n.s.$  The correlation between male commitment scores and differential understanding approached statistical significance,  $r = .23, n.s.$  These results suggest that females' belief in their ability to predict their partner did correspond to greater understanding, but the same did not hold true for males.

## Discussion

Honesty is a trait that individuals seek in a romantic partner in order to cultivate trust, and is a virtue that many learn from a young age. Deception, as popular culture sees it, does not belong in interpersonal relationships – likely because it is conceptualized solely as the “bold-faced lie.” However, the interpersonal communication literature has uncovered many ways that individuals can deceive that are much less severe than the bold-faced lie. Additionally, research highlights that deception is used quite frequently in relationships (Metts, 1989; McCornack, 1997; Burgoon & Levine, 2010; Cole, 2001), and it is often unselfishly motivated (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Clearly, deception is sometimes malignant and meant to manipulate or cause harm, but it is also a strategy used for relationship maintenance. It allows individuals to

accomplish competing goals, and has been documented as a strategy to avoid conflict (Peterson, 1996) and promote intimacy and harmony (DePaulo et al., 2009). Given that honesty is placed on a pedestal and deception is used quite frequently in relationships, a double-standard seems to exist: Individuals want to believe their partners will be 100% truthful at all times, yet people acknowledge that they, themselves, use deception when it is necessary in complex social situations.

When deception is discovered or is perceived to be discovered, individuals may react as if an obvious understood principle has been shattered – failing to acknowledge that they, too, have faced difficult decisions with respect to honesty. The conflict literature also notes that emotionally arousing topics can limit cognitive resources, thus making it more difficult to perspective-take and frame the situation in alternative ways. Examining the coordination of relationship rules that people support regarding honesty and deception is one way to uncover how individuals struggle with this contradiction and attempt to manage it. Relationship rules, as standards for conduct in the relationship, help align behaviors with expectations, making the relationship more predictable. Often times these rules are unspoken, and as a result, beliefs may not align between relational partners. When there are discrepancies between expectations and a partner's actions, they may have implications for relationship qualities such as satisfaction and conflict, as investigated in this study.

The first part of the study was able to extract a wide array of rules that individuals apply to their romantic relationships through in-depth interviews and a series of follow-up surveys. In general, these individuals concretized their ideas regarding honesty and deception through rules that regulated the flow of information. That is, they described the types of information that *must* be shared, *could* be shared, *did not have* to be shared, *could* be kept *private*, and so on. The

interviews also solidified the view that managing divergent conceptualizations of honesty was conflict provoking. For some, rules for managing these disclosures and secrets were explicitly discussed, but for many, the rules were implicit and assumed to be shared. Based on inductive coding, certain rules fit into the category of moral absolutes that encompassed the idea of never lying, or *rigid rules*. Others, labeled *flexible rules*, were situationally contingent and acknowledged the complexity of applying complete honesty to social situations by emphasizing judgment. The formulation of rules with contrasting properties appeared to be a communicative expression of individuals struggling with the desire to promote complete honesty in the relationship coupled with the recognition of the need for situationally contingent decisions regarding disclosures.

The main study (part 2) offers some support for previous findings in the interpersonal perception literature but is able to extend these findings to a new, specific group of relationship rules. As predicted by *hypothesis 1*, perceived agreement was higher than actual agreement. Additionally, differential understanding was lower than both perceived agreement and agreement, as predicted by *hypothesis 2* (See H1, H2, & H3). This means that couples thought they agreed with one another (perceived agreement) to a greater extent than their beliefs were aligned (agreement). Furthermore, when corrected for agreement (differential understanding), the extent to which individuals could accurately predict their partners' beliefs dropped considerably. In similar studies, scholars have documented that relational partners tend to overestimate agreement (Sillars & Scott, 1983; Sillars et al., 1994).

The low differential understanding scores are a reflection of this assumption of similarity. Individuals use their own self-perceptions as anchors for determining others' self-perceptions – especially with their romantic partners. Thus, it is no surprise that participants tended to perceive



that their perspectives about honesty and deception were in agreement more than they actually were, or that they agreed with each other to a greater extent than they understood each other's perspectives. Furthermore, when understanding scores were controlled for projection – using one's own beliefs as a foundation for “knowing” what the partner thought – the understanding scores dropped considerably. This suggests at least two things: 1) When it comes to honesty and deception, individuals tend to think that their own ideas about relationship rules serve as a basis for understanding their partner's beliefs about these rules, and 2) Individuals are not as accurate as knowing when their partner's beliefs differ from their own as they are at “knowing” when their partner's viewpoints align with their own. As further evidence of this finding, the raw understanding scores, which simply measure accuracy in predicting partners' perspectives without factoring out agreement, were higher than differential understanding scores. This is not to say that knowing one's partner's similarities to oneself is a less important than knowing differences. Rather, it highlights the tendency for individuals to use projection as a heuristic for determining others' thoughts and beliefs. Projection is a lower level cognitive process than decentering from one's own beliefs to infer unique elements of the partner's perspective.

