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Stephen Smith

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Preserving Relationship Stability and Self-Evaluations despite Individual Emotional Traits: The SEM Model and Specialization within Romantic Relationships

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Psychological Sciences from The College of William and Mary

by

Stephen Smith

Accepted for Honors (Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Dr. Constance Pilkington, Director

Dr. Jackson Sasser

Dr. Meaghan Stetson

Dr. Joanna Schmid

Williamsburg, VA
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Abstract

A sample of 24 couples (N = 24) participated in the present two-part study investigating whether the Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) process of specialization in romantic couples is affected by differences in individual psychological traits. In the first portion, couples worked collaboratively on one questionnaire to generate performance domains and subdomains of varying relevance, as well as rate which partner had more expertise. Couple conversations during this portion were recorded (with consent) to qualitatively assess the process of specialization in romantic couples. In the second portion, individual partners completed a questionnaire assessing the aforementioned psychological traits. Results suggested that couples evenly distribute subdomain expertise when the performance domain is highly relevant to both partners. There were no significant effects of any psychological variables on the process of specialization. Qualitative data suggested that couples differed in their approach to generation of subdomains, which related to how partners conversed with each other when allocating expertise. Results are discussed within the context of the SEM literature, and implications for the model and directions for future research are considered.
Introduction

Central to Abraham Tesser’s Self Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) model is the assumption that individuals are motivated to sustain positive views and evaluations of themselves. Additionally, the SEM model assumes that interpersonal relationships greatly influence our own self-evaluations (Tesser, 1988). This assumption is in line with theories of self-esteem and shame, in which repeated interpersonal experiences of rejection following vulnerability are thought to be correlated with low self-worth and high shame (Nichols, 1995).

The SEM model proposes two mechanisms of self-evaluation: reflection and comparison. Reflection is based upon the idea of “basking in reflected glory” of others (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976), and it occurs when a person, simply through observation and social connection, derives positive feelings and self-evaluations from the good performance or success of another. The process of reflection is indicated when a person emphasizes his/her association with a successful or praiseworthy person. People most likely derive positive self-evaluations from this process because of the belief that if another praiseworthy or successful person chooses to associate with them, then that must indicate that there is something worthwhile about them. Comparison, on the other hand, involves assessing one’s own performance relative to another person’s performance. Comparisons can result in positive self-evaluations if one outperforms another person or can result in negative self-evaluations if one’s performance is judged worse than another person’s (Tesser, 1988).

Both reflection and comparison are dynamic processes influenced by three variables: closeness, performance, and relevance (Tesser, 1988). Closeness refers to the degree to which two people feel physically, emotionally, socially, and/or intellectually connected with one another (Tesser & Campbell, 1982). Performance refers to a person’s performance ability or
expertise within a subject area, role, or skillset (also referred to as a performance domain). The interaction of closeness and performance predicts the occurrence of the SEM processes. Both reflection and comparison are much more likely to occur if closeness is high. Additionally, if performance is simply average, then one is much less likely to engage in either comparison or reflection. In other words, both reflection and comparison are more likely to occur when one person performs either significantly worse or significantly better than the other.

Relevance of the performance domain to one’s self-concept also influences the SEM processes though. Consider the following case in which Person A is significantly outperformed by Person B, and both people are very close to one another. When focused solely on performance and closeness, the SEM model’s prediction is unclear, because those circumstances could either result in Person A positively reflecting in Person B’s performance, or they could result in comparison between the two. Relevance refers to how significant a performance domain is to a person’s identity or self-concept, and it moderates situations such as these within the SEM model (Tesser, 1988). When relevance is low, people care less about their own performance in a domain, and thus they are more likely to engage in positive reflection with another person for whom the domain may be highly relevant. However, when a skill or role is considered highly relevant to one’s identity, performance within that domain is very important and often is interpreted to reflect one’s own self-worth. As a result, when relevance of the domain in consideration is high, one is more likely to compare performance (Tesser, 1988). As intuition would suggest, relevance is closely linked with the concept of self-evaluation. When relevance is high, an individual who outperforms a close other will increase his/her self-evaluation via positive comparison, whereas being outperformed by a close other in the same domain will likely decrease self-evaluation via negative comparison (Tesser, 1988).
Each of the three variables in the SEM model all interact dynamically with one another in a complex triangular relationship to predict social behavior. For example, people will adjust the variable of closeness in response to changes in relevance of the task and performance. Pleban & Tesser (1981) conducted a study that showed people will physically distance themselves (i.e. sit further away) from, be less willing to work with, and perceive less similarity with other people who outperform them on a personally relevant task. These results suggest that in response to being outperformed, people will attempt to reduce psychological and physical closeness in order to minimize the negative comparison effects on their self-evaluation. When asked to estimate the quality of another person’s performance on a task, participants tend to predict better performances for their friends when the task is of low self-relevance, yet they tend to predict better performances for strangers when the task is of high self-relevance (Tesser & Campbell, 1982). Thus, people appear more charitable in their evaluations of the performance of strangers because the good performance of someone low in closeness is less threatening to their self-evaluations than the good performance of someone high in closeness, such as a friend. Research has found that this cognitive process is also replicated behaviorally – in one study, participants provided more help to friends on tasks that were of low relevance to the participant but provided more help to strangers on tasks that were highly relevant (Tesser & Smith, 1980).

People also will attempt to alter their performance in response to changes in both relevance and closeness. When relevance of the domain is high, people are more likely to engage in comparison, meaning they are motivated to try and increase their performance so that positive self-evaluations are maintained (Tesser, 1988). Data suggest that people accomplish this through altering their behavior, as well as through cognitively altering perceptions of their performance. For example, one study found that when relevance was high, middle school students perceived
their own performance on assessments to be better than their teachers perceived them to be (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984).

Further research suggests that the variable of relevance is also affected by changes in the other two variables of closeness and performance. In one study, results suggested people may change and shape their self-definitions by altering the relevance of certain performance domains to their selves (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). In the Tesser and Paulhus (1983) study, participants were partnered with a stranger and given a task which they believed measured a real cognitive trait, which was in fact made up. The participants were given fake feedback on their performance relative to their partner on the task, and when participants were outperformed, they reported that the task was of lower relevance to them – an effect that was enhanced among those who believed their partner to be higher in closeness (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). Their results suggest that individuals change relevance cognitively as a means of privately maintaining positive self-evaluations (e.g. when outperformed, deciding that domain is not highly relevant anymore) and outwardly communicate the change in relevance to other people in service of image management (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). While this study demonstrates people do alter relevance, the data are inconclusive as to whether altering relevance of previously high relevance domains is the first response to threats of negative self-evaluation.

While the basic SEM model describes how individuals might alter the three variables in response to threats of negative self-evaluation, it cannot exactly predict which behavior people will engage in because situational factors and constraints also influence which variable people choose to alter. As a result, the original SEM model does not perfectly apply to romantic relationships because it fails to account for how the emotions and needs of one’s partner affect the self-evaluation of oneself. In contrast, it assumes that individuals will prioritize their own
positive self-evaluations above all else and will alter performance, closeness, and relevance in order to maintain those positive self-evaluations (Tesser, 1988).

The extended SEM model attempts to account for these shortcomings and considers a person’s concern for their partner’s well-being. Research suggests that the intimacy in romantic relationships often involves some degree of inclusion of the partner in one’s self (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004). As such, the emotional burdens of the other can become a component of one’s own feelings and the subject of empathic concern. Based on this characteristic of intimacy, the extended SEM model proposes that individuals will take into account how their own self-evaluation behaviors will affect their partners (Beach & Tesser, 1995). For example, when one person outperforms his/her partner in a domain, that will increase the positive comparison effects for one person but will lead to negative comparison effects experienced by the partner. Thus, the negative effects felt by one’s partner lessens the positive effects one feels from outperforming their partner according to the extended SEM model. On the other hand, though, positive comparison effects will be increased if the person believes that their partner is engaging in positive reflection.

According to the extended SEM model, the ideal relationship scenario would be one in which partners have complementary skills and abilities within performance domains. That is, each partner has his/her own performance domains that are highly relevant to him/her, and what is highly relevant to one partner is less relevant to the other partner. Operating within this theory, Pilkington, Tesser, & Stephens (1991) investigated the idea of relationship complementarity with respect to skills and abilities. Couples were asked to rate the relevance of several different performance domains to each partner, and then they were asked to rate which partner had the superior performance within that domain. As predicted, the partner for whom the performance
domain was highly relevant was consistently deemed to have superior performance. The results provide further support for the extended SEM model, but they only offer partial support for the idea of relationship complementarity.

