Associations between Mindfulness, Corrosive Communication Cues, and Satisfaction in Couple Relationships

by

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ABSTRACT

Intimate couple relationships are integral to the lives of most adults, and a typical stepping-stone in beginning a family. Thus, it is imperative to understand personal and interpersonal factors associated with healthy, long-lasting relationships (e.g., relationship satisfaction). One factor that may promote healthy relationships is mindfulness.

Mindfulness has been linked to positive physical and psychological outcomes (see Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney; Carmody & Baer, 2008), but has been minimally studied in the context of couple relationships. Research has also identified the corrosive effect of hostile communication cues on relationships (Gottman, 1994). The current study examined associations between mindfulness, corrosive communication cues, and relationship satisfaction in the context of cohabiting couples using actor-partner interdependence models (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, and Cook, 2006). Self-report questionnaires assessed five aspects of mindfulness: observing, describing, awareness, non-judgment of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience. Women's non-judgment of inner experience, one of five mindfulness facets, was positively associated with the women's own relationship satisfaction. Other facets of mindfulness were not significantly associated with relationship variables. These findings and considerations for future research are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For decades, relationship satisfaction has been an area of interest for psychologists. Early on, it was established as an integral variable in the complex study of relationship adjustment and success (Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). Researchers have been interested in satisfaction as both an antecedent variable and an outcome variable within the relationship context (see Snyder, 1979; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). One factor that may promote healthy relationships is mindfulness.

Mindfulness, a concept that originated from Buddhist meditation practices, refers to an open attention to, and non-judging curiosity toward one’s experiences. In recent years, it has been successfully adopted in clinical therapy settings (e.g., Dialectical Behavioral Therapy; Linehan, 2003) as well as psychological research (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003). It has been linked to positive outcomes in physical health, such as lowering pain levels (see Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burndy, 1985; Monroe, Greco, & Weiner, 2008) and psychological well-being, such as lowering stress (Carmody & Baer, 2008) and benefiting overall well-being (Nykliček, & Kuijpers, 2008). Thus far, there is a plethora of research examining mindfulness and individual well-being; however, the role of mindfulness in couple relationships is not well-understood. Given the overwhelmingly positive associations of mindfulness and well-being (see Greeson, 2009), it makes sense that its benefits would also have implications for interpersonal relationships. This study begins to fill the gaps in mindfulness and relationship research by examining associations between mindfulness and relationship processes in the context of cohabiting couples.
The associations between these variables are conceptualized using Huston’s (2000) systems model for viewing the ecology of the couple relationship. In Huston’s model, several types of variables inside and outside the context of the couple relationship influence outcomes. More specifically, Huston (2000) describes three interacting environments: the individual, marital behavior in context (i.e., behavior in relationship context), and the macro-environment (see Figure 1). The first two of these environments and their interactions are explored using the variables of interest in the current study: mindfulness, corrosive communication cues, and satisfaction.
Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a concept that was created from Buddhist meditation practices, wherein its early definition included metaphysical inquiries of the human experience. Most simply put, mindfulness could be defined as an absolute, open, non-judging awareness of, and attention to, one’s experiences and surroundings (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007). In the social sciences, researchers have proposed many similar conceptual definitions for mindfulness (see Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, et al., 2004; Fletcher & Hayes, 2005).

For example, Ellen Langer, one of the pioneers of mindfulness research, and her colleague (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000), include novelty as a key characteristic of mindfulness. They argue that distinguishing novel stimuli lessens automated cognitive processes and behaviors, such as the use of heuristics. With this in mind, perceptions of stimuli in the environment and within the “self” lay the groundwork for mindfulness as a construct. Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) also draw the distinction between mindfulness and mindlessness, another psychological construct commonly associated with lack of attention and lack of sensitivity to novelty. Mindlessness, in their view, results in the types of cognitive shortcuts and heuristics that lead to things like stereotyping and prejudice. For Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), mindfulness most importantly consists of awareness of and attention to change in one’s perceptive field.
Other researchers make claims involving cognitive and emotional processes. Hayes and Feldman (2004), for example, while also noting the importance of change and novelty in mindfulness, incorporate aspects of self-regulation (e.g., emotion regulation and decreased reactivity), curiosity, and acceptance toward one’s thoughts and emotions in their definition. These variables may be important in things like perceived partner responsiveness, which has been found to contribute substantially to relationship processes and the development of intimacy (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). Acceptance (or non-judgment), in particular, provides a vital piece to the construct of mindfulness. Despite the magnitude of a stimulus, or its appeal (or lack thereof) to the person experiencing it, mindfulness practice dictates that each experience should be accepted without the label of “good” or “bad”. The ability to regulate through refraining from judgment is an important part of mindfulness. Thus, attention and regulation (Hayes & Feldman, 2004) are key to the process of mindfulness.

For Feldman et al. (2007), emotion regulation is a particularly important aspect of mindfulness because of its impact on experiential avoidance and, conversely, over-engagement with emotions (e.g., rumination). Emotion regulation has been defined as the process of moderating one’s emotional experiences (e.g., with the use of appraisals; Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). Appraisals, or judgments, of emotions are particularly important in understanding mindfulness because of one of its key components, non-judgment of experience. For example, those who can refrain from appraisals of emotion that would result in over or under activation of said emotion (i.e., non-judgmental appraisals of various emotions) would be more mindful.
Another concept associated with regulatory aspects of mindfulness is *meta-emotion*, which is defined as “feelings about feelings” or second order emotions (e.g., resentment toward one’s anger; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). The theory of meta-emotion allows for a more in-depth explanation of the wide variety of emotions that people have, and the varying influences one’s approach to emotions has on development, behavior, and relationships (e.g., parents’ meta-emotions influence how they talk to their children about emotions as well as the quality of their children’s emotion regulation; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). If one views a particular emotion as “bad” or undesirable, it would likely follow that the individual would avoid that particular emotion (Gottman et al., 1997; Chambers et al., 2009). Despite the fact that we have cultural standards and scripts by which to judge our emotions (Cornelius, 2000), in the context of mindfulness, the awareness of one’s own meta-emotions would be important in cultivating non-judgment (e.g., neutrality, curiosity, or even acceptance of one’s anger). If non-judgment can be cultivated, then perhaps appraisals of emotions and thoughts can have less-polar influences on future emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In other words, this would allow for a more objective approach to one’s own experiences. This could prove to be particularly beneficial for distressed relationships that may need more objective and less emotionally charged approaches to dealing with conflict, although this link has not yet been studied.

Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) operationalize mindfulness as a “process of drawing novel distinctions” wherein an individual can be kept in the moment by staying aware of each novel aspect in his or her environment, whereas Bishop et al. (2004) propose a two part operational definition where an individual: 1) self-regulates his or her
attention toward the present moment and 2) develops an attitude of openness, curiosity, and acceptance toward the present moment. Despite small differences in operational definitions, researchers on mindfulness agree that mindfulness is a multi-faceted concept. The most commonly accepted aspects of mindfulness, as suggested by factor analyses and extensive discourse among scholars (see Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006), are awareness, openness to experience, and non-judgment of experience, which allow for a stable being present in one’s environment, although the vocabulary for these factors varies slightly from author to author (Feldman et al., 2007; Hayes & Feldman, 2004). Accompanying these factors is a general notion that this stable presence in one’s environment allows for a wider perceptive experience.

For this study, mindfulness was operationalized as encompassing the following five facets: observing, describing, awareness, non-judgment of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience. These five aspects of mindfulness were measured using the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al., 2006). Observing was operationalized as noticing internal and external stimuli in one’s environment. Describing was operationalized as one’s ability to, or ease of, putting thoughts and feelings into words. Awareness was operationalized as the ability to focus on the present moment without being distracted. Non-judgment of inner experience was operationalized as the ability of an individual to hold a neutral stance toward his/her thoughts and feelings by withholding positive or negative appraisals. Finally, non-reactivity to inner experience was operationalized as being calm and non-reactive in response to inner experiences, particularly negative ones. Mindfulness can be conceptualized as an
individual-level variable in Huston’s model, as it refers to inner experiences. Before exploring the potential benefits of mindfulness in couple relationships, it is important to first recognize already established healthy and toxic patterns in couple relationships.

**Relationship Processes**

Many aspects of couple relationships such as satisfaction, communication, stress, and coping (see Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Feeney, Noller, Callan, Bartholomew, & Perlman, 1994; Feeney, 1994) are of particular interest in the field. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) reviewed a decade of literature on couple relationships, namely the interpersonal processes within couple relationships, the contexts in which these relationships operate, and the measurement of relationship satisfaction. According to the review, the complex nature of couple relationships is studied in a myriad of ways, including self-report surveys, observations, and daily diary methods, which allows for a multidimensional look at couple relationships.

**Relationship satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction is a central variable in the study of couple relationships. It has been associated with numerous variables including depression (e.g., Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997), personality traits (e.g., White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004), support from partner (Cramer, 2004), couples’ philosophies about relationships (Franiuk, Cohen, & Pomerantz, 2002), and divorce outcomes (e.g., Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan; 2009). For example, Fincham et al. (1997) found very interesting causal paths between depression and relationship satisfaction wherein depression led to lower satisfaction for men, but lower satisfaction led to depression for women. White, Hendrick, and Hendrick (2004) found that neuroticism is negatively associated with satisfaction for men and women in
relationships, whereas extraversion and agreeableness are associated positively with relationship satisfaction. Cramer (2004) found that partner support was indirectly associated with satisfaction in relationships through reduced depression in a sample of college students. Franiuk et al. (2002) compared college students who held one of two beliefs: a) that finding a soul mate is the most important for maintaining a satisfying relationship or b) that putting effort into a relationship to “work it out” is the most important factor for success. They found that, for those who held a “soul mate” philosophy on relationships, feeling that their current partner was ideal better predicted relationship satisfaction and longevity than those who held a “work-it-out” philosophy on relationships. Lastly, Hirschberger et al. (2009) found that husbands’ low initial levels of marital satisfaction during their first child’s transition to school were a significant predictor of marital dissolution. It makes sense to study relationship satisfaction because of its myriad associations with relationship outcomes and other individual and relationship variables.

Brabury et al. (2000) suggested four key components for conceptualizing relationship satisfaction. The most prominent component, for the purpose of this study, is that relationship satisfaction can be conceptualized as an accessible attitude toward one’s relationship. Relationship satisfaction requires insight into each individual’s attitudes toward his or her relationship. Self-report assessments of relationship satisfaction provide particularly insightful data. For the current study, relationship satisfaction was measured through a global self-report item to assess attitudes held about the level of happiness in the relationship. Because it is an inner attitude about the relationship, relationship satisfaction is also an individual-level variable in Huston’s model.
One well-examined correlate of relationship satisfaction is attributions. In the 1980s there was a great deal of research on attributions in the relationship context (e.g., negative interpretations of, or explanations for, a partner’s behavior; see Bradbury et al., 2000). Several studies have found a link between negative attributions and relationship deterioration – a variable associated with decreased satisfaction (see Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Karney & Bradbury, 2000; Shapiro, Gottman, & Carrere, 2000). For example, Buehlman, Gottman, and Katz (1992) found that couples who failed to see any positive side to their previous struggles (i.e., gave only negative attributions) were more likely to separate than those who found a silver lining in their struggles, glorified their struggles, or put a positive spin on problem solving (i.e., gave positive attributions). Fincham and Bradbury (1993) also found that attributions about negative events accounted for a significant portion of variance in relationship satisfaction for both husbands and wives.

Conceptually, attributions can be linked to the non-reacting and non-judging aspects of mindfulness (i.e., if someone is non-reactive and non-judgmental of an experience, then he/she is not making any attributions – positive or negative). Because mindfulness practice helps individuals refrain from both positive and negative judgment of experiences (e.g., attributions of others’ behaviors), it makes sense that mindfulness could benefit those who tend to interpret their partner’s behaviors negatively. Because of these potential links between mindfulness and correlates of satisfaction, the first link I examined for this study was the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction.
**Relationship conflict.** Gottman and Porterfield (1981) suggest that satisfied married couples are particularly adept at reading non-verbal signs of communication, and pick up these signs with more sensitivity than those in dissatisfied couples, who may lack the skills necessary to pick up on these nuances. The ability to recognize and properly label nonverbal communication (e.g., recognizing a sigh as a reflection of sadness) may be especially important in partner relations, because some research suggests that nonverbal communication of certain affects is predictive of relationship satisfaction or decline (see Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Gottman and colleagues have examined specific emotional expressions within positive and negative affect categories that may have different functions in relationship communication. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that although anger and disagreement were associated with current dissatisfaction in the marriage, they were also associated with improvement in relationship satisfaction over the course of three years, whereas defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal appeared to be maladaptive for relationship satisfaction over that span of time. Thus, signs of conflict and dissatisfaction were not necessarily predictive of future relationship decline. The authors suggest the implication of this finding is that conflict in and of itself may not predict dissatisfaction, but rather how the couple addresses the conflict may be a better predictor for relationship satisfaction.

