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Communicated Perspective-Taking During Stories of Marital Stress: Spouses' Perceptions of One Another's Perspective-Taking Behaviors

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Abstract

Perspective-taking has important connections to social and relational functioning, making it an important skill for marital adjustment (Long & Andrews, 1990). The current study investigated the types of behaviors indicative of communicated perspective-taking from the participant perspective as couples told stories of stressful relational events. Using a stimulated recall procedure, 68 husband and wife pairs jointly told the story of a stressful relational experience and then separately viewed their videotaped interaction and evaluated their spouses' perspective-taking behaviors. *Agreement, attentiveness, relevant contributions, coordination, positive tone, and freedom* represented the categories of behaviors spouses judged to reflect perspective-taking. In contrast, *disagreement, inattentiveness, irrelevant contributions, lack of coordination, negative tone, and constraint* all emerged as categories of behaviors lacking in perspective-taking. Findings also indicated that disagreement, attentiveness, inattentiveness, negative tone, coordination, lack of coordination, and constraint were significantly related to general judgments of perspective-taking for husbands. For wives, on the other hand, disagreement, inattentiveness, irrelevant contributions, and constraint were the only significant negative correlates of general perspective-taking judgments.

Perspective-taking is a consequential but understudied, behavior in marriage. Previous research indicates that husbands' and wives' cognitive perspectives can differ significantly when making sense of interactional conflict and stress (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). Moreover, established links between perceptions of others' cognitive perspective-

taking ability and social (Davis, 1983) and relational (Long, 1993) functioning suggests that perspective-taking is an important skill for marital adjustment (Long & Andrews, 1990).

Although perspective-taking refers to the psychological ability to put oneself in another's shoes (Davis, 1980) and has been examined primarily as a cognitive construct (e.g., Kurdek, 1978; Oswald, 1996; Pélouquin & Lafontaine, 2010), it is an important communication skill when considered relationally. Communicated perspective-taking is the manifested evidence of cognitive perspective-taking. Behaviors that interpersonally *communicate* that one has put himself or herself in another's shoes may offer evidence to the relational partner that he or she is cared about and understood. Indeed, observers' judgments of communicated perspective-taking between relational partners has been linked to individual well-being (e.g., less perceived stress in husbands; Koenig Kellas, Trees, Schrodtt, LeClair-Underberg, & Willer, 2010) and relational functioning (e.g., greater relational satisfaction, Shröder-Abé & Shütz, 2011; greater family satisfaction, cohesion, and adaptability, Koenig Kellas, 2005).

Investigations into communicated perspective-taking to this point, however, offer general descriptions of perspective-taking behavior. Perspective-taking behavior has been considered broadly including both general judgments that individuals demonstrate an understanding of the relational partners' point of view (e.g., Shröder-Abé & Shütz, 2011) and ratings of behavioral indicators including the degree to which partners attend to and confirm each other's perspectives (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2005; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010). Extant investigations into communicated perspective-taking, however, do not offer detailed insight into the specific communication behaviors that make one feel understood, confirmed, and validated. In other words, we know little about the particular behaviors that make spouses feel as if their partner is communicatively attending to their perspectives. This is important in answering calls for research that investigate more specifically what couples do to validate each other. For example, Heyman argues that current research paradigms focusing on couples' interactions "seem well-suited to understanding what nondistressed couples do *not* do that perhaps protects them from distress but is poorly suited to understanding what they *do* that promotes satisfaction" (2001, p. 7, emphasis added). Bradbury, Johnson, and Story (2001) also recommend an increased focus on prosocial marital behavior in preventive interventions for couples. Additional research is needed to identify the types of specific behaviors that constitute communicated perspective-taking from the perspective of spouses in order to bolster our understanding of how couples (un)successfully communicate a sense that they understand each other (Sillars et al., 2000). Such research is important to the development of educational and intervention programs aimed at improving marital communication, providing practitioners with tangible behaviors couples might employ in an effort to communicate perspective-taking.

Thus, in order to investigate the kinds of behaviors that spouses communicate and identify as communicating perspective-taking in marriage, the current study examines those behaviors identified by spouses during the shared telling of the story of a stressful relational experience. In what follows, we review previous research on perspective-taking as a cognitive and communicative construct. We then present the results of a study in which 68 married couples identified specific communication behaviors that represented varying

degrees of perspective-taking during a videotaped storytelling interaction about marital stress.