In contrast to skills and abilities, research has found that people tend to be more attracted to people with similar personalities (e.g., Blankenship, Hnat, Hess, & Brown, 1984) and similar attitudes and values (e.g., Smeaton, Byrne, & Murnen, 1989). This calls into question whether complementarity (rather than similarity) of skills and abilities could actually provide the basis for attraction. In contrast, it is possible that partners develop complementary skills and abilities as the relationship progresses rather than the complementarity predating the inception of the relationship. However, these research findings on attraction based on similarity also pose issues for the extended SEM model. If people are more attracted to people with similar physical attractiveness (White, 1980), values attitudes, and personalities, then it is likely that there will be some overlap between partners in terms of their skills and abilities. There exists, then, the potential for romantic partners to both consider the same performance domain to be highly relevant to each of their identities.

According to the extended SEM model, in scenarios with domains that both partners consider highly relevant to their own identities, one or both of the partners must reduce the relevance of the domain to their identity. While there is some support for the flexibility of relevance, when a domain is already considered a core part of one’s identity, reducing relevance may not be so simple. Indeed, some domains may be so crucial to one’s sense of identity (e.g., a person who has worked for a decade as a lawyer) that he/she becomes rigid and unwilling to change. The only other avenue the SEM model offers in this case is to reduce closeness, but in
romantic relationships, reducing closeness is not a viable option for relationship preservation, as reducing closeness tends to ultimately result in the dissolution of the relationship entirely.

In response to this gap, Morewitz (2001) proposed the idea of subdomain specialization as a potential solution couples use to navigate the high-high relevance paradox. The process of subdomain specialization is essentially a way of dividing a domain into several component parts in order to create relationship complementarity. Consider for example, two lawyers who are married to one another. Rather than consider the performance domain of ‘lawyer,’ the couple may choose to sub-divide it into types of law or skills that each partner can specialize in, such as contract law, civil rights law, public speaking, or brief writing. By doing so, the couple ensures that each partner is allowed to excel in some areas of the domain and engage in reflection with their partner in the subdomains in which they are outperformed (Morewitz, 2001).

Morewitz investigated the concept of specialization by creating a questionnaire that offered participants 15 different performance domains, each with 8 subdomains. The participants were asked to rate the relevance of each overall domain to themselves, as well as to their partner. Additionally, they were asked to rate the relevance of each subdomain to each partner, as well as rate which partner had more expertise in the subdomain (taken as a measure of performance). Lastly, they were asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with their relationship.

Most notably, Morewitz (2001) observed that when a performance domain was considered highly relevant to both partners (HH relevance), participants evenly divided subdomain expertise between partners. That is, one partner was considered better in roughly 50% of the subdomains, and the other partner was considered better in the other 50% of the domains. Additionally, as expected, when a performance domain was rated as highly relevant to one partner and not relevant to the other, the partner for whom the domain was highly relevant was
deemed to have more expertise in a significantly greater number of subdomains than his/her partner, replicating the finding of the Pilkington, et al (1991) study that the partner who has high relevance was deemed to have superior performance. Overall, the findings were consistent with the extended SEM model in that they demonstrated a mechanism by which romantic partners attempt to maximize their own positive self-evaluations while not harming the emotional needs of their partners. Morewitz posited that couples are motivated by their desire for positive self-evaluation to avoid or reduce any tension between partners because conflict often creates negative emotionality in one or both partners. Accordingly, Morewitz suggested that romantic partners utilize the process of subdomain specialization as a method of conflict avoidance in order to maintain relationship stability and positive self-evaluations (Morewitz, 2001).

McGinley (2003) sought to provide further support for the existence of subdomain specialization as an SEM process, as well as investigate whether specialization relates to relationship satisfaction. Improving on the methodology of Morewitz’s study, McGinley (2003) chose to include reports from both partners in the relationship in order to ensure accuracy of expertise and relevance ratings of domains and subdomains. Couples were sent questionnaires via email and were asked to jointly identify three performance domains – one which was highly relevant to both partners (HH relevance condition), one that was highly relevant to the male partner and low relevance to the female partner (HL condition), and one that was low relevance to the male and high relevance to the female (LH condition). Couples were then asked to identify 8 subdomains for each performance domain they generated and were asked to rate which partner had more expertise in each subdomain. Lastly, the couples were asked to rate the difficulty they had in completing each section of the questionnaire, as well as indicate the amount of time it took them to complete each section. Each partner was also sent a second individual questionnaire.
(completed on their own) designed to assess the self-relevance of domains and subdomains generated (to ensure consistency with original reports), as well as assess relationship satisfaction, seriousness, and closeness (McGinley, 2003).

The results provided further support for the existence of specialization, as McGinley (2003) observed that among performance domains that were highly relevant to both partners, couples allocated 53% of subdomains to the male in terms of having greater expertise and 47% of subdomains to the female. Given that the original Morewitz (2001) study only used information provided by one partner, these findings provide stronger support for the existence of specialization. Additionally, reports of difficulty and time taken for each section of the questionnaire suggested that couples did not find it any more difficult (or time consuming) to generate performance domains and subdomains for the HH conditions than for the non-HH conditions. McGinley argued that these findings suggested couples had engaged in specialization prior to the study, because if couples were attempting specialization for the first time while completing the couple questionnaire, then they likely would have had more difficulty and taken more time with the HH conditions.

The results also provided some preliminary suggestions about the nature and qualities of specialization as a process. Data on the difficulty that couples had in completing the questionnaires suggest that couples had at least some conception of specialization within their relationship prior to the study and were not creating specialized roles on the spot. However, this provides little insight into when exactly specialization begins in a relationship, as well as whether it is a conscious or unconscious process. Additionally, results showed that partners with higher levels of positive feelings towards each other exhibited lower levels of complementarity when the domain was highly relevant to one partner and low relevance to the other. That is, in
the HL relevance and LH relevance conditions, the distribution of subdomain expertise did not fully reflect McGinley’s hypothesis that the partner to whom the domain was relevant would claim expertise in 100% of the subdomains (McGinley, 2003).

The first objective of the present study was to provide further support for the existence of specialization. In line with the primary hypothesis from the McGinley (2003) study, which serves as the primary basis for the present study’s methodology, it was hypothesized that when performance domains were highly relevant to both partners, couples should have allocated subdomain expertise between partners in a roughly 50-50 distribution.

The second objective of the present study was to understand to what extent (if any) emotional characteristics play a role in moderating how specialization and SEM processes occur in different romantic couples. Recall that while both Morewitz (2001) and McGinley (2003) observed a nearly even 50-50 distribution of subdomain expertise in the HH relevance condition, when a domain was highly relevant to one partner but not to the other, both Morewitz and McGinley found that the distribution of subdomain expertise was not exactly the 100-0% distribution that they hypothesized. Seeking to explain this finding, it was hypothesized in the present study that the individual emotional traits of attachment anxiety, differentiation of self, empathic concern, and the extent to which partners identify with each other would affect the distribution of subdomain expertise in couples. The following hypotheses were derived from the Beach and Tesser (1995) study in which they originally proposed the extended SEM model. While the extended SEM model assumes that all partners take into account the feelings of their partner when making self-evaluations, Beach and Tesser theorized that emotional traits might influence the extent to which partners consider how their own self-evaluation related behaviors affect the needs and emotions of their partners.
The first emotional variable considered was attachment anxiety, and it was hypothesized that partners with higher levels of attachment anxiety would cede a greater number of subdomains to their partners in terms of expertise (i.e. say their partner has more expertise), even when the subdomain was of low relevance to their partner. Because attachment anxiety involves a degree of intense desire for closeness and fear of partner’s responsiveness (e.g., Ruppel & Curran, 2012), it is possible that more anxious individuals will be overly fearful of their partner growing resentful from experiencing negative comparison effects. Accordingly, when they outperform their partner, people with higher attachment anxiety will overestimate or imagine negative comparison effects that their partner may not actually be experiencing and be less likely to recognize their partner’s positive reflection due to their own insecurity. When a performance domain is not relevant to the partner, their anxiety will have little effect, as they are not motivated to claim subdomain expertise anyways. However, when a performance domain is highly relevant to them but not their partner, the idea of a 100-0% distribution of subdomain expertise will trigger their anxiety, and they will cede more subdomains to their partner than people with lower attachment anxiety. This effect likely will not be observed when the domain is highly relevant to both partners, because a 50-50 distribution still maintains an image of fairness, and a partner’s anxiety is unlikely to be so strong that it would override their desire for positive self-evaluations.

The second emotional variable considered was Murray Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self (DoS), which arose out of his work within family therapy (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). DoS refers to an individual’s ability to regulate their own emotions, differentiate themselves from the emotions of others, and separate thinking from feeling (Charles, 2001). Broadly speaking, differentiated individuals are autonomous, secure in their identities, able to
resist acting on emotional impulse, and able to understand and respect the emotional boundaries of others without getting overly emotionally involved themselves. In contrast, undifferentiated individuals are insecure and give up their own emotional needs and individuality in the hope of gaining acceptance and love from others. Given that this concept was created with dyadic relationships in mind (albeit in a family-based context), it stands to reason that it has potential explanatory value for how individuals are able to distinguish and navigate balancing the SEM needs of their partner with their own.