**Corrosive Communication Cues.** Gottman and his colleagues identified a specific set of characteristics that are particularly detrimental to couple relationships, referred to as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (see Gottman, 1994). These behaviors belong in the “marital behavior in context/behaviors in relationship context”
portion of Huston’s ecological model (see Figure 1). The four behaviors: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, are predictive of myriad negative outcomes including dissatisfaction (Gottman, Coan, Carrère, & Swanson, 1998) and divorce (see Gottman, 1994, Holman & Jarvis, 2003). For example, Holman and Jarvis (2003) found that couples that employ a validating conflict resolution style scored lower on the four horsemen than those that had a hostile conflict resolution style.

Consider two couples: Jenna and Todd, and Judith and Will, in the following explanations and examples of the Four Horsemen:

One morning, while having his morning coffee, Will mentions to Judith, “I was a little upset that you didn’t clean up the kitchen after I cooked dinner last night, because waking up to a messy kitchen is stressful for me.” Judith responds, “I’ll try to be more careful about that. I know that is stressful for you.”

This is an example of an effective, context-specific complaint because it effectively and practically points out an issue that could be resolved in the relationship. On the other hand, criticism, the first of the four horsemen, consists of “global [complaints] and includes character attacks” (Driver, Tabares, Shapiro, Gottman, & Nahm, 2010; p. 3). It is often geared toward objections to a person’s personality rather than his or her behaviors:

“You never clean up after yourself and I always have to do it for you. Why can’t you ever do even simple cleaning tasks?” Todd exclaims as he slams the door on his way to work. Jenna sits in the kitchen, upset all morning, feeling like a failure.
This interjection is a clear example of criticism. Rather than stating a situational complaint about cleaning up, he attacks Jenna by globalizing the complaint and inferring a character deficit.

Contempt, which is considered the most corrosive of the four horsemen (see Gottman, 1994), encompasses behaviors and reactions that show a general feeling of superiority over the other. Contempt can include behavior such as sarcasm, disgust, hostility, mocking, and other direct put downs:

“Oh, just what I always wanted – an uninvolved husband who is never there for the kids!” Jenna screams as Todd rolls his eyes.

As displayed above by both partners, contempt is particularly harmful because it inherently contains a spirit of negativity that is not receptive to optimistic attempts from the partner.

Defensiveness, the third of the four horsemen, is a denial of responsibility for something. It can include counter-attacks, excuses, and “yes, but” statements. For instance, Todd suggests to Jenna, “I think you had a little too much to drink last night,” and Jenna follows up with, “Well you were completely wasted at the company Christmas party last year!” In this example, Jenna’s defensive counterattack is not productive to the conflict at hand and derails the point that Todd is trying to make.

The last of the four horsemen is stonewalling, which is an occurrence wherein one partner shuts down and becomes unresponsive to the other, almost actively ignoring them. This is indicated by a lack of eye contact and verbal response. Although this may initially seem like a helpful attempt to cool down for the person who is stonewalling, it can be perceived as a sign of disrespect and even disinterest to the person being
“stonewalled”. This sort of disengagement is predictive of divorce (see Shapiro & Gottman, 2004).

Over time, these corrosive communication cues (as exhibited by Jenna and Todd) can develop into negative, reactive patterns of communication such that the behaviors regularly derail and distract from important topics of discussion (e.g., conflict that needs resolved). The continuous cycle of ineffective and upsetting communication styles is what makes these cues so collectively corrosive. Over time, partners may become so accustomed to these patterns that there seems to be no positive or effective way to communicate or collaborate toward a better end.

Because of mindfulness’ focus on non-reactivity and non-judgment (variables that are logically inversely related to the corrosive communication cues listed above), I also examined the associations between mindfulness and corrosive communication cues for this study.

**Conceptual Framework for Mindfulness and Relationship Processes**

The variables examined in this study were conceptualized using relational frameworks posited by Ted L. Huston and his colleagues (see Huston & Robins, 1982; Huston, 2000). In Huston’s relationship framework, intimate relationships (e.g., the marital relationship) are mutually influential relationships that exist within a “relationship ecosystem” (see Figure 1). In this systems framework, Huston describes the complex interplay between individuals (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, and psychological well-being), behaviors in the context of dyadic relationships (e.g., communication patterns within the relationship), and macro-environments (e.g., cultural scripts and expectations for couple relationships). As such, each individual brings to a relationship his/her own “system,”
including things like attachment histories and beliefs about relationships. In Huston’s view, the interactions between subjective attitudes and overt relationship behaviors form a pattern of interdependence over time wherein the dyad’s patterns become so engrained or automated that they “go underground”. The individual and behavior in relationship context portions of the model were used to conceptualize the associations between each of the variables for the current study.

Mindfulness, an individual-level variable, refers to inner experiences in response to both internal and external stimuli. Satisfaction is another individual-level variable that denotes an individual’s attitude toward the relationship. Corrosive communication cues are behaviors within the relationship context that can affect and be influenced by individual-level variables (as seen in Figure 1). For the current study, I examined associations both between two individual-level variables as well as between an individual-level variable and a behavior in relationship context variable. Examining direct associations between variables within and across sub-systems is an important first step in exploring the potential roles of these variables in transactional relationship processes.

Although mindfulness is an individual-level variable, because of the transactional processes at play in Huston’s model, I think that it can be seen as a potential explanation for, and link between, patterns of overt behaviors and subjective experiences. For example, an individual’s level of mindfulness could be the variable that breaks down or prevents engrained patterns within relationships. The following example clarifies.

Consider Jenna and Todd again. Jenna and Todd have been married for six years. They, like any couple, have their disagreements and conflicts from time to time. One
recurring conflict is Todd’s desire to keep the house spotless even though it is not a top priority for Jenna. Neither partner is particularly mindful. A conflict between the two goes as follows:

Jenna comes home from work at 5pm, takes off her shoes and leaves them by the couch along with her purse and coat. She drops the mail on the couch and leaves it there to look at later (overt behavior). Todd comes home from a frustrating day at work shortly after. He notices the mess, “Could you leave the mail on the table instead of the couch and put your coat away?” Todd has just overtly expressed his frustration with Jenna. His comment reminds Jenna of being berated by her mother during her childhood (individual psychological factor). Feeling attacked and upset with tears filling her eyes, Jenna immediately reacts, “I was just about to pick it up, I just really needed to sit for a minute before going through it all because I had a long day! Don’t get mad at me, you never start cleaning the minute you get home!” Jenna has internalized Todd’s comment as an attack, and she has counter-attacked (overt behavior). The frustration-attack/upset-counter-attack pattern forms between the two until it “goes underground” and becomes second nature to them. Their own histories and attitudes have now contributed to an engrained pattern of behavior.