The current study was also able to link these interpersonal perceptions regarding honesty and deception rules to specific relationship outcomes. Agreement was significantly correlated with satisfaction for males and females. That is, couples whose beliefs were more similar to one another were more satisfied with their relationships than those who faced greater discrepancies. Prior research has documented that discrepancies between relational partners' beliefs can be problematic (Campbell et al., 2001), and those who have fewer discrepancies between their own and their partners' standards for relationships tend to be happier (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997; Caughlin, 2003; Afifi & Joseph, 2010; Acitelli et al., 2001). Indeed, this study also linked

agreement with conflict – those who had less agreement tended to report higher levels of conflict in the relationship.

Perceived agreement also predicted both relationship satisfaction and conflict, although the correlations were weaker for females than for males. The significance of this finding is that believing that one is in agreement with one's partner – even if this is not an accurate reflection of reality – may serve a protective function in the relationship. On the other hand, differential understanding did not predict satisfaction or conflict in a meaningful way based on the bivariate correlations. To be aware of differences between one's own beliefs and one's partner's beliefs did not increase an individual's satisfaction with the relationship. In the regression model with male conflict as the outcome variable, however, differential understanding's role became clearer. When the effects of other variables were controlled, higher differential understanding by males actually led to higher levels of conflict. This meant that being aware of differences in perspectives was conflict-provoking for males in the sample. Although one might regard understanding one's partner as positive, the finding that it increased males' perceptions of conflict helps explain why, in some cases, individuals might be motivated to misunderstand their partners (Sillars, 2011). Because this finding was not replicated for females in the sample, it should be investigated further in future research.

Two findings allude to the idea that selecting a partner whose beliefs about honesty and deception are *already* similar to one's own may be more important to the relationship than being aware of where one's partner's perspectives are different. 1) Differential understanding scores were low. 2) Perceived agreement and actual agreement were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction and conflict. Thus, similarity in beliefs about relationship rules may be the key to higher satisfaction with the relationship and lower levels of conflict, as opposed to

understanding. Acitelli et al. (2001) echo this sentiment, noting that similarity may be more important than understanding.

Understanding is a double-edged sword. While it intuitively seems to parallel closeness and depth of the relationship, it is sometimes equivalent to exposing problematic differences between partners, which can be conflict provoking. Thus, understanding can essentially unveil “blissfully ignorant” perceptions that are sometimes functional in relationships. However, as discussed in the literature review, many relationship rules are implicit and unspoken – so this blissful misunderstanding may persist peacefully until conflict erupts over a partner’s actions failing to align with one’s expectations. The Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) helps situate these findings. This theory purports that individuals may be motivated to seek or *avoid* relevant information about others, depending upon whether they want more or less uncertainty than they have (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In conjunction with the idea of “motivated misunderstanding” (Sillars, 2011), this explains why sometimes individuals may actually desire *more* uncertainty about their partner’s beliefs if those beliefs are not similar. These findings regarding honesty and deception perhaps serve as an example of when reducing uncertainty can be anxiety- provoking, and why perceived agreement on rules is significantly higher than agreement and differential understanding.

Finally, this research explores the notion that different properties of rules may exist, as reflected in rules as being flexible or rigid. Based on the mean scores, rigid rules were more endorsed by participants in the sample than flexible rules. Rigid rules were also more strongly linked to conflict in the relationship than flexible rules. Lower agreement and perceived agreement on the rigid rules tended to increase reported conflict more so than agreement and perceived agreement on flexible rules. This may be a reflection of the moral and absolute tone of

the rigid rules, which allows for greater predictability and control of one's partner to the extent that such rules are mutually endorsed. The endorsement of rules helps create feelings of stability and predictability (Honeycutt et al., 1993), so it may be that the rigid rules ensure a perception of predictability more than the flexible rules. Another way to frame the properties of flexibility and rigidity of rules is through Petronio's (1991) Communication Boundary Management Theory (CBM). CBM states that individuals establish boundaries around specific realms of information to regulate its ownership. Two dimensions by which these boundary rules vary which relate to this study are *permeability* and *control*. Control relates to who has access to the information, and permeability relates to how freely the information flows. Rigid rules seem to demand that the recipient partner should be granted control over the specific information across a variety of contexts, whereas flexible rules do not explicitly demand this control. Furthermore, the rigid rules are stated in a way that is very permeable, whereas the flexible rules allow for discretion on behalf of the partner to determine whether or not that information must be shared (thus, allowing for less permeability).