Specifically, it was hypothesized that individuals who have lower DoS (reflecting undifferentiated tendencies) would be more likely to cede a greater number of subdomains to their partners in terms of expertise, even when the subdomain was of low relevance to their partner. Considering undifferentiated individuals’ tendency to relinquish their own emotional needs in hopes of gaining acceptance from others, it follows that they may give extra weight to their partner’s self-evaluation needs. This would suggest that they would be quick to cede subdomain expertise to their partners.

Inclusion of self in other, the third emotional variable considered, represents a similar type of concept to DoS in that it describes to what extent partners see themselves and their emotions reflected in their partner. It was therefore hypothesized that individuals who score high on measures of inclusion of self in other will be more likely to cede subdomains to their partner in the same pattern as individuals with high attachment anxiety and low DoS.

The final emotional variable considered was empathic concern, which is a variable that was acknowledged by Beach and Tesser (1995) as one that could potentially explain some of the extended SEM model. A later related study found evidence that participants had higher empathic responses towards their partners when the task was low in relevance to the participants, and they
had less strong empathic responses when relevance was high for both partners (Beach, Tesser, Fincham, Jones, Johnson, & Whitaker, 1998). The current study aims to expand upon the idea that empathic tendencies could be related to variations in performance domain relevance by investigating whether individuals who score higher in empathy cede more subdomains to their partner under varying conditions of relevance.

All of the above emotional variables were hypothesized to predominantly affect how partners allocate subdomain expertise in the HL and LH conditions. Based on the fairly robust and consistent findings of Morewitz (2001), McGinley (2003), and other prior research in the SEM literature, it was assumed that individuals have a cutoff point for ceding subdomain expertise to their partner. While the extended SEM model assumes that individuals take their partners’ emotions into account, there has been no evidence in the line of research that would suggest individuals completely disregard their own desire for positive self-evaluations via positive comparison. The assumption that any of the above emotional variables could cause individuals to fully cede subdomain expertise to their partners in the HH condition runs contrary to the very foundations of the original and extended SEM model. Thus, performance domains that are highly relevant to the individual but not to his/her partner represent the most likely scenario where these emotional variables would have an effect, as it is far easier for a person to cede expertise when they still are going to be considered the expert in the majority of those subdomains.

The final objective of this study was to better understand qualitatively when and how the process of specialization occurs in couples and whether it is a conscious or unconscious process. To better investigate the nature of the process, the present study included qualitative methodology in the form of recording partners’ conversations as they completed the couples’
questionnaire. It was hypothesized that if specialization is a conscious process that partners engage in, conversations would be brief and demonstrate little disagreement between partners because they would have already spoken together about such matters prior to the study. In contrast, if specialization is an unconscious or implicit process, one would expect conversations between partners to contain some instances of surprise, disagreement, or negotiation, because each partner may have their own implicit ideas about the specialization in the relationship but have not expressed them with each other. The qualitative portion of this study was also deliberately included to allow the opportunity to observe phenomena that were not specifically included in the primary hypotheses of this study or mentioned in prior research, such as any interactions between partners that might offer context for findings from the quantitative data.

Method

Participants

Approximately half of the couples (n = 11) were recruited via fliers, messages to campus organizations, and official postings, which they responded to indicating their interest to participate. The other half of the couples (n = 13) were recruited through the undergraduate psychology research participation database, which students in psychology courses use to gain course credit through participation in research studies.

In total, 24 couples were recruited for participation, all of whom completed both portions of the study. All participants were over 18 years of age, and in all couples at least one member attended the College of William & Mary. The average length of relationship for participating couples was 16.1 months (SD = 18.6). Almost all participating couples were heterosexual couples (n = 22), with only two being non-heterosexual couples (n = 2). The sexual orientation
and gender of each partner, though, was considered largely irrelevant to the interpretation of results.

Compensation was offered to all participants in order to incentivize participation. Participants who were recruited through the undergraduate psychology research participation database were granted course credit towards their psychology classes as compensation. Each participant not enrolled in psychology courses (recruited through other means) was offered $5 base compensation for their time, and they also were entered into a raffle to win a $50 gift card.

Measures

Two questionnaires were used for each couple in this study. The first, the couple questionnaire (see Appendix A) was adapted from the couple questionnaire used in the McGinley (2003) study, and each couple completed the questionnaire collaboratively (both partners worked together on one questionnaire). Couples were asked to generate 3 different performance domains: (a) one that was highly relevant to both partners’ identities (HH condition), (b) one that was highly relevant to partner A and low in relevance to partner B (HL condition), and (c) one that was low in relevance to partner A and highly relevant to partner B (LH condition). Subsequently, couples were asked to generate 8 subdomains for each of the performance domains they indicated. For each subdomain, couples rated which partner had more expertise on a 6-point scale (1=partner A much more expertise, 6=partner B much more expertise). Couples then answered questions rating the difficulty they had generating each performance domain and its respective subdomains on a 7-point scale (1=not at all difficult, 7=extremely difficult). The survey was administered on a computer, and the questionnaire recorded the amount of time (in seconds) spent on each question as an additional measure of difficulty.
The second questionnaire, the individual questionnaire (see Appendix B), was administered to each partner separately a minimum of 5 days after they had completed the couple questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was adapted from the individual questionnaire in the McGinley (2003) study and included questions assessing the self-relevance of performance domains and subdomains the partners had generated on the couple questionnaire (rated on the same 7-point scale), as well as asking them to re-rate which partner had more expertise in the HH subdomains (rated on a 6-point scale) for consistency. The individual partners were also asked demographic questions and how long they had been together with their current partner. The following sections of the individual questionnaire consisted of questions drawn from four empirically supported scales (see Appendices C through F): (a) the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (Skowron & Schmidt, 2003) assessing emotional cutoff and fusion (two components of DoS), (b) the Inclusion of Self in Other form (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) assessing how emotionally enmeshed partners felt, (c) the Experience in Close Relationships-Revised form (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) assessing attachment anxiety, and (d) the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (Peloquin & Lafontaine, 2010) assessing empathy within romantic relationships.

Procedure

For the first portion of the study (the couple portion), participants came into the laboratory at their scheduled time and were given a copy of the informed consent form which briefly detailed the general nature and method of both portions of the study and the terms of consent. Once informed consent forms were read and signed, the participants then arbitrarily determined which partner was considered partner A and which was partner B for data recording purposes, and their names and emails were recorded in order to link their couples’ data with their
individual data. The categorizations as partner A and B were used in place of solely recording
gender so as to ensure that data could be collected from couples of all genders and sexual
orientations, not just heterosexual couples (although gender was ultimately used in the final
analysis). Participants were informed that this identifying information was kept on a password
protected spreadsheet only viewed by the researcher in order to ensure confidentiality. Before the
participants began the couple questionnaire, an audio recorder was surreptitiously placed on a
nearby desk in the lab room and was turned on to record conversations between the partners.
Then, the partners were taken into the room and asked to sit at the same computer and complete
the couple questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to work collaboratively and discuss their
answers for as long as necessary.

Once the couples finished the couple questionnaire, the participants were given a
randomly generated couple identification number (e.g. “CQ-01”). The couples were then
informed that their conversations were recorded for the purpose of qualitative analysis and were
debriefed on the general purpose of the recording and ensured of its confidentiality. The couples
were asked to sign a form either giving or withholding consent to the analysis of the recordings
(see Appendix G). If consent was obtained, the audio files were numbered to match the couple’s
identification number to maintain confidentiality and were stored in a password protected file. If
participants did not consent to use of the audio recording, the researcher deleted the audio file
from the recorder in front of the participants before they left the lab. Only one of the 24 couples
did not consent to the use of their audio recording. Participants were then scheduled for a follow-
up time to come into the lab separately to complete the individual portion of the study.

For the second portion of the study (individual portion), individual participants were
scheduled to complete the questionnaire at least 5 days after their couple session so as to avoid
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persistence effects. Participants arrived at their scheduled time and were instructed that this portion of the study was to be completed alone and without consultation with their partner. The participants then completed their individual questionnaire on a laptop computer; no audio recording was involved in this section. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the participants’ responses were titled with an identification number corresponding to their couple identification number and indicating whether they were Partner A or B in the couples’ phase of the study by consulting the log of names and genders (i.e., “CQ-01” corresponds with “IQ-01-Partner A”). After they completed the individual questionnaire, participants were debriefed. The nature of the study and its purpose was explained, and a typed document with more in-depth information and background was emailed to them (see Appendix H). Finally, participants were given their compensation for completion of the study and were asked to refrain from discussing the nature of the study with other people, as well as their partner until both members of the couple had completed the final portion of the study.