Consider the same conflict between Judith and Will, a particularly mindful couple. Judith comes home from work at 5pm, hangs up her coat and puts away her purse and shoes. She leaves the mail on the couch. Will arrives home shortly after. He observes that she has left the mail on the couch – something that grates on his nerves. He notices that he has already grown frustrated. Rather than responding reactively (knowing that it could trigger an upset response from Judith), he decides to use a different
approach. “Long day, Judy?” he asks. “Yes, I had a horrible meeting with my boss and have been a bit unnerved all day about it.” Observing how upset Judith already is, Will picks up the mail himself and places it on the table where he likes it. Judith observes this action. Her initial reaction is to feel upset that she forgot, once again, to put the mail in the right spot. She tells herself that it’s okay to be upset, but that it’s also okay to forget sometimes. “Sorry I didn’t put the mail on the table!” she states, making sure to communicate that she noted her mistake. “Thanks,” Will replies, “I noticed you were upset, so didn’t want to react harshly.” “I’ll try to remember better tomorrow,” Judith responds calmly.

Unlike in Jenna and Todd’s conflict, during this exchange, Will and Judith are both observant of overt behaviors, as well as their own subjective experiences (e.g., Judith’s instinct to feel guilty for forgetting to put the mail on the table). They are non-judgmental of these experiences/behaviors, and are not immediately reactive to these experiences/behaviors. Presumably, Judith’s mindfulness is associated with her ability to a) not respond reactively or defensively to Will’s action of moving the mail, b) not judge herself for forgetting to move the mail, c) have better clarity in understanding her own emotional response to Will’s actions, and d) provide an objective and logical response to his action. This allows Judith to better integrate this experience into her cognitive and emotional processes, which in turn could be particularly helpful in her relationship when teamwork is required for problem solving and joint coping on a day-to-day basis (see Driver et al., 2010). Furthermore, if she has a good understanding of her emotions and surroundings through cultivating mindfulness, her enhanced awareness and attention to her surroundings will likely also lead her to picking up on Will’s emotions more readily.
She will then be less likely to judge Will’s emotions, therefore establishing a more peaceful and positive experience for the both of them. Hence, their mindfulness facilitates a more productive exchange. In this case, using Huston’s (Huston & Elliot, 1982) relationship framework as a reference, mindfulness helps the couple to break old, ineffective habits through observation, awareness, reflection, non-judgment, and non-reactivity of both overt behaviors and subjective experiences. Their mindfulness is the connection between their attitudes and behaviors, allowing for a more peaceful exchange.

Both partners are aware of their feelings – even negative feelings – without judging or being reactive to those feelings. This level of mindfulness could be particularly helpful when both parties within the relationship exhibit mindfulness, because they could provide each other with clear, detailed descriptions of their own emotions and experiences without the stress of judging whether those are “right” or “wrong,” “good” or “bad,” which in turn could decrease levels of relationship-related stress and hostility.

Mindfulness could also help promote emotional engagement in couples, as they would not avoid emotions or experiences based on negative appraisals of these experiences. Again, consider Jenna and Todd. If Jenna’s initial emotional response to Todd’s complaint about cleanliness was feeling hurt, she could mindfully acknowledge the feeling and express her hurt feelings to Todd. Thus, she would address both the cleanliness issue and the issue of being hurt by his statement rather than trying to avoid or hide her feelings. In short, cultivating mindfulness could be a very strategic option not only for the promotion of better individual mental health, but also for the improvement of all types of interpersonal relationships, as those who are mindful actively engage in, and adapt to, their environments and decrease experiential avoidance in order to interact with
others around them (i.e., they approach their emotional and physical environments with curiosity and acceptance rather than avoidance; Feldman et al., 2007).

**Mindfulness and Couple Relationships.** A search of the literature regarding both mindfulness and relationships yielded only three studies. Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, and Rogge (2007) found that higher mindfulness scores were associated with higher relationship satisfaction and more constructive responses to relationship stress, such as self-control during responses to stress and accommodation of one’s partner. Over the course of the 10-week study, the authors noted that there were only very slight changes in relationship satisfaction and mindfulness from time 1 to time 2, suggesting that a greater lapse in time may be needed to detect changes over time for both variables. In their second of two studies, Barnes et al. (2007) found that mindfulness was related to better communication quality for partners during a conflict discussion. Wachs and Cordova (2007) explored the link between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction by testing the hypothesis that mindfulness improves relationship satisfaction through cultivating more “relationally skillful emotion repertoires”. They found that both mindfulness and emotion skills, such as identifying and communicating emotions, were related to better relationship adjustment.

Carson, Carson, Gil, and Baucom (2004) employed a mindfulness-based relationship enhancement intervention with non-distressed, happy couples. The multi-faceted intervention included skills instructions via guided audiotapes, presentations, exercises, group discussions, and daily homework assignments for couples to practice their mindfulness skills. The intervention also entailed 8 weekly 2.5-hour meetings and a 7-hour retreat session for the couples, focusing on various aspects of mindfulness practice.
(e.g., meditation, communication skills, attention to obstacles). Carson et al. found that the intervention was associated with improvement in relationship satisfaction, decreased relationship distress, increased closeness, and increased acceptance of one another. For individuals, they found that optimism, relaxation, spirituality, and psychological distress were also improved. These benefits were maintained at a 3-month follow-up.

In another study that was not specifically geared toward examining mindfulness, Shapiro, Gottman, and Carrère (2000) found that awareness, which is a key component of mindfulness, plays a large role in buffering relationship decline. Specifically, their research on successful relationships over the transition to parenthood suggests that awareness is one of the cornerstones of a resilient relationship. This research, which is peripherally related to the construct of mindfulness, provides further impetus for examining the role of mindfulness in couple relationships.