Perspective-Taking as a Cognitive and Communicated Construct

Most researchers who study perspective-taking define it as the cognitive ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings (Kurdek, 1978; Oswald, 1996). Cognitive perspective-taking includes examining multiple viewpoints and mentally putting oneself in another's shoes (Davis, 1980). Perspective-taking also has been referred to as the cognitive component of empathy and linked with similar constructs, such as role-taking (see Lobchuck, 2005; Long, 1993). A related concept, empathic accuracy, refers to the accurate understanding of a partner's thoughts and feelings (e.g., Ickes, 1993) and research in this area emphasizes the cognitive match between partners' perceptions of the others' thoughts and feelings and their actual thoughts and feelings. Indeed, Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis, and Devoldre (2008) argue that perspective-taking should predict empathic accuracy.

This type of cognitive skill has several important outcomes. As a cognitive component of empathy, perspective-taking positively relates to the likelihood of helping others and social competence and negatively relates to social dysfunction (Davis, 1983; Oswald 1996). Long and Andrews (1990) found that one's ratings of general perspective-taking (i.e., general beliefs about one's ability to take others' perspectives), self-dyadic perspective-taking (i.e., rating one's own perspective-taking behavior within a *specific* relationship), and other-dyadic perspective-taking (i.e., rating one's partner's perspective-taking behavior within that relationship) were all predictive of marital adjustment, especially for husbands across all three measures. Long and Andrews concluded that there are both cognitive and behavioral subcomponents of perspective-taking, warranting further investigation of its *behavioral* components.

Some research has attended to perspective-taking as a behavioral move (Long & Andrews, 1990) or interpersonal process (e.g., Lobchuck, 2006). For example, Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus (2004) identified perspective-taking as a central component to potential responses in interpersonal conflict. Communication researchers interested in conversational skills have examined perspective-taking and its related constructs as elements of communication competence (e.g., Spitzberg, 2007; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987), social/communication skills (e.g., Segrin et al., 2007; Segrin & Taylor, 2006), emotional support skills (e.g., Burleson & Kunkel, 2002), and confirmation (see Dailey, 2006, 2008). Perspective-taking also has a central place in observational work on interactional sense-making (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Koenig Kellas et al., 2010; Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009).

In their research on interactional sense-making, Koenig Kellas, Trees, and colleagues define communicated perspective-taking as the ways in which interactional partners acknowledge, attend to, and confirm one another's perspectives in interaction (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). In studies on joint storytelling about marital (Koenig Kellas et al., 2010) and family (Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009) stress, observers rated behavioral indicators of perspective-taking, including statements that express understand-

ing of multiple viewpoints, acknowledge others' insights, affirm the validity of others' experiences and/or agree verbally or nonverbally. Similarly, Shröder-Abé and Schütz (2011) operationalized interactional perspective-taking in conflict by assessing the degree to which the partner demonstrated an effort to take on the partner's point of view and consider both sides in the conflict.

Findings from these initial studies of communicated perspective-taking indicate it positively relates to family satisfaction, family cohesion, family adaptability, overall family functioning (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009), parental and peer comforting skills (Burlison & Kunkel, 2002), perceptions of family supportiveness (Trees & Koenig Kellas, 2009), and relationship closeness (Shröder-Abé & Shütz, 2011). Perspective-taking negatively relates to mental health symptoms and perceived stress for husbands (Koenig Kellas et al., 2010). Moreover, communicated perspective-taking appears to be an important behavior for distinguishing between families who engage in joint sense-making versus those who make sense individually or fail to make sense of family stress (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006).

Extant research, thus, has painted a picture in which general behavioral manifestations of perspective-taking, such as attentiveness and confirmation, are related to individual and relational well-being. However, a more comprehensive catalogue of the behaviors that constitute communicated perspective-taking is warranted. An examination of micro-level processes from participant perspectives offers insight into the behaviors that build feelings of intimacy (Prager, 2000). As both a cognitive and communicative construct, the most in-depth insight about communicated perspective-taking may be gained at the intersection of cognition and communication: namely in how one perceives his or her interactional partners' behaviors.