The finding that properties of rules impact relational outcomes also indirectly supports an insight from Campbell et al.'s (2001) study, which found that the flexibility of ideal standards moderated the relationship between ideals and relationship judgments. Campbell et al. (2001) found that the more flexible the partner, the more likely he or she would be to maintain a positive impression of his or her partner even when there was a discrepancy (between reality and ideals). The current study found that lower agreement on flexible ideals was not significantly associated with increased conflict, but that lower agreement on rigid rules resulted in increased conflict. Lower agreement represents a discrepancy between partners' beliefs, and greater conflict is a potential indicator of problems in the relationship (and, perhaps, less positive impressions of

one's partner). A discrepancy on the flexible rules did not result in increased conflict to the same extent, suggesting that those who support more flexible rules acknowledge and expect differences in perspectives, and are more tolerant of ambiguity. Disagreement on flexible rules is thus less conflict provoking.

An alternative explanation for why discrepancies with rigid rules tend to be conflict provoking is that they represent what Kohn and Sayers (2005) referred to as *extreme standards*. Extreme standards are more difficult to live up to than standards that are flexible, and as a result, individuals sometimes fall short of their partners' expectations. The Kohn and Sayers (2005) study helped clarify previous research that had found both negative and positive associations between extreme standards and relationship quality. They found that, for happy couples, supporting extreme standards enhanced the relationship. For couples who were struggling, supporting extreme standards instead created an awareness of growing discrepancies between what they have and what they want. Applied to the current study, this explanation helps explain why agreement and perceived agreement on rigid rules would be linked more strongly than flexible rules to satisfaction and conflict.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while individuals support a variety of rules in their relationships that may include both rigid rules and flexible rules, the rigid rules appear to be more impactful on the relationship than flexible rules. Again, the examination of these properties of rules (flexibility and rigidity) is exploratory in nature. Future research should continue to unpack how the properties of the rules that are endorsed in relationships affect interactions, and consequently the overall qualities of the relationship.

To synthesize the findings and implications of this research, the project contributes the following findings and implications to the field of interpersonal communication:

1. Individuals do identify with rules they have in their romantic relationships to manage the ambiguous meanings of honesty and deception.
2. Couples tend to perceive that they agree with one another on rules more than they actually agree, and they understand each other less than they agree.
3. Individuals project their own beliefs about honesty and deception onto their partners, thereby overestimating similarity.
4. Agreement and perceived agreement on deception and honesty rules are associated with better relational quality (i.e., higher satisfaction and less conflict).
5. Individuals endorse rules that are categorized as rigid (absolute, extreme) more strongly than they endorse rules that are flexible (situationally- determined, contingent).
6. Agreement and perceived agreement on rigid rules are negatively associated with conflict to a stronger extent than agreement and perceived agreement on flexible rules. It may be more conflict- provoking to disagree on rigid rules than flexible rules, likely because there is far less room for interpretation or alternative meanings with respect to rigid rules.
7. Differential understanding of honesty and deception rules plays a more complex role in influencing relational quality than agreement or perceived agreement. In some cases, awareness of differences between relational partners is conflict- inducing.

### **Limitations**

The college-aged sample is the most obvious limitation of this research. A sample size of 74 couples is informative, but a larger sample would allow for more statistical power. Further, beliefs that govern college dating relationships are likely very different from the beliefs that guide established marriages. Future research should address the way that married couples manage these tensions as compared to dating couples.

Survey data is inevitably subject to self-report biases. It is possible that having individuals complete the survey at the same time as their relational partners may have created additional pressure to respond according to how their partner would expect. Likely, many of the participants realized that after leaving the survey, their partners would ask them questions about their responses to the items.

Grouping the items into “flexible rules” and “rigid rules,” although exploratory in nature, is a limitation in itself. The items that comprise the groups of rules are not all topically similar – they capture many different beliefs as well as different degrees of flexibility and rigidity. For the sake of simplicity, specific rules were grouped together under rigid and flexible categories; however, it is important not to oversimplify a “score” on the scaled variable of “flexible rules” or “rigid rules.” As a result of the rules being treated as two separate scales, individuals could agree with some of the rigid rules and some of the flexible rules without a contradiction existing.

## **Conclusion**

The current study explored rules that individuals utilize in their relationships to manage the difficult and ambiguous topics of honesty and deception. Through dyadic analysis, the research was able to link interpersonal perception variables to the distinct relationship outcome variables of satisfaction and conflict. The results support some previous findings from the interpersonal perception literature, applying these concepts to a specific and novel group of rules – a particular set of rules that may be more ambiguous and potentially conflict-provoking to navigate than others. Finally, the study was able to investigate the role of rule flexibility or rigidity in a novel way. Hopefully, the findings from this study can help communication scholars continue to untangle the complexities of human relationships to help individuals cultivate healthier, more satisfying connections with others. Specifically, this research helps shed light on

the difficulties of managing ambiguity and tensions over the variety of definitions of honesty and deception, and exposes a disjuncture between perception and reality in relationships through the lens of relationship rules.