**Current Study**

This study examined mindfulness as a factor that contributes differentially to corrosive communication styles and relationship satisfaction, adding to existing literature in the areas of mindfulness, communication, and couple relations. I aimed to expand the current knowledge on mindfulness and couple relationships using Actor-Partner Interdependence models (APIM; Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006). APIM is a model that tests both *intra-individual* and *inter-individual* effects at a dyadic level of analysis, thus exploring not only personal effects (i.e., actor effect), but also relational effects (i.e., partner effect). In other words, the model is able to examine questions of mutual influence wherein one partner’s behaviors or beliefs may influence the other’s outcomes.
I had two main research objectives for this study. The first was to examine the associations between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Because previous studies (see Wachs & Cordova, 2007) have found positive associations between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, I sought to replicate and expand on the finding. More specifically, I hypothesized that: a) each person’s mindfulness is positively associated with his/her own relationship satisfaction (i.e., actor effect) and b) each person’s mindfulness would be positively associated with his/her partner’s relationship satisfaction (i.e., partner effect). My second research objective was to examine associations between mindfulness and report of corrosive communication cues in romantic relationships. I hypothesized that each person’s mindfulness is negatively associated with his/her own corrosive communication cues (i.e., actor effect) and that his/her mindfulness would also be negatively associated with his/her partner’s corrosive communication cues (i.e., partner effect).
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study included 48 cohabiting heterosexual couples living in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area that participated in the Couples Communication Project. Couples were recruited through flyers, online ads, and snowball sampling. Couples were included in the study based on the following inclusion criteria: age above 18 years for both partners, cohabitation with partner for at least 6 months, access to internet during the evening, and residency in the Phoenix area. A total of 85 couples contacted the Couples Lab interested in participating in the study. Of the 85 couples, 29 couples were unresponsive after contact was made for screening, 7 were no longer interested in participating after screening, and 1 couple broke up before beginning the study, thus disqualifying them from participation. One male partner from the pool of participants failed to mail back his baseline questionnaire, so we were left with 47 dyads with complete data in this study.

Participants were paid a total of $180 per couple for participation in the study. They were informed that they could withhold answers on questionnaires and in interviews or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were also informed that their information and participation would be kept confidential.

Complete anonymity was not possible because of the use of observational data for other portions of the study. These data were kept in a secure, locked facility for privacy of the participants. The mean age of participants was 35.25 years for men and 33.88 years for women ($SD_{male} = 10.67, SD_{female} = 10.24$). Eighty seven and a half percent of the couples
were married. On average, couples reported being romantically involved for 10.27 years ($SD = 10.41$) and relationships ranged from .75 years together to 57 years together. Of the participants, 76.8% were White, 8.4% were Hispanic/Latino, 6.3% were Black, 3.2% classified themselves as “other”, 2.1% were Asian-Pacific Islander, 2.1% were Native American, and one participant was classified as biracial.

**Procedures**

The procedures discussed for the current study were part of a larger, multi-method study in the Phoenix area called the Couples Communication Project. After qualifying and giving informed consent for participation in the study, couples were mailed baseline questionnaires to complete. The questionnaires consisted of self-report surveys about personal and relationship history, as well as perceptions of their relationships and their partners. After completion of the study, couples were mailed payment for their participation.

**Measures**

**Mindfulness.** The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006; Baer, Smith, Lykins, Button, Krietemeyer, Sauer, et al., 2008; see Appendix A) is a 39-item questionnaire measuring five related but distinct subscales of the construct of mindfulness: *observing* (8 items; e.g., “I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions”), *describing* (8 items; e.g., “I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail”), *acting with awareness* (8 items; e.g., “I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I’m doing”; reverse coded), *non-judging of inner experience* (8 items; e.g., “I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn’t feel them”; reverse coded), and *non-reactivity to inner*
experience (7 items; e.g., “When I have distressing thoughts or images, I “step back” and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it”). Questions on each subscale were measured using a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale ranging from “never or very rarely true” to “very often or always true.” Higher scores indicate greater mindfulness. Cronbach’s alphas for this study of the subscales for men were $\alpha = .81$ for observing, .83 for describing, .87 for acting with awareness, .89 for non-judging of inner experience, and .62 for non-reactivity to inner experience. Cronbach’s alphas of the subscales for women were $\alpha = .70$ for observing, .87 for describing, .61 for acting with awareness, .90 for non-judging of inner experience, and .70 for non-reactivity to inner experience.

**Corrosive Communication Cues.** Corrosive communication cues were measured using Gottman’s Four Horsemen Questionnaire (FHQ; Gottman, 1999; see Appendix B). The FHQ is a sub-scale from John Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Scales (SRH: Gottman, 1999). It is a 33-item measure assessing the four aspects of communication that Gottman identified as being particularly corrosive to relationships: criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt. Each question is answered in True/False format (e.g., “I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements,” “I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times”). The scale was computed by summing the answers on each of the 33 items. Gottman (2011) established that the FHQ showed convergent validity with SPAFF coding of the four horsemen in 130 couples going through the transition toparenthood. The scale is best used as a global assessment of corrosive behaviors within the relationship. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ in our sample were .92 for men and .90 for women. The correlation between men and women’s FHQ was $r = .71$, $p < .01$. 

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**Relationship Satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction was assessed using one item from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier & Thompson, 1982). The 7-point Likert-type item measures degree of happiness in the relationship ranging from “extremely unhappy” to “perfect.” Use of the single, global measure for satisfaction was preferred conceptually for the current study because of concerns raised with using the satisfaction subscale of the DAS wherein some of the items may reflect conflict along with satisfaction (e.g., “how often do you and your partner quarrel?”). Using the single item removes the possibility of assessing conflict rather than satisfaction with this measurement. In my sample, the satisfaction item was significantly and negatively correlated with the FHQ, $r = -.61, p < .01$, as would be expected based on past research concerning corrosive behaviors and relationship satisfaction. The correlation between men and women’s relationship satisfaction was $r = .57, p < .01$. 
CHAPTER 4
STATISTICAL ANALYSES

During scale computation, I used mean imputation to account for minimal missing data in the FFMQ and FHQ reports. Each scale was then grand mean centered. Before running my models, I examined the bivariate correlations between each of the potential substantive covariates (i.e., age, years living together, depressive symptoms, and presence of children) and the outcome variables (i.e., global relationship satisfaction and corrosive communication cues). Age, years living together, and presence of children were not correlated with either of the outcome variables for men or women, thus they were not included in the final analyses. For women, depressive symptoms were correlated with satisfaction, \( r = -0.43, \ p < .01 \) and corrosive communication cues, \( r = 0.52, \ p < .001 \), thus, they were included as a control variable in the subsequent APIM analyses.