Communicated Perspective-Taking in the Context of Stories about Relational Difficulty

Spouses' identification of the communication behaviors that reveal attention (or lack of attention) to perspectives in communication offers a focused exploration of a specific and consequential but understudied practice in marital interaction about difficulty (Long, 1993). We are interested in a more specific and nuanced understanding of what perspective-taking behaviors look like, particularly from the point of view of the spouse to whom they may communicate (or not) a sense of belonging, understanding, and we-ness. Asking spouses to identify the behaviors that communicate perspective-taking allows for a more detailed picture than extant a priori definitions of what exactly partners do to provide visible evidence of the cognitive process of perspective-taking during interactions.

Moreover, a thorough understanding of the processes and behaviors that communicate perspective-taking to spouses may ultimately allow for insight into those behaviors that contribute to relational satisfaction, functioning, and support. Bates and Samp (2011), for example, found that partners' perceived empathic accuracy positively related to conflict resolution in romantic relationships, suggesting that relational partners' perceptions of perspective-taking can be important for successful conflict management. Understanding one's partner and demonstrating that knowledge to them also contributes to relational closeness and stability (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997).

One place to examine evaluations of spousal perspective-taking behavior is in the interactive patterns through which partners create the couple's reality of the relationship (Stephen, 1984) and jointly make sense of difficulty. Couples create meaning together in part through jointly remembering and constructing their relational stories (e.g., Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Doohan, Carerre, & Riggs, 2010). Relationships are fashioned through talk (Duck, 1994), and couples often create the reality of their relationships by telling stories about the relationship together or jointly. Indeed, research shows that how couples manage these joint tellings *positively predicts marital satisfaction* when couples are similar in their storytelling style (Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993) and *negatively predicts divorce* when couples glorify the struggle rather than describe their marital history as chaotic (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992).

Although perspective-taking is an important skill across contexts, it may be particularly important when couples are attempting to discuss relational difficulty. Telling stories of marital stress can be a site of conflict and/or an opportunity to collaboratively create meaning. For example, relational partners might disagree on the events that occurred and may correct each other, thus changing the shape of the storytelling and potentially impacting the relationship and the identities of the involved parties. When partners face stressors, making sense of them can be particularly challenging if they view the stressor and/or each other's role in it differently. When partners discuss stress or marital conflict, they are forced to confront each other's differing perspectives.

In sum, the ways in which couples tell stories together provides a window into both marital climate and marital functioning (Fiese & Winter, 2009; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Veroff et al., 1993). It also provides a context in which communicated perspective-taking is particularly salient. Joint storytelling offers a context in which spouses might readily observe the degree to which their partners attend to and confirm their perspective in the narrative that is constructed and the types of communication strategies that behaviorally indicate perspective-taking. Thus, the first research question in the current study asks:

RQ1: What behaviors do spouses identify as indicative of their partner's perspective-taking in jointly told stories of stress?

Alongside descriptions of the behaviors that spouses identify as indicators of perspective-taking in shared storytelling about relational difficulty, additional insight can be drawn from exploring which behaviors identified carry the most weight for judgments of partner perspective-taking, or the degree to which spouses feel their partners engage in communicated perspective-taking generally over the course of an interaction. Relational partners' interpretations of interpersonal behaviors can be more predictive of relational health than the behaviors themselves (e.g., Sillars, Roberts, Dun, & Leonard, 2001; Vangelisti, Corbin, Luchetti, & Sprague, 1999). Research establishing links between cognitions partners have for communication about disagreement and marital satisfaction, for example, identifies important connections between spouses' *perspectives* about their partners' *communication* and their marital culture (e.g., Sillars et al., 2000; Vangelisti et al., 1999). Sillars et al. found that "in severe conflicts and dissatisfied relationships, the individuals had more angry,

blaming, and pessimistic thoughts and less focus on content issues" (2000, p. 480). Similarly, Vangelisti et al. observed that dissatisfied partners voiced significantly more negative thoughts about their spouses and fewer positive thoughts about their partner or relationship than satisfied partners. Exploring the connections between the behaviors identified by spouses and spouses' perceptions of their partners' perspective-taking overall allows investigation of the links between behaviors and cognitive judgments. Certain behaviors may be more influential for spouses in overall judgments of the degree to which their partner understands them (e.g., behaviors such as explicit statements of confirmation may carry more weight than behaviors demonstrating attentiveness to the other or vice versa). Thus, the second research question asked:

RQ2: Which perspective-taking behaviors are related to (a) husbands' and (b) wives' ratings of the degree to which their partners communicated perspective-taking during jointly told stories of stress?