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**Appendix A**

Table 1

*List of Rules*

Rigid Rules	Flexible Rules
White lies are not ok between us.	What my partner shares with me is up to him/her, and that's fine with me.
We should share everything about our relational history.	Sometimes it's better not to share things that are just going to start a conflict.
We should be able to talk about the future of the relationship without lies.	Sharing genuine emotions is not necessary all the time.
Sexual history is important to share with each other.	Secrets are ok unless they will directly affect me (ex – health issues or future of the relationship).
My partner should tell me if he/she spends time with someone of the opposite sex.	Secrets are ok if disclosing them would bring harm to the self or partner, but they should definitely be disclosed if they could strengthen the relationship.
My partner should tell me if he/she is facing problems and vice versa.	Omitting details is ok if it is to avoid hurting my partner's feelings or upsetting him/her.
My partner should keep me involved in his/her everyday activities to the point that I know where he/she is a majority of the time.	My partner is not obligated to tell me anything.
My partner should be honest with me about who is contacting him/her through media if I ever have questions.	My partner and I don't need to reveal everything to each other, but if prompted, we should.
My partner and I should voice our concerns about jealous feelings.	My partner and I can keep secrets from one another.
My partner and I should disclose where we are financially.	Just because my partner and I are able to contact each other all throughout the day (as afforded by technology), it doesn't mean that we should.
My partner and I should disclose everything to each other – nothing should be kept secret.	It's ok to keep things private that are not damaging to the relationship.
My partner and I should disclose all details about when we "go out."	It's ok that we don't disclose everything about our past history to each other.
My partner and I should be honest with each other about needing time alone.	It's important that my partner and I retain some independence.
My partner and I should be honest regarding feelings about the relationship itself.	It's better to not share things that will provoke conflict if these things are not a big deal.
My partner and I should be genuine about emotions – good or bad.	It is ok to have secrets from each other, unless we directly ask one another about a particular topic – in which case we should disclose that information.
My partner and I must be exclusive. I think I should be able to know where my partner is at all times.	If it is not affecting the relationship directly, I don't need to share it with my partner.
I should know whom my partner is contacting through new media (texting, social networking, emailing).	I don't need to know my partner's sexual history.
Health issues must be shared, regardless of the circumstances.	I don't need to know everything my partner is doing daily.
Drug or alcohol use should be shared.	Family issues can be kept private from my partner.
Being direct with each other is necessary.	Distorting minor details is ok.
	Distorting information is ok as long as it's something inconsequential/minor.
	Being completely honest is not always necessary.



Table 2

*Univariate Descriptive Statistics for Individual and Dyadic Variables (n = 74)*

<b>Demographics and Indexes</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimu m</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Female Age	24.95	8.76	18	54
Male Age	26.35	9.24	18	56
Length of Relationship	48.45 mo/ 4.04 yrs	78.49	3 (mo)	408 mo/ 34 yrs
Female Attributional Confidence (Index)	88%	9.98	54%	100%
Male Attributional Confidence (Index)	85.89%	10.66	35.00%	98.40%
<b>Couple Attributional Confidence (Index)</b>	86.94%	8.28	50.50%	99.20%
Female Conflict (Index)	1.86	.78	1	4
Male Conflict (Index)	1.91	.81	1	4
Female Satisfaction (Index)	5.75	1.13	2	7
Male Satisfaction (Index)	5.78	.93	2	7
<b>Couple Satisfaction (Index)</b>	5.77	.87	2	7
Female Commitment (Index)	6.80	1.20	3.83	8
Male Commitment (Index)	6.66	1.58	2.33	8
<b>Couple Commitment (Index)</b>	6.82	1.16	3.50	8
Female Rigid Rule Endorsement (Index)	3.86	.40	3.10	4.85
Male Rigid Rule Endorsement (Index)	3.75	.34	3.05	4.45
Female Flexible Rule Endorsement (Index)	3.02	.51	1.83	4.00
Male Flexible Rule Endorsement (Index)	3.15	.42	2.26	3.87