After the data collection process was completed, the researcher randomly selected an email from the pool of participants eligible for the $50 gift card. The selected participant was informed of his/her compensation via email. All other eligible participants were informed via email that they were not selected to receive the $50 gift card but were once again thanked for their participation. After the study was concluded, all records of participants’ emails and names were electronically shredded, and the audio recorder was wiped clean of all recordings.

**Results**

Because the main questionnaire (the couple questionnaire) in this study was completed by both partners working together, the primary unit of analysis for this study was the couple. The first set of tests were one-way within-couple analyses of variance (ANOVA) comparing the HH
(highly relevant to both partners), HL (high relevance to male and low relevance to female), and LH (low relevance to male and high relevance to female) conditions. Subsequently, between-couple analyses were conducted using mixed factorial analyses of variance to examine how the process of specialization differed between couples according to various relationship and individual emotional characteristics.

Relevance and Allocation of Subdomain Expertise

The distribution of expertise between partners in a couple was used as an indicator of the process of subdomain specialization. To analyze this distribution, the percentage of subdomains allocated to each partner was calculated for each of the three relevance conditions. A subdomain was categorized as “Partner A expert” if it was rated 1-3 on the 6-point expertise scale. A subdomain was categorized as “Partner B expert” if it was rated 4-6 on the 6-point expertise scale. The number of subdomains allocated as “Partner A expert” for each performance domain was divided by the total number of subdomains the couple generated (8 total) for the associated performance domain. This same procedure was repeated for subdomains allocated as “Partner B expert.” The results were the percentage of subdomains that each partner was considered the expert in for each performance domain. By cross-referencing the log of participant identification numbers, the genders of Partner A and Partner B in each couple were determined, and the percentages of subdomain expertise were converted from “Partner A expert” and “Partner B expert” to “male expert” and “female expert.” In each of the two non-heterosexual couples, one partner was randomly assigned as male and the other as female (even though those did not reflect their self-reported genders) in order to ensure matching pairs of data. Recall that couples generated three performance domains: a) one that was highly relevant to both partners (HH condition), b) one that was highly relevant to one partner and low relevance to the other partner
(HL condition), and c) one that was low relevance the first partner and highly relevant to the other (LH condition). For each performance domain condition, the percentage of subdomains considered “male expert” and the percentage of subdomains considered “female expert” were calculated.

It is worth noting that the percentages were converted into terms of gender solely for statistical purposes, as gender was used simply as a categorical variable to separately test the influence of each partner’s individual emotional characteristics (DoS, anxiety, and empathy) on their ratings as a couple. As such, the arbitrary manipulation of the two non-heterosexual couples’ genders had no effect on the outcomes or interpretation of the data. No gender differences emerged during the individual analysis of emotional characteristics. Still though, because this study originally sought to eliminate gender from consideration to increase inclusivity, any gender differences that might have emerged would have been considered irrelevant and not discussed in the findings of this study.

Due to limitations of statistical tests and the ipsative nature of the data, both percentages of expertise could not be included in the same ANOVA tests as the dependent variables. However, because the percentages are mirror images of one another (they both sum to 100%), either can be used to effectively test the hypotheses. For the majority of the following analyses, the “male expert” percentages were randomly selected as the dependent variable to test the hypotheses about what influences the process and rate of specialization.

To test the effect of the relevance of the performance domain on how couples allocated expertise between partners, a one-way (relevance) within-couple ANOVA was conducted, with the percentage of subdomains allocated as “male expert” serving as the dependent variable. This ANOVA produced a significant main effect of relevance, $F(2,22) = 372.45, p < .001$ (see Table
1). As expected, when the performance domain was highly relevant to both partners, about half of the subdomains were rated as “male expert.” Additionally, when the performance domain was of high relevance to the male and of low relevance to the female, a significantly higher percentage of subdomains were rated as “male expert.” Conversely, when the performance domain was of low relevance to the male and of high relevance to the female, a significantly lower percentage of subdomains were rated as “male expert.” These findings confirm the expected pattern of subdomain specialization based on findings of the McGinley (2003) study. Partners demonstrated a roughly 50-50 distribution of expertise in the HH condition, and in the HL and LH conditions, the partner to whom the performance domain was highly relevant was considered the expert in almost all of the related subdomains.

**Difficulty in Generation of Performance Domains and Subdomains**

The difficulty couples had in generating performance domains and related subdomains was measured in two ways: (a) couple reports of difficulty measured on a 7-point Likert scale, and (b) the time (in minutes) it took couples to complete each section of the questionnaire that asked them to generate performance domains and subdomains for each relevance condition. Difficulty was analyzed in order to investigate if couples had engaged in specialization prior to the study and were using pre-existing specialized roles, or if they were unfamiliar with the process and were negotiating new roles during the study.

For each couple, the difficulty ratings provided for the HL and LH performance domains were averaged together to form a composite non-HH performance domain difficulty rating. This average was compared to the HH performance domain difficulty rating through a one-way (relevance) within-couple ANOVA. The results indicated no significant effect of relevance on difficulty to generate performance domains, suggesting that couples did not find it easier or more
difficult to generate performance domains for the HH relevance condition ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.65$) than for the non-HH relevance conditions ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.52$).

This same procedure was followed for difficulty ratings for subdomains as well. Difficulty ratings for HH subdomains were compared to difficulty ratings for non-HH subdomains (average of HL and LH subdomain ratings) using another one-way within-couple ANOVA. No significant effect of relevance on difficulty to generate subdomains was found. Consistent with the results for performance domains, couples found it neither easier nor more difficult to generate subdomains for the HH relevance condition ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.37$) than for the non-HH relevance conditions ($M = 2.94, SD = 1.30$).

For each section of the questionnaire, the amount of time (in minutes) taken to complete the questions on the page was recorded, creating measures of time taken to generate performance domains and subdomains. Similar to the procedure for couple reports of difficulty, the amount of time taken to generate the HL and LH performance domains was averaged to form an average completion time for non-HH performance domains. Another one-way (relevance) within-couple ANOVA compared the time taken to generate HH and non-HH domains, and no significant effect of relevance on time taken to generate performance domains was found. Consistent with results of the difficulty tests, couples did not take a significantly longer or shorter amount of time to generate HH performance domains ($M = 2.01, SD = 1.55$) than they took to generate non-HH performance domains ($M = 1.37, SD = 1.27$).

Finally, the time taken to generate HH subdomains was compared to the time taken to generate non-HH subdomains using a one-way (relevance) within-couple ANOVA. In contrast to the performance domain findings, a significant effect of relevance on time taken to generate subdomains was found, $F(1, 23) = 4.44, p < .05$. Couples took a significantly longer time to
generate subdomains for the HH condition \((M = 3.48, SD = 1.80)\) than they took to generate subdomains for the non-HH conditions \((M = 2.78, SD = 1.20)\). This finding could potentially be attributed to practice effects. Because couples generated subdomains for the HH condition first, they likely spent more time reading the directions and considering what they believed qualified as a “subdomain.” As they progressed through the survey and repeated the same procedure for the HL and LH conditions, they did not have to re-read directions and operated off an already established conception of what they believed qualified as a subdomain.

**Difficulty in Allocation of Subdomain Expertise**

For each relevance condition, the questionnaire recorded the time taken to complete the questions which asked couples to determine which partner had more expertise in each subdomain. The time taken on these questions was taken as an indicator of how difficult it was for couples to allocate subdomain expertise. Following the same procedure as the difficulty ratings above, a one-way (relevance) within-couple ANOVA was conducted to analyze the effect of relevance on difficulty in allocating subdomain expertise. A significant effect of relevance on time taken to allocate subdomain expertise was found, \(F(1, 23) = 11.34, p < .01\). Couples took significantly longer to allocate subdomain expertise in the HH relevance condition \((M = 2.72, SD = 1.71)\) than they took in the non-HH relevance conditions \((M = 1.48, SD = 0.83)\). Thus, couples appear to have found it more difficult to determine which partner had more expertise in the HH relevance subdomains than the non-HH relevance subdomains.

**Relationship Length**

In order to assess the effect of relationship length on subdomain specialization, a median split was performed. Couples were divided into two groups according to the median relationship length \((Mdn = 10.75\) months): couples who were considered to have been romantically involved
for a long time (above the median) and couples who were considered to have been romantically involved for a short time (below the median). A 2 (relationship length) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted, and the dependent variable used was the aforementioned percentage of subdomains allocated as “male expert.” Results showed a significant relevance x relationship length interaction, $F(2, 21) = 4.70, p < .05$ (see Table 2). When a performance domain was highly relevant to both partners (HH condition), the percentage of subdomains rated as “male expert” was roughly the same for longer relationships and shorter relationships. Similarly, when a performance domain was highly relevant to the male and not highly relevant to the female (HL condition), the percentage of subdomains rated as “male expert” was roughly the same for longer relationships and shorter relationships. However, when a performance domain was of low relevance to the male and highly relevant to the female (LH condition), a higher percentage of subdomains was rated “male expert” in couples with shorter relationship lengths than in couples with longer relationship lengths. Therefore, relationship length only appeared to have an effect of the specialization process in the LH relevance condition.