Finally, husbands and wives may differ in the types of behaviors that are particularly important for their assessments of perspective-taking. Specifically, Sillars et al. (2000) found that when it came to perspective-taking husbands tended to focus more on self and issue appraisal and focused less on relationship issues or their wives' communication. Wives, on the other hand, were more other oriented and focused more on the engagement, avoidance, and confrontation of their partners than were husbands. In addition, Long and Andrews (1990) found that perceptions of cognitive perspective-taking, although significant for both husbands and wives, were stronger predictors of marital adjustment for husbands. Finally, Koenig Kellas et al.'s (2010) observational ratings of communicated perspective-taking showed that both wives' and husbands' perspective-taking behaviors were significantly related to reduced negative mental health symptoms and perceived stress for husbands, yet neither husbands' nor wives' perspective-taking behavior was predictive of wives' mental health or perceived stress. Based on these findings and the general lack of evidence for how perspective-taking operates relationally for wives, we were interested in possible differences between husbands and wives in the types of perspective-taking behaviors that predicted their ratings of the degree to which their partners attended to, understood, and confirmed their perspectives during an interaction about marital stress. Thus, the third research question asked:

RQ3: Do the correlations between perceptions of partners' communicated perspective-taking during jointly told stories of stress and perspective-taking behaviors differ between husbands and wives?

Method

Participants

Sixty-eight heterosexual married couples from the Western and Midwestern regions of the United States participated in the study. Participants were recruited through newspaper

advertisements, flyers posted on campus and in the community, announcements in communication courses, and network sampling. Couples were paid \$50 for their participation. Wives in the sample were an average of 34.26 years old (range = 21 to 71, $SD = 12.46$). Husbands in the sample were an average of 36.40 years old (range = 22 to 75; $SD = 13.54$). Couples averaged 9.21 years of marriage ($SD = 10.41$), and a majority of participants ($n = 85$) indicated they had children. Nine husbands and 16 wives reported previous marriages that ended in divorce. Couples were generally satisfied with their marriages ($M = 5.92$ on a 7-point scale, $SD = 1.01$). The majority of participants were white (94.8%).

Procedure

Prior to coming to the communication lab, couples were given consent forms to read and sign. They also separately completed a questionnaire regarding demographic and relationship information, placed them in sealed envelopes, and turned them in at their lab appointment.

Upon arrival at the lab, couples were asked to identify a story that they tell others about an experience that has been stressful for their relationship and that is particularly meaningful for them. They were reminded that stressful events in marriage can be either positive (e.g., the birth of a baby) or negative (e.g., a conflict) and were told to identify a story about a specific event (as opposed to "stress" in general). We defined stories for participants as "retellings of some noteworthy event that include a plot (a sequence of events), characters (you, your spouse, and any other relevant persons), and usually some type of meaning (a point, a conclusion)." The spouses were then separated and asked to identify two story topics that might meet these requirements. We asked couples to think of ideas separately to avoid the potential that they would begin telling their stories while talking about possible story topics.

When both spouses had completed this task, a member of the research team brought the couple back together and facilitated a discussion on the topic ideas, helping the couple decide which story they would tell. Couples' stories focused on a number of different types of experiences that were stressful on their relationships, including family experiences ($n = 21$), work ($n = 11$), moving ($n = 11$), finances ($n = 5$), health ($n = 4$), death ($n = 4$), differing expectations ($n = 4$), and long-distance relationships ($n = 2$). The six remaining stories could not be categorized within this set of topics as they were about idiosyncratic experiences. Couples ($n = 51$), or individual spouses in situations where only one individual generated the story topic on his/her list ($n = 13$), indicated these story events were relatively stressful for the marriage ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.00$, on a 5-point scale).