Table 3

*Interpersonal Perception Variables including All Rules*

<b>Interpersonal Perception Variables (all rules)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Agreement	.46	.17	.11	.79
Female Perceived Agreement	.55	.21	-.13	.90
Male Perceived Agreement	.53	.25	-.51	.88
Female Raw Understanding	.42	.19	-.17	.79
Male Raw Understanding	.43	.21	-.17	.87
Female Understanding (controlling for projection)	.21	.21	-.34	.61
Male Understanding (controlling for projection)	.23	.22	-.38	.70
Female Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.00	.31	-.54	.60
Male Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.14	.22	-.26	.70
Female Understanding (controlling for both)	-.10	.27	-.53	.54
Male Understanding (controlling for both)	.06	.20	-.39	.57

Table 4

*Rigid Rules Interpersonal Perception Variables*

<b>Interpersonal Perception Variables (Rigid Rules)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Agreement	.49	.20	0	.89
Female Perceived Agreement	.61	.23	-.13	.95
Male Perceived Agreement	.53	.26	-.10	.98
Female Raw Understanding	.45	.22	-.10	.87
Male Raw Understanding	.39	.26	-.19	.82
Female Understanding (controlling for projection)	.24	.31	-.46	.80
Male Understanding (controlling for projection)	.14	.25	-.53	.64
Female Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.02	.31	-.65	.57
Male Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.13	.28	-.50	.69
Female Understanding (controlling for both)	-.02	.30	-.60	.44
Male Understanding (controlling for both)	.04	.27	-.54	.63

Table 5

*Flexible Rules Interpersonal Perception Variables*

<b>Interpersonal Perception Variables (Flexible Rules)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Agreement	.34	.21	-.42	.78
Female Perceived Agreement	.44	.25	-.19	.86
Male Perceived Agreement	.41	.26	-.25	.93
Female Raw Understanding	.32	.22	-.19	.72
Male Raw Understanding	.27	.24	-.30	.64
Female Understanding (controlling for projection)	.27	.23	-.40	.78
Male Understanding (controlling for projection)	.14	.25	-.49	.58
Female Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.00	.24	-.46	.48
Male Understanding (controlling for stereotyping)	.03	.25	-.54	.52
Female Understanding (controlling for both)	-.05	.24	-.47	.46
Male Understanding (controlling for both)	-.02	.27	-.80	.52

Table 6

*Zero-order Correlations for Rigid Rules*

	Female Satisfaction	Male Satisfaction	Female Conflict	Male Conflict
Agreement	.05	.16	-.26*	-.42***
Female Perceived Agreement	.04	-.02	-.04	-.25*
Male Perceived Agreement	-.03	.25*	-.11	-.45***
Female Raw Understanding	.08	.07	-.14	-.25*
Male Raw Understanding	-.05	.09	-.14	-.23*
Female Differential Understanding	.03	.02	-.03	-.05
Male Differential Understanding	-.09	-.12	.02	.13

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

Table 7

*Predictors of Male Conflict*

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Block 1: Controls</b>			.05
Male Age	-.02	-.34	
Length of Relationship	-.17	.02	
<b>Block 2: Interpersonal Perception Variables</b>			.31***
Male Age	-.02	.33*	
Length of Relationship	-.17	-.34*	
Agreement	-.43***	-.33**	
Male Perceived Agreement	-.46***	-.49***	
Male Raw Understanding	-.19	.31*	

*Note:* The first column reports to zero-order Pearson correlations between independent variables and male satisfaction. The second column reports standardized betas with all variables in blocks 1 and 2 entered in the regression equation. The third column reports the increment to  $R^2$  for the block of variables at each step. This particular table reports that male age and length of relationship in block 2 as well as both variables added significantly to the model.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

Table 8

*Predictors of Female Conflict*

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Block 1: Controls</b>			.00
Female Age	-.02	.00	
Length of Relationship	-.02	-.02	
<b>Block 2: Interpersonal Perception Variables</b>			.10
Agreement	-.30***	-.21	
Female Perceived Agreement	-.22	-.10	
Female Raw Understanding	-.21	-.07	

*Note:* The first column reports to zero-order Pearson correlations between independent variables and female satisfaction. The second column reports standardized betas with all variables in blocks 1 and 2 entered in the regression equation. The third column reports the increment to  $R^2$  for the block of variables at each step.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

Table 9

*Predictors of Male Satisfaction*

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Block 1: Controls</b>			.00
Male Age	.03	-.01	
Length of Relationship	.05	.05	
<b>Block 2: Interpersonal Perception Variables</b>			.23**
Agreement	.34***	.14	
Male Perceived Agreement	.44***	.32*	
Male Raw Understanding	.37***	.12	

*Note:* The first column reports to zero-order Pearson correlations between independent variables and male satisfaction. The second column reports standardized betas with all variables in blocks 1 and 2 entered in the regression equation. The third column reports the increment to  $R^2$  for the block of variables at each step.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed).