Data were restructured into a pairwise structure (Kenny et al., 2006) such that men and women’s data were double entered and present in both the ‘actor’ and ‘partner’ positions (see Figure 2). Specifically, data points for within-dyad variables such as ‘awareness’ and ‘satisfaction’ are double entered such that each person has an entry for his/her own score as well as and entry for his/her partner’s score. Thus, each Person 1’s ‘actor’ score on a within dyad variable will appear in the corresponding Person 2’s ‘partner’ spot, and vice versa. For example, Dyad 1, Person 1’s score for Awareness is “3”. It appears twice – first as “actor awareness” in his own line of data, and second as “partner awareness” in Dyad 1, Person 2’s line of data. This person’s partner (Dyad 1, Person 2) scored “5” for awareness and again, the response is entered twice – first as “partner awareness” in Dyad 1, Person 1’s line of data and second, as “actor awareness”
in their own (Dyad 1, Person 2) line of data. Variables such as ‘years living together’ are between-dyad variables. These variables are not double entered in the same manner as within-dyad variables because the score on these variables will be the same for both people in any given dyad. Analyses were run using the MIXED procedure in SPSS v.22, which accounts for non-independence of the dyadic data such that the standard errors are no longer biased statistics.

To assess the first set of hypotheses, global relationship satisfaction was modeled as a function of each of the men and women’s five facets of mindfulness using a within-dyad level of analysis. For example, the model specified for observing was as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = (\text{Female}_{ij}) (b_{0f} + b_{1f}\text{ActObs}_i + b_{2f}\text{PartObs}_i + e_{ij})$$

$$+ (\text{Male}_{ij}) (b_{0m} + b_{1m}\text{ActObs}_i + b_{2m}\text{PartObs}_i + e_{ij})$$

where $Y$ is the relationship satisfaction for dyad $i$ for person $j$ ($j = 1$ is women’s report; $j = 2$ is men’s report). When the outcome is the women’s report (Female$_{ij} = 1$ and Male$_{ij} = 0$), the first part of the model is selected and all of the $b$ coefficients have the subscript $f$. Thus, ActObs$_i$ is the actor’s report of the observing subscale of mindfulness (e.g., if the outcome is women’s report, then the observing subscale is women’s report); PartObs$_i$ is the partner’s report of the observing subscale of mindfulness (e.g., if the outcome is women’s report, then the observing subscale is men’s report); the residual components are represented by $e_{ij}$. Similarly, when the outcome is the men’s report, Female$_{ij} = 0$, and Male$_{ij} = 1$, and the second part of the model is selected. Therefore, $b_{1f}$ and $b_{1m}$ are the coefficients that represent the actor effects, and $b_{2f}$ and $b_{2m}$ are the coefficients that represent the partner effects. The model was repeated using each of the five subscales of the FFMQ (i.e., observing, describing, awareness, non-judgment of inner experience, and
non-reactivity to inner experience). For the second set of hypotheses, the model was rerun such that $Y_{ij} = \text{global report of the four horsemen, again, using each of the five subscales of the FFMQ}$.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics on self-report measures are presented in Table 1 for men and women. There were no sex differences for relationship satisfaction and corrosive communication cues; however, men ($M = 3.49, SD = 0.49$) reported significantly higher on non-reactivity to experience than women ($M = 3.05, SD = 0.55$), paired $t(46) = 3.61, p = .01$. Men and women did not differ on the four other facets of mindfulness.

Correlations between each of the five facets of mindfulness for men and women are presented in Table 2. For men, the describing and observing facets were positively correlated, $r = .33, p < .05$, the non-reacting and non-judging facets were positively correlated, $r = .30, p < .05$, and surprisingly, the non-judging and observing facets were negatively correlated, $r = -.33, p < .05$. For women, the describing and observing facets were also positively correlated, $r = .36, p < .05$, the describing and non-judging facets were positively correlated, $r = .39, p < .01$, and the awareness and non-judging facets were positively correlated, $r = .50, p < .01$. The means for relationship satisfaction for men and women indicate an answer between ‘happy’ and ‘very happy.’ The means for the FHQ indicate an average sum of corrosive behaviors marked as “true” out of the 33 items for men and women.

**Relationship Satisfaction.** Multilevel modeling (MLM) with restricted maximum likelihood (REML) was used to estimate the effect of a person’s own facets of mindfulness on his or her own relationship satisfaction (i.e., actor effect), and the effect of the partner’s facets of mindfulness on the person’s relationship satisfaction (i.e., partner effect). Table 3 presents results for women and men’s reports of global
relationship satisfaction in association with the five facets of mindfulness. Only the women’s actor effect predicting relationship satisfaction from the ‘non-judgment of inner experience’ facet of mindfulness was significant, $b_{1i} = 0.48$, $t(47) = 2.66$, $p = .011$. This indicates that for every unit increase in women’s non-judgment, their own relationship satisfaction increased by .48 (see Figure 3). None of the other actor or partner effects were significant.

Corrosive Communication Cues. MLM with REML was also used to estimate the effect of a person’s own facets of mindfulness on his or her own corrosive communication cues (i.e., actor effect), and the effects of the partner’s facets of mindfulness on the person’s corrosive communication cues (i.e., partner effect). Table 4 presents results for women and men’s reports of corrosive communication cues in association with the five facets of mindfulness. None of the actor or partner effects were significant.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to examine associations between mindfulness, corrosive communication cues, and satisfaction in couple relationships. The major finding was that women’s *non-judgment of inner experience* was positively associated with their own relationship satisfaction. It makes sense that this facet would be significantly associated with satisfaction because the act of having a neutral stance toward one’s thoughts and feelings rather than judging them could be therapeutic and helpful in refraining from negative appraisals of one’s relationship. Furthermore, because the *non-judgment of inner experience* facet of mindfulness refers to *appraisals* or *attitudes* about one’s experiences, it is a similar variable to the global measurement of relationship satisfaction, which is also an attitude, about the relationship. Perhaps women who tend to take a neutral stance toward their thoughts and feelings are also less likely to make negative appraisals of their relationships and happiness within those relationships. This finding provides partial support for my hypothesis that mindfulness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction. However, the association between *non-judgment of inner experience* and relationship satisfaction was not significant for men. It would make sense for this finding to be non-significant for men if there was a significant sex difference for the actor effects between the *non-judging of inner experience* subscale and the report of relationship satisfaction, but this was not the case.

The only sex difference found in the study was for the *non-reactivity to inner experience* facet of mindfulness (see Table 1). Interestingly, men reported that they were less reactive to inner experiences than women. This finding could exist for a number of
reasons. It is possible that men are either actually less reactive in response to inner experiences than women, or that men are less likely to report being reactive to inner experiences than women because of cultural and societal ideals that pressure men to be less emotionally reactive and expressive than women (see Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, and Diekman, 2000).