Once the topic was chosen, couples were seated in chairs positioned side by side and angled slightly toward one another to facilitate joint storytelling. Couples first told the story of how the couple met, fell in love, and got married. This allowed couples to become comfortable with the research setting. After this story, couples jointly told the story about their relationally stressful experience. During the storytelling, the interviewer responded nonverbally but did not engage verbally in the telling so as not to interfere in the joint telling of the couple. Marital interactions were digitally video-recorded.

After both stories were told, the couple separated to complete a post-interaction questionnaire with measures unrelated to the current report. In addition, they individually participated in a stimulated recall activity focused on communicated perspective-taking. Several marital communication researchers have used video recall procedures to tap into cognitive or affective responses in interaction without intruding on those processes during the interaction (e.g., Sillars et al., 2000; Vangelisti et al., 1999). During the stimulated recall procedure, each spouse separately watched the video of the joint telling of their difficult marital experience. At the end of each minute of the story, the video was paused and the spouse was asked to rate the degree to which he or she believed his or her partner communicated perspective-taking during that minute. In addition, an open-ended question asked what specific behaviors influenced his or her ratings of that minute. Splitting the stimulated recall task into minute segments allowed for the possibility that perspective-taking would vary over the course of the story.

Measures

Perceptions of perspective-taking

To measure spouses' assessment of partners' perspective-taking, or the degree to which they perceived their partner took their perspective during the interaction, each husband and wife reported on his or her perceptions of the partner's perspective-taking for each minute of the story. Perceptions of perspective-taking were measured using three semantic differential questions created for the current study and based on Koenig Kellas and Trees' (2005) interactional sense-making scheme derived from observational ratings of communicated perspective-taking. Participants rated each item on a 7-point scale with higher numbers indicating higher perceptions of perspective-taking. The questions asked participants to "indicate the degree to which you feel your partner" "misunderstood/understood your perspective," "ignored/acknowledged your perspective," and "disconfirmed/confirmed your perspective."

To check the reliability of the measure, we ran Cronbach's alpha statistics on the three items across the first 5 minutes of each participant's interaction. We chose the first 5 minutes in order to evidence a pattern of reliability within a data set that contained a variable number of minutes (stories ranged in length from 3 to 17 minutes, $M = 7.60$, $SD = 3.98$). This analysis indicated strong reliability among the three items (Minute 1 $\alpha = .89$; Minute 2 $\alpha = .90$; Minute 3 $\alpha = .92$; Minute 4 $\alpha = .93$; Minute 5 $\alpha = .94$).

Based on the reliability of perspective-taking across the narrative as well as the analytic need to compare husbands and wives across couples whose narratives differed in length, perspective-taking scores within each minute were averaged and these scores were then averaged across minutes to create a single perspective-taking score from husbands about their wives ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 0.88$, skew = $-.83$, kurtosis = $.10$) and from wives about their husbands ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 0.78$, skew = $-.68$, kurtosis = $-.16$).¹ Averaging perspective-taking scores is consistent with previous research assessing perspective-taking across scenarios (e.g., Burleson & Kunkel, 2002), provided a composite portrait of spouses' perceptions about their partners' perspective-taking over the course of the storytelling and allowed for parsimonious analysis of the data.

Communicated perspective-taking behaviors

For each minute participants rated, they also provided open-ended responses to a question that asked what specific behaviors influenced his or her ratings of that minute. These open-ended data were inductively analyzed for categories of perspective-taking behaviors (see below). Prior to applying the coding system to the data, the data were unitized into individual units of perspective-taking behavior. For each minute, two coders used brackets to divide the response into units for analysis. For example, for the second minute of her interaction with her husband, the wife in Couple 3 offered the following explanation for her numeric ratings of her husband's perspective-taking behavior:

[Again I felt that he did understand and acknowledge my perspective through nonverbals like eye contact and head-nodding.] [I felt he also confirmed my perspective by the way he would continue telling the story where I left off.] [He didn't stop me or correct my part of the story.]