Table 10

*Predictors of Female Satisfaction*

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Block 1: Controls</b>			.02
Female Age	-.13	-.14	
Length of Relationship	-.10	.02	
<b>Block 2: Interpersonal Perception Variables</b>			.13*
Agreement	.28*	.13	
Female Perceived Agreement	.26*	.11	
Female Raw Understanding	.31**	.20	

*Note:* The first column reports to zero-order Pearson correlations between independent variables and female satisfaction. The second column reports standardized betas with all variables in blocks 1 and 2 entered in the regression equation. The third column reports the increment to  $R^2$  for the block of variables at each step.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

Table 11

*Zero-order Correlations for Rigid Rules*

	Female Satisfaction	Male Satisfaction	Female Conflict	Male Conflict
Agreement	.05	.16	-.26*	-.42***
Female Perceived Agreement	.04	-.02	-.04	-.25*
Male Perceived Agreement	-.03	.25*	-.11	-.45***
Female Raw Understanding	.08	.07	-.14	-.25*
Male Raw Understanding	-.05	.09	-.14	-.23*
Female Differential Understanding	.03	.02	-.03	-.05
Male Differential Understanding	-.09	-.12	.02	.13

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

Table 12

*Zero-order Correlations for Flexible Rules*

	Female Satisfaction	Male Satisfaction	Female Conflict	Male Conflict
Agreement	.21	.05	-.05	-.16
Female Perceived Agreement	.08	.03	-.14	-.13
Male Perceived Agreement	-.04	.25*	-.12	-.19
Female Raw Understanding	.07	-.02	-.08	-.04
Male Raw Understanding	.11	.14	-.05	-.01
Female Differential Understanding	.06	-.13	-.11	.03
Male Differential Understanding	.07	.07	.02	.14

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

**Appendix B**

Dyad # \_\_\_\_\_

Partner:   A     B

**Relationship Rules Survey****Instructions:**

All relationships have “rules” that people follow to make the relationship work. Relationship rules are beliefs about acceptable, approved, or expected behavior in relationships, including rules about what information should be shared or kept private. The following questionnaire lists relationship rules that some people report in their own relationships. You will see a variety of types of rules which may or may not apply to you.

After each relationship rule listed, please indicate the extent to which you agree that this should be a rule in your current relationship with the partner who is completing the study with you. Remember this survey is confidential and completely voluntary. Thank you in advance for your participation.

My Perception of Relationship Rules	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. White lies are not ok between us.	1	2	3	4	5
2. What my partner shares with me is up to him/her, and that's fine with me.	1	2	3	4	5
3. We should share everything about our relational history.	1	2	3	4	5
4. We should be able to talk about the future of the relationship without lies.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sometimes it's better not to share things that are just going to start a conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Sharing genuine emotions is not necessary all the time.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Sexual history is important to share with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Secrets are ok unless they will directly affect me (ex – health issues or future of the relationship).	1	2	3	4	5
9. Secrets are ok if disclosing them would bring harm to the self or partner, but they should definitely be disclosed if they could strengthen the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Omitting details is ok if it is to avoid hurting my partner's feelings or upsetting him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My partner should tell me if he/she spends time with someone of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My partner should tell me if he/she is facing	1	2	3	4	5

problems and vice versa.					
13. My partner should keep me involved in his/her everyday activities to the point that I know where he/she is a majority of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My partner should be honest with me about who is contacting him/her through media if I ever have questions.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My partner is not obligated to tell me anything.	1	2	3	4	5
16. My partner is not allowed to check my personal stuff such as text messages or my computer without permission.	1	2	3	4	5
17. My partner and I should voice our concerns about jealous feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
18. My partner and I should disclose where we are financially.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My partner and I should disclose everything to each other – nothing should be kept secret.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My partner and I should disclose all details about when we “go out.”	1	2	3	4	5
21. My partner and I should be honest with each other about needing time alone.	1	2	3	4	5
22. My partner and I should be honest regarding feelings about the relationship itself.	1	2	3	4	5
23. My partner and I should be genuine about emotions – good or bad.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My partner and I must be exclusive.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My partner and I don’t need to reveal everything to each other, but if prompted, we should.	1	2	3	4	5
26. My partner and I can keep secrets from one another.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Just because my partner and I are able to contact each other all throughout the day (as afforded by technology), it doesn’t mean that we should.	1	2	3	4	5
28. It’s ok to keep things private that are not damaging to the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
29. It’s ok that we don’t disclose everything about our past history to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
30. It’s important that my partner and I retain some independence.	1	2	3	4	5
31. It’s better to not share things that will provoke conflict if these things are not a big deal.	1	2	3	4	5
32. It is ok to have secrets from each other, unless we directly ask one another about a particular topic – in which case we should disclose that information.	1	2	3	4	5
33. If it is not affecting the relationship directly, I don’t need to share it with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I think I should be able to know where my partner is at all times.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I should know whom my partner is contacting through new media (texting, social networking, emailing).	1	2	3	4	5
36. I don’t need to know my partner’s sexual history.	1	2	3	4	5