*Individual Emotional Variables and Subdomain Expertise*

Because each of the individual emotional variables (DoS, attachment anxiety, empathy, and inclusion of self in other) was measured on the individual questionnaires, the total number of scores for each variable (N=48) was twice the number of the total number of couples that participated in the study (N=24). In order to analyze the effect of individual emotional characteristics on allocation of subdomain expertise on the couple questionnaire, partners’ individual data was separated by gender so that scores for emotional characteristics could be paired with the same number of responses on the couple questionnaire. The same median split procedure that was used for relationship length was used for all individual emotional variables as
well. Thus, for each individual emotional variable, a 2 (emotional variable level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVAs was conducted once for males and once for females to test if one gender’s emotional characteristics influenced the couples’ specialization processes.

**Differentiation of Self and Inclusion of Self in Other**

Responses to the “fusion with others” and “emotional cutoff” subscales of the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (Skowron & Schmidt, 2003) were appropriately reverse scored and averaged to form a composite DoS index. Individual partners were divided into two groups according to the median score of DoS ($Mdn = 100$): one group was considered to have high DoS (i.e., those with composite scores above the median value) and the other was considered to have low DoS (i.e., those with composite scores below the median value). Because the tests were designed to test the hypotheses that partners with low DoS and high inclusion of self in other would cede more subdomain expertise to their partners, the dependent variable in each test was the percentage of subdomain expertise allocated for the partner of the opposite gender (although either gender’s percentage could be used to produce identical results). Thus, to analyze the influence of male DoS on the couples’ rate of subdomain specialization, a 2 (male DoS level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted using the percentage of subdomains rated as “female expert” as the dependent variable. No significant effect of male DoS on subdomain specialization was found.

Similarly, a 2 (female DoS level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted using the percentage of subdomains rated “male expert” as the dependent variable. No significant effect of female DoS on subdomain specialization was found. In other words, neither partner’s level of DoS (low or high) appeared to have any effect on how they as a couple allocated subdomain expertise.
The same procedure was conducted to test the variable of inclusion of self in other. Partners with scores above the median value ($Mdn = 5$) were considered to have high inclusion of self in other, and partners with scores below the median value were considered to have low inclusion of self in other. A 2 (male level of inclusion of self in other) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted using percentage of subdomains rated “female expert” as the dependent variable. No significant effect of male inclusion of self in other on subdomain specialization was found. In accordance with this finding, the 2 (female level of inclusion of self in other) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA also yielded no significant effect of female inclusion of self in other on subdomain specialization. Thus, it appears that individuals’ level of inclusion of self in other does not have any significant effect on how they engage in subdomain specialization with their partner.

**Attachment Anxiety**

Individual scores of attachment anxiety were calculated by averaging selected items (after appropriately reverse scoring) from the Experience in Close Relationships-Revised form (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) measuring attachment anxiety. Partners who had composite scores above the median value ($Mdn = 50$) were considered to have high attachment anxiety, and partners that had composite scores below the median value were considered to have low attachment anxiety. These two groups were then tested using the same procedure as the one used to test DoS. A 2 (male anxiety level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted using percentage of subdomains rated “female expert” as the dependent variable. No significant effect of male attachment anxiety on subdomain specialization was found. A complementary 2 (female anxiety level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA was also conducted, and the results showed no significant effect of female attachment anxiety on subdomain specialization.
either. Therefore, it appears that partners (regardless of gender) do not appear to differ in the process of specialization whether they are high or low in attachment anxiety.

**Empathy**

Individual scores of empathy in romantic relationships were calculated by averaging responses to questions (after reverse scoring appropriate items) from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples scale (Peloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). Two groups were formed based on the median empathy score ($Mdn = 55$): one group considered to be high in empathy (i.e., with scores above the median value) and one group considered to be low in empathy (i.e., with scores below the median value). The same statistical procedures and dependent variables that were used to test DoS and attachment anxiety were also used to test empathy, and they produced similar results as well. The results of the 2 (male empathy level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA indicated that there was no significant effect of male empathy on subdomain specialization. In line with all other similar tests, the 2 (female empathy level) x 3 (relevance) mixed factorial ANOVA yielded no significant effect of female empathy on subdomain specialization. Ultimately, it appears that the process of subdomain specialization is unaffected by whether individual partners have high or low levels of empathy.

**Qualitative Observations from Recordings of Couples**

While evaluating the recordings of partners’ conversations during the couple questionnaires, special attention was given to evaluating the nature and style of the couples’ conversations during the HH relevance conditions, as well as whether couples had either talked about or formed specialized roles prior to the study.

In reference to the first consideration, there was one unexpected observation; how couples generated the 8 subdomains seemed to be related to how they navigated the allocation of
expertise for those subdomains. Couples had one of two approaches to how they generated subdomains for the HH performance domain: either the couple would simply think of the first 8 items that came to mind which they believed qualified as subdomains without any consideration of the subdomains’ relevance to each partner (quick generation method), or the couple would very purposefully generate subdomains such that each subdomain was more relevant to one partner than the other (deliberate generation method). These two categories are no doubt imperfect in how they were coded for, and more couples were classified as “quick generation” couples (n = 15) than “deliberate generation” couples (n = 8). However, the qualitative analysis still yielded an unexpected difference in how couples negotiated expertise allocation (partners primarily claiming subdomains versus giving subdomains).

Couples who used the “quick generation method” tended to have the most discussion while rating expertise. Instances in which a subdomain was clearly highly relevant to both partners occurred far more often for these couples, and these instances sparked the most debate between partners. These scenarios usually ended with the couple deciding one partner barely had the edge in expertise, and the partner who acquiesced and ceded expertise often sounded dissatisfied and would claim expertise in another domain as compensation. These scenarios showed that partners were engaging in comparison with one another, as they showed awareness of the fact that if their partner was considered the expert, they would experience negative self-evaluation. Because they could not avoid choosing one partner to have expertise (expertise was rated on a 6-point scale with no middle option), couples attempted to balance the scales and lower tension by ensuring that the partner who ceded expertise was given expertise elsewhere, lending support to the idea that specialization serves the purpose of avoiding conflict and relationship tension. The dominant approach that the “quick generation” couples took to rating
expertise involved one partner claiming that he/she had more expertise and the other partner either agreeing or disagreeing (at which point debate ensued).

In contrast, the couples who used the “deliberate generation method” appeared to generate subdomains such that roughly half the subdomains were pointedly relevant to one partner and the other half were relevant to the other partner. This style was indicated by ensuring that each partner came up with 4 of the 8 subdomains and having a conversation to ensure they were both happy with the list of subdomains generated before moving on to the next section. These couples seemed to anticipate the expertise rating section, which usually involved very little discussion, debate, or tension for these couples because they had managed to devise a scenario in which some of the subdomains were highly relevant to one partner and low relevance to the other and vice versa. Rather than claiming expertise in subdomains, partners in “deliberate generation” couples more often would offer subdomains to each other. In other words, rather than one partner claiming expertise and the other agreeing or not, more often one partner would say that he/she believed that his/her partner had more expertise, and that partner would then agree or disagree. Instead of each claiming subdomains, they each chose which subdomains the other had expertise in, and if there was any disagreement or debate that followed, it most often only concerned the magnitude of the rating. This process was fairly smooth because it appeared that participants knew which subdomains were not relevant to them (most often the subdomains they did not generate) and were quick to tell their partners that they had more expertise.

In reference to the second consideration kept in mind during data evaluation, the qualitative data did not offer any consistent observations about whether couples had established specialized roles. On the whole, partners in all couples at least showed evidence of having their own conceptions of what was relevant to each partner and who had more expertise. That is, in all
couples, both partners participated in the conversation to some degree, gave input during the generation of performance domains and subdomains, and offered opinions on which partner had more expertise. However, there was no consistent pattern or indicator that a couple had explicitly talked together about specialized roles with each other or had implicitly held beliefs about specialized roles prior to the study. In this regard, the qualitative analysis provided little conclusive insight.

**Discussion**

Overall, the results of the present study offer further support for the existence of subdomain specialization as an extended SEM process across couples. Additionally, the results provide insight into further questions about the process of specialization and illuminate several potential limitations of the present study’s methodology that could be rectified in future research.