None of the other mindfulness subscales were significantly associated with relationship satisfaction for men or women and there were no significant associations between any of the five mindfulness facets and corrosive communication cues for men or women. Furthermore, no partner effects were found. It is interesting that no association was found here particularly because the non-judging of inner experience and non-reactivity to inner experience facets of mindfulness were conceptualized in a way that suggests a lack of hostility (i.e., a lack of the types of verbal and non-verbal corrosive behaviors that often appear in disagreements, and were measured by the FHQ). Although the null hypothesis is hard to explain, it is possible that there is in fact no association between mindfulness and corrosive communication cues. However, it is also possible that the relationship does exist, but that there were conceptual or methodological reasons for not finding these associations in this study. One possible explanation for not finding this association is that the FHQ is a measurement of behaviors within the relationship (behavior in relationship context), rather than individual-level variables like mindfulness and relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1 for conceptual model), where the significant result was found. Perhaps effects were easier to find when both variables referred to attitudes rather than one variable pertaining to attitudes and one pertaining to behaviors.
Another possible explanation for the lack of findings is that mindfulness may be context-specific. It is possible that someone may be very mindful in her personal surroundings, but that she is not particularly mindful in the context of her relationship. She may be aware and non-reactive to certain events, like a bad traffic jam, but she may be incredibly reactive to conflict in a relationship with her significant other. Tapping into this context-specific type of mindfulness would require a measurement that reflects this reconceptualization in that its items refer to relational experiences and settings (unlike individual or personal experiences and settings). For example, the item “in difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting” could be changed to “in difficult times with my partner, I can pause without immediately reacting to them,” to better convey the relational context. This may be a key to better understanding mindfulness in couple relationships.

I also revisited the five-facet approach to conceptualizing mindfulness. The one significant finding involved the non-judgment of inner experience facet for women. However, most of the hypothesized associations were not significant. Although there are many reasons for conceptualizing and operationalizing mindfulness as having five facets, it may not adequately express how mindfulness operates, especially in a relational context. For example, the first three facets described in the FFMQ (observing, describing, and awareness), without the employment of the latter two facets (non-judgment of inner experience and non-reactivity to inner experience) may not actually result in a valid measure of global mindfulness for an individual. Someone may be hyper-observant, aware, and descriptive of what happens in her life, but if she observes and describes her environment in reactive and judgmental ways, then it cannot follow that
she is fully mindful. Rather, she is merely aware and descriptive of what she finds negative. Thus, perhaps individuals must be high on each of the five facets to be truly mindful, rather than on only one or a few of the facets. The substantial lack of correlations and one significant negative correlation between the five facets of mindfulness in this study support the idea that someone can be high on one of the facets and lower on one of the others. In particular, the non-judging and observing facets were significantly negatively correlated for men. This is not consistent with previous research where each of the five facets were all positively correlated (Baer et al., 2008); however the Baer et al. sample was predominantly female. One explanation for this odd finding is that men who are hyper-judgmental pay more attention to observing their thoughts and feelings or vice versa. Furthermore, a global construct, rather than five individual facets may be a better conceptualization and operationalization for mindfulness within a relationship context.

Unrelated to my hypotheses, I found that depressive symptoms were significantly associated with both relationship satisfaction and corrosive communication cues (see Tables 3 and 4). The statistically significant paths between depressive symptoms and the outcome variables suggest that depression may be important in the understanding of the relationship between each of these variables. Future research should explore the potentially complex associations between depression, mindfulness, corrosive communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction. It is also possible that mindfulness is a potential moderator. It is possible that mindfulness does not hold strong direct associations with each of the variables in this study, but rather that it moderates various processes and outcomes in the relationship context (e.g., moderating the association
between depression and relationship satisfaction). In future research, further examination of mindfulness in relational contexts will illuminate the role of mindfulness within complex relationship processes.

**Methodological Considerations**

There are several methodological considerations for this study. The FFMQ questions are written about individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences in relation to their personal environments. The items do not refer to thoughts, feelings, or experiences in a relational context (e.g., “I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing”). It is possible that the wording of this particular questionnaire helps to reveal an individual’s general mindfulness within his/her personal environment (e.g., “I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face”), but not mindfulness in the context of a relationship. Perhaps mindfulness can be context specific (e.g., in the context of a romantic relationship), and the FFMQ does not measure mindfulness in a relational context.

Using a measure that both, a) measures mindfulness within a relational context and b) reflects a global conceptualization of mindfulness (as opposed to multi-faceted) could potentially provide different outcomes and understanding of the role of mindfulness within relationships. For example, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) measures a global attention and awareness to present experiences. The single-score scale has been associated with emotional intelligence, openness to experience, and well-being, as well as negatively associated with more mindlessness-oriented variables like rumination. According to Brown and Ryan (2004), this global measure encompasses the acceptance and curiosity components of the concept.
of mindfulness, resulting in a single measure of a multi-faceted concept. Measures like this one may better assess a global type of mindfulness.

There are also considerations regarding the FHQ as a measurement of corrosive communication cues. First, participants are not trained to recognize and label each of the four horsemen (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling). Furthermore, the items on the scale are not easily allocated into only one of each of the four horsemen. For example, the item, “I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements,” could refer to perceived criticism from the partner, but it could also refer to defensiveness from the respondent. Likewise, the items may not adequately delineate which person in the relationship displays which corrosive communication cues. If one is interested in delineating the four corrosive cues, observational measures may be a preferable way to measure corrosive cues. Furthermore, this measurement would reflect actual behaviors, rather than attitudes about behaviors (as conceptualized in Huston’s model). Thus, observational coding for each of the four horsemen in a conflict situation in each partner may be a preferable measurement for corrosive communication cues within the relationship. This could be helpful for understanding how mindfulness is employed in relational contexts, as well as how it manifests behaviorally, which will be of immeasurable value for further understanding couple relationships.
In conclusion, this study found that *non-judgment of inner experience* is positively associated with reports of relationship satisfaction for women, and that men and women differ on *non-reactivity to inner experience*. These findings provide new information for further understanding the role of mindfulness in couple relationships. More specifically, cultivating a neutral stance toward inner thoughts and feelings may be particularly beneficial for women in relationships. Although the finding was not significant for men, it would not be detrimental for men to cultivate a more neutral stance toward their own inner thoughts and feelings as well. Furthermore, because past research points to the numerous positive outcomes that mindfulness provides for individuals, partners may benefit individually from practicing mindfulness.
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics on Self-Report Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global relationship satisfaction</td>
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<td>Corrosive communication cues</td>
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<td>7.70</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Describing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-judgment of inner experience</td>
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<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-reactivity to inner experience $^a$</td>
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<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35.25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years living together</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive symptoms</td>
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<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 47 couples. $^a$There was a significant difference between male and female reports, $t(46) = 3.61, p = 0.001.$*
Table 2