37. I don't need to know everything my partner is doing daily.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Health issues must be shared, regardless of the circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Family issues can be kept private from my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Drug or alcohol use should be shared.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Distorting minor details is ok.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Distorting information is ok as long as it's something inconsequential/minor.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Being direct with each other is necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Being completely honest is not always necessary.	1	2	3	4	5

**Instructions:**

Next, I would like to know how you think your partner perceives the same relationship rules. This time, please respond to the same set of rules as you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer.

My Partner's Perception of Relationship Rules	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
45. White lies are not ok between us.	1	2	3	4	5
46. What my partner shares with me is up to him/her, and that's fine with me.	1	2	3	4	5
47. We should share everything about our relational history.	1	2	3	4	5
48. We should be able to talk about the future of the relationship without lies.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Sometimes it's better not to share things that are just going to start a conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Sharing genuine emotions is not necessary all the time.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Sexual history is important to share with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Secrets are ok unless they will directly affect me (ex – health issues or future of the relationship).	1	2	3	4	5
53. Secrets are ok if disclosing them would bring harm to the self or partner, but they should definitely be disclosed if they could strengthen the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
54. Omitting details is ok if it is to avoid hurting my partner's feelings or upsetting him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
55. My partner should tell me if he/she spends time with someone of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5
56. My partner should tell me if he/she is facing problems and vice versa.	1	2	3	4	5
57. My partner should keep me involved in his/her everyday activities to the point that I know where he/she is a majority of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
58. My partner should be honest with me about who is contacting him/her through media if I ever	1	2	3	4	5

have questions.					
59. My partner is not obligated to tell me anything.	1	2	3	4	5
60. My partner is not allowed to check my personal stuff such as text messages or my computer without permission.	1	2	3	4	5
61. My partner and I should voice our concerns about jealous feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
62. My partner and I should disclose where we are financially.	1	2	3	4	5
63. My partner and I should disclose everything to each other – nothing should be kept secret.	1	2	3	4	5
64. My partner and I should disclose all details about when we “go out.”	1	2	3	4	5
65. My partner and I should be honest with each other about needing time alone.	1	2	3	4	5
66. My partner and I should be honest regarding feelings about the relationship itself.	1	2	3	4	5
67. My partner and I should be genuine about emotions – good or bad.	1	2	3	4	5
68. My partner and I must be exclusive.	1	2	3	4	5
69. My partner and I don’t need to reveal everything to each other, but if prompted, we should.	1	2	3	4	5
70. My partner and I can keep secrets from one another.	1	2	3	4	5
71. Just because my partner and I are able to contact each other all throughout the day (as afforded by technology), it doesn’t mean that we should.	1	2	3	4	5
72. It’s ok to keep things private that are not damaging to the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
73. It’s ok that we don’t disclose everything about our past history to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
74. It’s important that my partner and I retain some independence.	1	2	3	4	5
75. It’s better to not share things that will provoke conflict if these things are not a big deal.	1	2	3	4	5
76. It is ok to have secrets from each other, unless we directly ask one another about a particular topic – in which case we should disclose that information.	1	2	3	4	5
77. If it is not affecting the relationship directly, I don’t need to share it with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
78. I think I should be able to know where my partner is at all times.	1	2	3	4	5
79. I should know whom my partner is contacting through new media (texting, social networking, emailing).	1	2	3	4	5
80. I don’t need to know my partner’s sexual history.	1	2	3	4	5
81. I don’t need to know everything my partner is doing daily.	1	2	3	4	5
82. Health issues must be shared, regardless of the circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
83. Family issues can be kept private from my	1	2	3	4	5

partner.					
84. Drug or alcohol use should be shared.	1	2	3	4	5
85. Distorting minor details is ok.	1	2	3	4	5
86. Distorting information is ok as long as it's something inconsequential/minor.	1	2	3	4	5
87. Being direct with each other is necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
88. Being completely honest is not always necessary.	1	2	3	4	5

**Instructions:**

The next five questions will ask you to express how confident you are that you know a particular fact about your dating partner. On these questions, the answers should be written as a percentage, anywhere from 0% to 100%. For example, if you are totally confident that you know a particular fact, you might write 100%. If you were slightly less confident, you might put a number like 93%. If you were not at all confident, you might place a very low percentage, like 5%, as your answer.