The first goal of the present study was to re-test the main finding of the McGinley (2003) study using a slightly different and more technologically advanced methodology. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that when a performance domain was highly relevant to both partners, couples would allocate subdomain expertise evenly to each partner. The results provided strong support for this hypothesis. When a performance domain was highly relevant to both partners, 46% of subdomains were allocated as “male expert” and 54% of subdomains were allocated as “female expert.” This finding almost identically replicates the same finding of McGinley (2003), as well as Morewitz (2001), each of whom found that partners evenly divided subdomain expertise in the HH condition. Additionally, results were consistent with the predictions of the extended SEM model. When a performance domain was highly relevant to one partner and not relevant to the other partner (both HL and LH conditions), a significantly higher percentage of subdomain expertise was allocated to the partner to whom the domain was highly relevant. These results
suggest that couples were actively trying to maximize positive self-evaluations. By ceding most of the subdomain expertise to their partner when a performance domain was of low relevance to them, individuals were ensuring that their partner (to whom the domain was highly relevant) received maximum positive self-evaluations via comparison, while they themselves were engaging in reflection to maximize their own positive self-evaluations.

McGinley (2003) concluded that subdomain specialization must have existed within couples prior to the study based on his findings that couples had the same amount of difficulty generating and assigning expertise for the HH and non-HH conditions. The results of the present study partially contradict and cast doubt on the validity of his conclusions. First, results of the present study suggest that while couple-reports of difficulty did not differ significantly between the HH and non-HH conditions, couples did, in fact, take a significantly longer amount of time both to generate subdomains and rate subdomain expertise in the HH condition than they took in the non-HH conditions.

However, these findings do not necessarily mean that subdomain specialization did not exist within couples prior to the study, and they must be interpreted through the lens of the qualitative data. Audio recordings of couple conversations revealed that couples based their self-reports of difficulty in generating domains and subdomains primarily on how difficult it was for them to think of items that they felt fit the definition of “performance domain” and “subdomain” that was laid out for them in the directions. Thus, the couple-reports of difficulty may more accurately reflect the difficulty that couples had understanding or interpreting the directions and definitions of concepts on the questionnaire rather than the difficulty they had thinking of specialized roles that existed within their relationship. Furthermore, audio recordings revealed practice effects and individual differences between subjects. Because the study was designed as a
repeated measures test, couples read the directions diligently on the first portion of the questionnaire (the HH condition), spent time interpreting the definitions of “performance domain” and “subdomain,” and then worked through the questionnaire. Conversations often indicated that couples quickly understood that they were repeating the same procedure three times, and therefore they began to move more quickly through the later sections due to familiarity. Additionally, conversations revealed that some couples were particularly tired during their couple session, and some couples happened to spend time talking with each other about matters unrelated to the questionnaire. Lastly, in the HH condition, there was often simply more discussion between partners due to the fact that the domain and subdomains were highly relevant to both. Partners would give more examples, share more stories, and just spend more time talking about things that were highly relevant to both of them. The combination of these factors, then, makes completion time a less accurate indication of the difficulty.

Overall then, these results suggest that comparing differences in difficulty may be an inefficient way to investigate whether specialization exists in couples prior to the study. In the future, researchers should consider alternative ways of investigating this idea of when specialization occurs in relationships. One such way could be a more standardized qualitative method, as the only data from the current study that offered any insight into whether couples had specialized roles were the audio recordings. On the whole, it appeared that all couples had some understanding or conception of which partner had more expertise in certain areas. Couples frequently spoke with each other about some existing differences in specialized roles and expertise in some performance domain, but then did not ultimately list that performance domain on the questionnaire because they were worried it did not fit the definition that the questionnaire was using. As a result, the performance domains and subdomains that couples ultimately listed
may not have been the most representative of specialization within their relationship. In the future, researchers ought to consider alternate definitions of “performance domain” and “subdomain” to account for these types of scenarios or qualitatively code for them.

The second goal of the present study was to investigate potential effects of individual emotional characteristics on the process of subdomain specialization. It was hypothesized that individuals with higher attachment anxiety, lower DoS, higher empathy, and higher scores of inclusion of self in other would be more likely to cede subdomain expertise to their partners. Somewhat surprisingly, none of these hypotheses were supported. These findings (or lack of support for the hypotheses) suggest that specialization is a fairly robust process that occurs in all relationships, and that individual emotional differences are not strong enough to outweigh self-evaluation needs. Additionally, because both partners worked collaboratively on the same questionnaire, one partner’s influence may be diminished, which might reduce the effect of individual emotional variables.

The only between-couples variable that appeared to have any effect on the specialization process was relationship length. Results indicated that relationship length only had an effect on allocation of subdomain expertise in the LH condition (low male relevance, high female relevance). In this condition, when the length of the relationship was short, female partners ceded more expertise to their male partners than when the length of the relationship was long. This finding could potentially be explained by the security and knowledge of one another that comes with couples being together longer. When couples are together longer, they become more able to recognize potential reflection benefits as they get to know one another, and therefore, partners (females in this case) become more comfortable claiming subdomain expertise because they know their partner will engage in reflection. However, the difference (while statistically
significant) does not appear to be large in effect, and the general trend and direction of the relationship between relevance and allocation of subdomain expertise is similar for short relationships and long relationships. Therefore, this finding should not be overgeneralized.

The third objective of this study was to qualitatively assess the nature of the process of specialization. Results were mixed but did provide some useful insights. Couple conversations, particularly during the HH condition, did show resemblance to basic comparison and reflection processes. Additionally, qualitative data suggested that the process of specialization may not be confined to just how partners allocate expertise. Some couples appeared to deliberately generate an equal number of subdomains that were relevant to one partner and not the other, despite being subdomains in the HH condition. As a result, their process of rating expertise went by smoothly and with little debate or confrontation. This finding, although observed in only about a third of couples, is the best piece of evidence from the current study that partners do have pre-existing specialized roles. The dichotomy observed in how couples generated subdomains should not at this point be taken as an indication of a way couples differ in the specialization process. Rather, it is possible that other couples who did not generate subdomains this way did so because of how they interpreted the directions of the questionnaire. Future research should seek to alter the present study’s methodology in order to investigate more fully when couples begin the process of specialization in their relationship, as limitations of the present study rendered results on this matter inconclusive.

It appears that subdomain specialization exists within romantic relationships in accordance with the extended SEM model. While specialization does not appear to be something couples explicitly talk about, qualitative data do suggest that partners in relationships have some implicit, unspoken conceptions of roles and expertise distribution within their relationships.
(which sometimes overlap). However, the point in the relationship at which these implicit ideas about roles and expertise distribution emerge is still unclear. With the macro-level process of specialization having fairly strong empirical support at this point, future researchers should seek to investigate the micro-level dynamics of subdomain specialization using more mixed methods or qualitative approaches.
References


Table 1

Subdomain Expertise: tttttttt

Percentage of Subdomains as a Function of Relevance of Performance Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance Condition</th>
<th>High Male – High Female (HH)</th>
<th>High Male – Low Female (HL)</th>
<th>Low Male – High Female (LH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Expert</td>
<td>M = 0.46, SD = 0.14</td>
<td>M = 0.90, SD = 0.08</td>
<td>M = 0.10, SD = 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Expert</td>
<td>M = 0.54, SD = 0.14</td>
<td>M = 0.10, SD = 0.08</td>
<td>M = 0.90, SD = 0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 24. Analysis conducted only on percentage of subdomains allocated as Male Expert.
Table 2

\textit{Subdomain Expertise Allocation:}
\textit{Percentage of Subdomains as a Function of Relevance and Relationship Length}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance Condition</th>
<th>Long Relationship Length</th>
<th>Short Relationship Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.51 SD = 0.12</td>
<td>M = 0.42 SD = 0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.92 SD = 0.08</td>
<td>M = 0.89 SD = 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.05 SD = 0.06</td>
<td>M = 0.15 SD = 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Expert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.49 SD = 0.12</td>
<td>M = 0.58 SD = 0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.08 SD = 0.08</td>
<td>M = 0.11 SD = 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 0.95 SD = 0.06</td>
<td>M = 0.85 SD = 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Expert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(N = 24\). Analysis conducted only on percentage of subdomains allocated as Male Expert.
Appendix A
SEM Model - Couple Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this study regarding skills and abilities of partners in romantic relationships. You and your partner will be asked to complete a short questionnaire together in which you will identify things that are relevant to each of your self-images, and you will then be asked to discuss who in the relationship has more expertise in those areas.

1. A "performance domain" can be defined as a skill, ability, role, or area of interest. Some examples of performance domains might include "cooking," "philosophy major," or "athletics." "Relevance" can be defined as how important a particular performance domain is to an individual's self-identity and personal definition.

Think for a moment and talk with your partner to generate a performance domain which you both consider to be highly relevant to your own self-images.