*Correlations among five mindfulness facets*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observing</th>
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<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Non-Judging</th>
<th>Non-Reacting</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.16</td>
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<td>.27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Judging</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Reacting</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Coefficients above the diagonal are the correlations for men’s reports, and coefficients below the diagonal are the correlations for women’s reports.
Table 3

*Multilevel Analyses of Results Relating the Five Facets of Mindfulness to Global Relationship Satisfaction for Women and Men*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observing</th>
<th></th>
<th>Describing</th>
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<th>Awareness</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-judgment</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-reactivity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Mindfulness</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.48*</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Mindfulness</td>
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<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Mindfulness</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Mindfulness</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.62</td>
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<td>Depressive Symptoms</td>
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<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.46**</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.43*</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.46**</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates a significant finding with a *p* value below .05; **indicates a significant finding with a *p* value below .01. The depressive symptoms indicates an average effect of both partners’ symptoms on outcome variable.
Table 4

Multilevel Analyses of Results Relating the Five Facets of Mindfulness to Report of Corrosive Communication Cues for Women and Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observing</th>
<th></th>
<th>Describing</th>
<th></th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-judgment</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-reactivity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Corrosive Cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Mindfulness</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>-0.99</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-2.39</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Mindfulness</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
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<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.18</td>
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<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Corrosive Cues</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor Mindfulness</td>
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<td>1.60</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
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<td>-0.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Mindfulness</td>
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<td>-2.83</td>
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<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depressive Symptoms</td>
<td>3.49***</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.24***</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>3.11**</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2.90**</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>3.83***</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *indicates a significant finding with a p value below .01; ***indicates a significant finding with a p value below .001. The depressive symptoms indicates an average effect of both partners' symptoms on outcome variable.
Figure 1. Huston’s (2000) three-level ecological model of a marriage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyad</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Actor Awareness</th>
<th>Partner Awareness</th>
<th>Actor Satisfaction</th>
<th>Partner Satisfaction</th>
<th>Years Cohabiting</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Example of pairwise data structure.
Figure 3. APIM of the associations between non-judgment of inner experience and relationship satisfaction for women and men. *indicates a finding with a $p$ value below .05.
REFERENCES


Carrère, S., & Gottman, J. M. (1999). Predicting divorce among newlyweds from the
first three minutes of a marital conflict discussion. *Family Process, 38*, 293-301.


APPENDIX A

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire
Description: This instrument is based on a factor analytic study of five independently developed mindfulness questionnaires. The analysis yielded five factors that appear to represent elements of mindfulness as it is currently conceptualized. The five facets are observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience.

Please rate each of the following statements using the scale provided. Write the number in the blank that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Never or very rarely true</th>
<th>2 Rarely true</th>
<th>3 Sometimes true</th>
<th>4 Often true</th>
<th>5 Very often or always true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

__O__ 1. When I’m walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.
__D__ 2. I’m good at finding words to describe my feelings.
__J__ 3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.
__R__ 4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.
__A__ 5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I’m easily distracted.
__O__ 6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.
__D__ 7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words.
__A__ 8. I don’t pay attention to what I’m doing because I’m daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.
__R__ 9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.
__J__ 10. I tell myself I shouldn’t be feeling the way I’m feeling.
__O__ 11. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions.
__D__ 12. It’s hard for me to find the words to describe what I’m thinking.
13. I am easily distracted.

14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn’t think that way.

15. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face.

16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things.

17. I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad.

18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.

19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I “step back” and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.

20. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing.

21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.

22. When I have a sensation in my body, it’s difficult for me to describe it because I can’t find the right words.

23. It seems I am “running on automatic” without much awareness of what I’m doing.

24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after.

25. I tell myself that I shouldn’t be thinking the way I’m thinking.

26. I notice the smells and aromas of things.

27. Even when I’m feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words.

28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

29. When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting.

30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn’t feel them.

31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow.

32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words.
33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go.

34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I’m doing.

35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad, depending what the thought/image is about.

36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior.

37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.

38. I find myself doing things without paying attention.

39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.

O = Observing
D = Describing
A = Acting with Awareness
J = Non-Judgment of Inner Experience
R = Non-Reactivity toward Inner Experience
APPENDIX B

Four Horsemen Questionnaire
Instructions: Please read each statement below and consider in your own opinion whether these statements are generally true or generally false for you.

T=True

F=False

FH(h/w)1 I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements

FH(h/w)2 I usually feel like my personality is being assaulted

FH(h/w)3 In our disputes, at times I don’t even feel my partner likes me

FH(h/w)4 I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair

FH(h/w)5 I often feel unappreciated by my spouse

FH(h/w)6 My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood

FH(h/w)7 I don’t feel appreciated for all the good I do in this marriage

FH(h/w)8 I often just want to leave the scene of the arguments

FH(h/w)9 I get disgusted by all the negativity between us

FH(h/w)10 I feel insulted by my partner at times

FH(h/w)11 I sometimes just clam up and become quiet

FH(h/w)12 I can get mean and insulting in our disputes

FH(h/w)13 I feel basically disrespected

FH(h/w)14 Many of our issues are just not my problem

FH(h/w)15 The way we talk makes me want to withdraw from the marriage

FH(h/w)16 I think to myself, “Who needs all this conflict?”

FH(h/w)17 My partner never really changes

FH(h/w)18 Our problems have made me feel desperate at times

FH(h/w)19 My partner doesn’t face issues responsibly and maturely
FH(h/w)20  I try to point out flaws in my partner’s personality that need improvement
FH(h/w)21  I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times
FH(h/w)22  My partner uses phrases like “You always” or “You never” when complaining
FH(h/w)23  I often get the blame for what are really our problems
FH(h/w)24  I don’t have a lot of respect for my partner’s position on our basic issues
FH(h/w)25  My spouse can be quite selfish and self-centered
FH(h/w)26  I feel disgusted by some of my spouse’s attitudes
FH(h/w)27  My partner gets far too emotional
FH(h/w)28  I am just not guilty of many of the things I get accused of
FH(h/w)29  Small issues often escalate out of proportion
FH(h/w)30  Arguments seem to come out of nowhere
FH(h/w)31  My partner’s feelings get hurt too easily
FH(h/w)32  I often will become silent to cool things down a bit
FH(h/w)33  My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical

Note: The value assigned to True or False depends on how the question is worded. The answer that indicates “more indications of negativity” during arguments is given a score of 1; the other answer is scored 0.