- 89. How confident are you of your general ability to predict how he/she will behave? \_\_\_\_\_
- 90. How accurate are you at predicting the values he/she holds? \_\_\_\_\_
- 91. How accurate are you at predicting his/her attitudes? \_\_\_\_\_
- 92. How well can you predict his/her feelings and emotions? \_\_\_\_\_
- 93. How well do you know him/her? \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:**

Next, I would like you to think about your relationship with your partner over the last two months, and use the following words and phrases to describe it. Circle the number that most closely describes your feeling toward your partner over the past two months. A "4" represents a "neutral" feeling.

94.	Miserable:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Enjoyable
95.	Hopeful:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Discouraging
96.	Empty:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Full
97.	Interesting:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Boring
98.	Rewarding:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Disappointing
99.	Doesn't give me a chance:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Brings out the best in me
100.	Lonely:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Friendly
101.	Worthwhile:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Useless



All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship with your partner over the last two months?

102.	Completely dissatisfied:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	:Completely satisfied
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**Instructions:**

The next few questions ask about disagreements in your relationship.

To what extent have you and your partner had disagreements that upset one or both of you about...	Not at all	Small extent	Moderate extent	Great extent
103. ...keeping secrets from each other?	1	2	3	4
104. ...not sharing “relevant” information?	1	2	3	4
105. ...honesty?	1	2	3	4
106. ...deceptive behavior?	1	2	3	4
107. ...distorting the truth?	1	2	3	4

**For the next question, please circle the answer to your response.**

108. Think about your IDEAL partner (exactly as you would wish your romantic partner to be).

To what extent would your current partner have to match your ideal partner in order for you to have a happy and successful relationship with your current partner? (Circle the appropriate number.)

- 1.) 0 – 10% of my ideal partner
- 2.) 11 – 20% of my ideal partner
- 3.) 21 – 30% of my ideal partner
- 4.) 31 – 40% of my ideal partner
- 5.) 41 – 50% of my ideal partner
- 6.) 51 – 60% of my ideal partner
- 7.) 61 – 70% of my ideal partner
- 8.) 71 – 80% of my ideal partner
- 9.) 81 – 90% of my ideal partner
- 10.) 91 – 100% of my ideal partner

Similar to the previous scales, please indicate on the scale below the extent to which you agree or disagree to the following statements.

(not at all agree 0-----somewhat agree 4----- agree completely 8)

109. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
110. I would not be very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
111. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner in the next year.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
112. I feel very attached to the relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
113. I want our relationship to last forever.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
114. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

**Demographic Questions**

115. How long have you and your partner been in a romantic relationship (altogether)?

Years \_\_\_\_\_

Months \_\_\_\_\_

116. Which of the following best describes your relationship status?

- a. Casual dating
- b. Dating exclusively
- c. Engaged
- d. Married

117. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

118. What is your sex?

- a. Male
- b. Female

119. What is your ethnicity?

- a. Caucasian
- b. African American
- c. Asian/ Pacific Islander
- d. Hispanic
- e. Native American
- f. Other ethnic origin

**Instructions:**

Finally, I would like to know some general things about how you see your family and your parents. Please circle the answer which best represents your own family that you grew up with.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
120. My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.	1	2	3	4	5
121. My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
122. My parents often say that every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
123. My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.	1	2	3	4	5
124. If my parents don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.	1	2	3	4	5
125. In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others.	1	2	3	4	5
126. I can tell my parents almost anything.	1	2	3	4	5
127. My parents often say things like "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."	1	2	3	4	5
128. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.	1		3	4	5
129. My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.	1	2	3	4	5
130. My parents like to hear my opinions, even when they don't agree with me.	1	2	3	4	5
131. My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.	1	2	3	4	5
132. My parents often say things like "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."	1	2	3	4	5
133. I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree..	1	2	3	4	5
134. My parents tend to be very open about their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
135. When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.	1	2	3	4	5
136. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.	1	2	3	4	5
137. In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.	1	2	3	4	5
138. My parents often say things like "My ideas are right and you should not question them."	1	2	3	4	5
139. I usually tell my parents what I am thinking about things.	1	2	3	4	5
140. My parents often say things like "A	1	2	3	4	5

	child should not argue with adults."					
141.	In our home, my parents usually have the last word.	1	2	3	4	5
142.	My parents encourage me to express my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
143.	When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules.	1	2	3	4	5
144.	My parents often say that you should look at both sides of an issue.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you again for your participation. If you need assistance with counseling or psychological services, The University of Montana’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is available by appointment at: (406) 243-4711 and for additional information, the website is: <http://life.umt.edu/curry/Departments/CAPS/default.php>

Should you have any further questions, feel free to contact the researcher at: [katlyn.roggensack@umontana.edu](mailto:katlyn.roggensack@umontana.edu)

I really appreciate your help!