___________________________________________________________

2. Now, think and talk together and list specialty areas or "sub-domains" that the domain you just generated is composed of. For example, if you listed "cooking" as a domain important to both of you, sub-domains of that might include "baking, grilling, vegetarian meals, desserts, etc," and "philosophy major" might include sub-domains such as "epistemology, ethics, moral philosophy, etc." Try to generate 8 sub-domains or specialty areas for the domain that you listed in the previous question.

O Sub-Domain 1 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 2 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 3 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 4 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 5 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 6 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 7 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 8 ________________________________________________
3. “Expertise” can be defined as being more skilled or adept at a certain area, as well as more informed and knowledgeable about a certain area. For example, take the category of cooking. One person may know a lot about cooking from reading cookbooks and watching cooking specials, and/or may be a great cook. In this case, since the person is both knowledgeable and skilled at cooking, they would be considered to have a high amount of expertise.

Consider the sub-domains you just generated together. For each of the sub-domains, select a number between 1 and 6 to indicate which partner has more expertise on that particular sub-domain. 1 = Partner A has much more expertise and 6 = Partner B has much more expertise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Domain</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (x1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (x2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (x3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (x4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (x5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (x6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (x7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (x8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Recall the definitions for both "performance domain" and "relevance": A "performance domain" can be defined as a skill, ability, role, or area of interest. Some examples of performance domains might include "cooking," "philosophy major," or "athletics." "Relevance" can be defined as how important a particular performance domain is to an individual's self-identity or self-concept.

Now, think for a moment and talk with your partner to generate a performance domain which is highly relevant to Partner A's self-image, but is of low relevance to Partner B's self-image.
5. In a similar fashion to question 2, think and talk together and list specialty areas or "sub-domains" that the domain you just generated is composed of. For example, if you listed "cooking" as a domain important to both of you, sub-domains of that might include "baking, grilling, vegetarian meals, desserts, etc," and "philosophy major" might include sub-domains such as "epistemology, ethics, moral philosophy, etc."

Try to generate 8 sub-domains or specialty areas for the domain that you just listed in the previous question.

O Sub-Domain 1 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 2 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 3 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 4 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 5 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 6 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 7 ________________________________________________
O Sub-Domain 8 ________________________________________________

6. “Expertise” can be defined as being more skilled or adept at a certain area, as well as more informed and knowledgeable about a certain area. For example, take the category of cooking. One person may know a lot about cooking from reading cookbooks and watching cooking specials, and/or may be a great cook. In this case, since the person is both knowledgeable and skilled at cooking, they would be considered to have a high amount of expertise.

Consider the sub-domains you just generated together in question 5. For each of the sub-domains, select a number between 1 and 6 to indicate which partner has more expertise on that
particular sub-domain. 1 = Partner A has much more expertise and 6 = Partner B has much more expertise.

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<tr>
<th>Sub-Domain 1</th>
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</table>

7. Recall the definitions for both "performance domain" and "relevance": A "performance domain" can be defined as a skill, ability, role, or area of interest. Some examples of performance domains might include "cooking," "philosophy major," or "athletics." "Relevance" can be defined as how important a particular performance domain is to an individual's self-identity or self-concept.

Now, think for a moment and talk with your partner to generate a performance domain which is **highly relevant** to Partner B's self-image, but is of **low relevance** to Partner A's self-image.
8. In a similar fashion to question 2, think and talk together and list specialty areas or "sub-domains" that the domain you just generated is composed of. For example, if you listed "cooking" as a domain important to both of you, sub-domains of that might include "baking, grilling, vegetarian meals, desserts, etc," and "philosophy major" might include sub-domains such as "epistemology, ethics, moral philosophy, etc."

Try to generate 8 sub-domains or specialty areas for the domain that you just listed in the previous question.

- O Sub-Domain 1 ________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 2 _______________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 3 __________________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 4 __________________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 5 __________________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 6 __________________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 7 __________________________________________
- O Sub-Domain 8 __________________________________________

9. “Expertise” can be defined as being more skilled or adept at a certain area, as well as more informed and knowledgeable about a certain area. For example, take the category of cooking. One person may know a lot about cooking from reading cookbooks and watching cooking specials, and/or may be a great cook. In this case, since the person is both knowledgeable and skilled at cooking, they would be considered to have a high amount of expertise.

Consider the sub-domains you just generated together in question 8. For each of the sub-domains, select a number between 1 and 6 to indicate which partner has more expertise on that
particular sub-domain. 1 = Partner A has much more expertise and 6 = Partner B has much more expertise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Domain</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<td>1 (x1)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the performance domain that was **highly relevant to both of you** (i.e. the performance domain listed in question 1)?

Answer: ____

11. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the sub-domains for that domain (i.e. the sub-domains listed in question 2)?

Answer: ____
12. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the performance domain that was highly relevant to Partner A, but of low relevance to Partner B (i.e. the performance domain listed in question 4)?

Answer: ___

13. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the sub-domains for that domain (i.e. the sub-domains listed in question 5)?

Answer: ___

14. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the performance domain that was highly relevant to Partner B, but of low relevance to Partner A (i.e. the domain listed in question 7).

Answer: ___

15. On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = not at all difficult, 7 = extremely difficult), how difficult was it for you to identify the sub-domains for that domain (i.e. the sub-domains listed in question 8)?

Answer: ___
Appendix B

Individual Questionnaire without Emotional Variable Scales (see Appendix C through F)

Thank you for participating in the second leg of this study! In this portion, we will be asking you about some of your individual characteristics, as well as some additional questions regarding skills and abilities similar to the questionnaire you completed with your partner. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and to the best of your ability.

1. What is your age?
________________________________________________________________

2. Please specify your ethnicity

☐ Caucasian/White
☐ Hispanic or Latino
☐ African American/Black
☐ Native American
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________________________________

3. What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Non-Binary
☐ Prefer to Self-Describe __________________________________________

Recall from the couple questionnaire that a performance domain can be defined as a skill, ability, role, or area of interest. People consider some of these areas important to how they think about themselves, meaning they have relevance to their self-concepts. "Relevance" can be defined as how important a particular performance domain is to an individuals self-identity and personal definition. When a domain is important to one's self-image
and one wants to succeed in that area, it is considered to be *high relevance*. Other domains, which matter significantly less to one's self-image, are considered to be *low relevance*.

4. In the previous questionnaire, you and your partner identified three performance domains (listed below). For each of the performance domains, indicate how much relevance it has to your self-definition. 1 = Very Low Relevance, 7 = Very High Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Domain 1: (High-High relevance)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Domain 2: (High-Low relevance)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Domain 3: (Low-High Relevance)</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</table>
5. Below are the sub-domains you and your partner generated for Performance Domain 1. For each of the sub-domains, indicate how much relevance it has to your self-definition. 1 = Very Low Relevance, 7 = Very High Relevance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-domain</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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6. Below are the sub-domains you and your partner generated for Performance Domain 1. For each of the sub-domains, indicate whether you or your partner have more expertise.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sub-domain 1</th>
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7. How long have you been dating/together with your current partner? (please answer in either weeks or months)

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Differentiation of Self Inventory – Revised (Skowron & Schmidt, 2003)


APPENDIX

DSI-R

These are questions concerning your thoughts and feelings about yourself and relationships with others. Please read each statement carefully and decide how much the statement is generally true of you on a 1 (not at all) to 6 (very) scale. If you believe that an item does not pertain to you (e.g., you are not currently married or in a committed relationship, or one or both of your parents are deceased), please answer the item according to your best guess about what your thoughts and feelings would be in that situation. Be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT AT ALL</th>
<th>VERY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRUE OF ME</td>
<td>TRUE OF ME</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. People have remarked that I'm overly emotional. 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for. 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. I often feel inhibited around my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress. 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. I usually need a lot of encouragement from others when starting a big job or task. 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him/her for a time. 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am. 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I want to live up to my parents' expectations of me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I wish that I weren't so emotional. 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person. 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. My spouse/partner could not tolerate it if I were to express to him/her my true feelings about some things. 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. When my spouse/partner criticizes me, it bothers me for days. 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly. 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person. 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6

April 2003

JOURNAL OF MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT AT ALL</th>
<th>VERY TRUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRUE OF ME</td>
<td>OF ME</td>
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</table>

17. I feel a need for approval from virtually everyone in my life.  
18. At times I feel as if I’m riding an emotional roller-coaster.  
19. There’s no point in getting upset about things I cannot change.  
20. I’m concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships.  
21. I’m overly sensitive to criticism.  
22. I try to live up to my parents’ expectations.  
23. I’m fairly self-accepting.  
24. I often feel that my spouse/partner wants too much from me.  
25. I often agree with others just to appease them.  
26. If I have had an argument with my spouse/partner, I tend to think about it all day.  
27. I am able to say “no” to others even when I feel pressured by them.  
28. When one of my relationships becomes very intense, I feel the urge to run away from it.  
29. Arguments with my parent(s) or sibling(s) can still make me feel awful.  
30. If someone is upset with me, I can’t seem to let it go easily.  
31. I’m less concerned that others approve of me than I am in doing what I think is right.  
32. I would never consider turning to any of my family members for emotional support.  
33. I often feel unsure when others are not around to help me make a decision.  
34. I’m very sensitive to being hurt by others.  
35. My self-esteem really depends on how others think of me.  
36. When I’m with my spouse/partner, I often feel smothered.  
37. When making decisions, I seldom worry about what others will think.  
38. I often wonder about the kind of impression I create.  
39. When things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse.  
40. I feel things more intensely than others do.  
41. I usually do what I believe is right regardless of what others say.  
42. Our relationship might be better if my spouse/partner would give me the space I need.  
43. I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.  
44. Sometimes I feel sick after arguing with my spouse/partner.  
45. I feel it’s important to hear my parents’ opinions before making decisions.  
46. I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset.

**DSI-R Subscale Composition:** (underlined means reverse scored)  
Emotional reactivity: 1, 6, 10, 14, 18, 21, 26, 30, 34, 38, 40;  
Emotional cutoff: 2, 3, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, 39, 42;  
Fusion with others: 2, 9, 13, 17, 22, 25, 29, 33, 37, 44, 45, 46.

Appendix D

Inclusion of Self in Other Form (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992)
Appendix E
Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire

Scale:
The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by circling a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>1=Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.</td>
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<td>3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.</td>
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<td>4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.</td>
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<td>5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.</td>
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<td>6. I worry a lot about my relationships.</td>
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<td>7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.</td>
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<td>8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.</td>
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<td>9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.</td>
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<td>10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.</td>
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<td>11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.</td>
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<td>12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.</td>
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<td>13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.</td>
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<td>14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.</td>
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<td>15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.</td>
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<td>16. It makes me mad that I don’t get the affection and support I need from my partner.</td>
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<td>17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.</td>
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<td>18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.</td>
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<td>19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.</td>
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<td>20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>I tell my partner just about everything.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>I talk things over with my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>I am nervous when partners get too close to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>My partner really understands me and my needs.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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Scoring:
(adapted from http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcraley/measures/ecrritems.htm):

Scoring Information: The first 18 items above comprise the attachment-related anxiety scale. Items 19 – 36 comprise the attachment-related avoidance scale. In real research, the order in which these items are presented should be randomized. To obtain a score for attachment-related anxiety, please average a person’s responses to items 1 – 18. However, because items 9 and 11 are “reverse keyed” (i.e., high numbers represent low anxiety rather than high anxiety), you’ll need to reverse the answers to those questions before averaging the responses. (If someone answers with a “6” to item 9, you’ll need to re-key it as a 2 before averaging.) To obtain a score for attachment-related avoidance, please average a person’s responses to items 19 – 36. Items 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, and 36 will need to be reverse keyed before you compute this average.
Appendix F

Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples Scale (Peloquin & Lafontaine, 2010)

APPENDIX

Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations occurring in your relationship with your partner. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by circling the appropriate number.

**Empathic Concern scale:**

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for my partner when he/she is less fortunate than me.
2. Sometimes I don’t feel very sorry for my partner when he/she is having problems.
3. When I see my partner being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him/her.
4. My partner’s misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.
5. When I see my partner being treated unfairly, I sometimes don’t feel very much pity for him/her.
6. I am often quite touched by things I see happen in my relationship.

**Perspective Taking scale:**

11. In my relationship with my partner, I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

3. I try to look at my partner’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
5. I sometimes try to understand my partner better by imagining how things look from his/her perspective.
7. If I’m sure I’m right about something, I don’t waste much time listening to my partner’s arguments.
10. In my relationship, I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
12. When I’m upset at my partner, I usually try to “put myself in his/her shoes” for a while.
13. Before criticizing my partner, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in his/her place.

**Scoring:** Items are rated on the following scale: 0 = Does not describe me well; 4 = Describes me very well. Items 2, 6, 7, and 8 are reverse coded. Items in each scale are summed to obtain scale total scores.
Appendix G

Consent to Use Audio Recording Form

I am aware that my conversations during the completion of the couples’ questionnaire were recorded. I understand that if, and only if, both my partner and I agree to grant the researcher permission to use this recording, it will be used for qualitative analysis to understand the nature of our joint decision-making process. No identifiable characteristics will be used in the reporting or analysis of data. I understand that this recording will be analyzed by only the researcher, and that it will be stored in a password protected file and deleted once data analysis is completed in order to protect confidentiality. I understand that I have the right to refuse to sign this form and deny the researcher permission to use this recording in the research, and that any payment or credit offered as compensation for participation will not be affected by my exercising this right.

I understand that my signature below indicates consent for this audio recording to be used in the study according with the terms of consent above.

____________________________    __________________________
Date                          Signature

____________________________
Print Name

____________________________    __________________________
Date                          Signature

____________________________
Print Name
Appendix H

Final Debriefing Document

Thank you for participating in this study! This study was designed to further a line of research on a model of social and romantic relationships originally created by Abraham Tesser known as the Social Evaluation Maintenance Model (SEM Model). This model assumes that people are motivated to maintain positive evaluations of themselves and that relationships with others have a significant effect on evaluations of self. The two processes of self-evaluation described in the model are reflection and comparison. Reflection occurs when a person, simply through observation and social connection, derives positive feelings and self-evaluations from the performance or success of another. Comparison occurs when a person assesses their own performance relative to another person’s performance.

There are three variables that can influence whether reflection, comparison, or neither will occur in relationships. The first is closeness, or the degree to which two people are a unit and identify with one another. The closer two people are, the more likely they are to engage in either reflection or comparison. The second is performance, or how well a person does on a task or area relative to another person. In order to engage in reflection, another’s performance must be greater than one’s own, and in order to engage in comparison, another’s performance must be either significantly better or worse than one’s own. The third variable is relevance, which involves how important a performance domain is to one’s identity or self-concept. A performance domain can be high in relevance to person A but low in relevance to person B. When person A and person B are close with each other and person A has significantly superior performance, person A is more likely to engage in comparison and increase their positive self-evaluation as a result. In contrast, person B, for whom the performance domain is of low relevance, can simply reflect and increase their positive self-evaluation through their association with person A.

However, when a performance domain is of high relevance to both people, the superior performance of one person can threaten the self-evaluation needs of the inferior performer. In other words, comparison in this instance results in one person’s positive self-evaluation coming at the cost of negative self-evaluation of the other. In this case, the model predicts that the inferior performer can either reduce closeness with the other person, reduce the relevance of the task to their self-identity, or reduce the difference in performance.

Research on the SEM Model suggests that partners in a romantic relationship have to face a unique challenge, because when two people have strong feelings of intimacy and affection for each other, they must consider not only their own self-evaluations, but also the self-evaluations of their partner. When two partners both feel that a particular performance domain is highly relevant to their self-image, they face a paradox: they want to claim superior performance in order to maximize their own positive comparison, but they know that doing so will cause negative comparisons and make their partner feel inferior. As you might guess, in romantic relationships, reducing closeness is not a viable option, as reducing closeness tends to ultimately result in the dissolution of the relationship entirely. Furthermore, reducing relevance of a performance domain is difficult and unlikely because core components of identities and self-concepts are not easily changeable. Research shows that to reduce conflict, couples achieve some
balance of performance by engaging in specialization, in which they sub-divide a performance domain into smaller components, and one partner is considered better in 50% of the sub-domains while the other is considered better at the other 50%.

The purpose of this study was to further investigate this process of sub-domain specialization within romantic relationships. We sought to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the process of specialization occurs by examining if an individual’s attachment anxiety, empathic ability, and differentiation of self moderated or affected the rate or presence of the process of sub-domain specialization. Also, we hoped to qualitatively assess specialization by recording and analyzing the dialogue between partners while they completed the designed surveys in order to gain insight into when specialization begins, and whether it is an unconscious process or one that is consciously thought about in couples.

Specifically, we hypothesized that higher levels of attachment anxiety, higher levels of empathic concern, and lower levels of differentiation of self would correlate with a greater number of subdomains “ceded” or given to the other partner. In other words, individuals with the aforementioned traits would be more likely to show concern for their partners’ feelings and show hesitancy to claim expertise in a sub-domain for fear of upsetting their partners.

Due to the nature of this study, we ask that you not discuss the contents or full purpose of this study with anyone you know who may participate in the study. If someone does ask you about your participation, you can tell them that it was research relating to things people do in their romantic relationships.

Thank you for your cooperation and your participation, and should you have any additional questions regarding your data, the methods, the purpose, or the results of this study, please feel free to contact me at slsmith02@email.wm.edu.