As illustrated in the example, each unit was a coherent thought that developed a single idea about a particular dimension of perspective-taking behavior. This could range from simple phrases as in the example above (e.g., "He didn't stop me or correct my part of the story") to multiple phrases that develop a single idea about a specific aspect of communication (e.g., "and confirmed what I was saying. When I said, 'I got it done.' He agreed verbally, 'yep' and nonverbally by shaking his head"). The third author and a research assistant unitized the data for 25% of the pairs (17 couples) and then jointly discussed any points of disagreement, coming to consensus on how to create units for analysis. Following this process, one coder unitized the remaining data. The second coder then unitized 20% of the sample (13 couples) to check for unitizing reliability. Guetzkow's index (Guetzkow, 1950) $U = .02$ indicated good unitizing reliability.

To determine the nature of the perspective-taking behaviors identified by spouses during the observational recall, a coding system for categorizing the behaviors was inductively derived (Bulmer, 1979). Initially, the third author and a research assistant reviewed the data, looking for patterns in the types of behaviors that couples identified when assessing their partners' perspective-taking. They separately reviewed the data then met to discuss observations regarding commonalities in the behaviors that spouses identified. Five categories, including *contribution*, *coordination*, *attentiveness*, *freedom in storytelling*, and *agreement*, were developed in this initial review of the data. Next, the first and second author reviewed the data and refined the categorization system. Specifically, using negative case analysis (Bulmer, 1979), we looked for any instances in the data that did not fit within the five-category coding scheme. Through this process, we identified behaviors that represented both confirmation of the other's perspective and disconfirmation of the other's perspective for each dimension (e.g., within the category of *agreement*, we categorized behaviors that spouses identified as confirming as *agreement* and behaviors identified as disconfirming as *disagreement*). We also identified and added to the coding scheme a sixth category related to *tone*. The resulting 12 categories of perspective-taking behavior, including six supra-categories and two subcategories—confirming and disconfirming—within each supra-category, are discussed in the results section.

An independent, trained research assistant who was not involved in the development of the coding scheme and who was unaware of study research questions then applied the coding scheme to the data. In a few instances when it was unclear whether to assign the behavior to the high or low perspective-taking categories (e.g., For Minute 3, Husband 60 wrote “telling the same part of the story at the same time” that could be coded as coordination or constraint), the coder referenced valence codes (i.e., positive, negative, neutral) that indicated whether or not the spouse perceived the partner’s behaviors to be indicative of confirming or disconfirming perspective-taking. Finally, in order to assess intercoder reliability a second coder coded a randomly selected 20% subset of the data (13 couples, including both husbands and wives). Cohen’s kappa revealed good intercoder reliability ($\kappa = .75$).

Frequency of communicated perspective-taking behaviors

Because story length differed and because each participant’s response included a different number of perspective-taking units, the frequency of each type of perspective-taking behavior was assessed by calculating ratios, such that the number of times each category was assigned across the entire interaction was divided by the total number of units coded for perspective-taking behaviors across the interaction. Calculating a common ratio score for each participant was necessary for analytic comparison. Thus, for each spouse, we created 12 ratio scores, one for each subcategory of behavior (e.g., agreement, disagreement, attentiveness, inattentiveness). For example, the wife in Couple 5 had a ratio score of 0.45 for the category *agreement*, because we divided the five statements coded as agreement from all of her minute-by-minute responses by 11, which was the total number of units coded in her observational recall responses across all minutes. These ratio scores were used to test RQ₂ and RQ₃ as described in the results section below.

Results

Communicated Perspective-Taking

The first research question asked what behaviors spouses identified as demonstrating communicated perspective-taking. The inductive coding analysis revealed six categories of perspective-taking behaviors, with subcategories of confirming and disconfirming perspective-taking elements for each. Thus, in total there were six supra-categories, each with two subcategories of perspective-taking behaviors—one that demonstrated spouses were taking the others’ perspective and one that indicated a lack of perspective-taking on the part of the spouse—for a total of 12 categories of behaviors. Table 1 offers examples of behaviors in each of these 12 categories.

Behavioral supra-category	Confirming	Disconfirming
Agreement-disagreement	His nonverbal cues such as head-nodding and eye contact made me feel like he understood and acknowledged my perspective (Couple 3, Wife). Joanie* told about how happy we were at this time and that is exactly how I feel (Couple 44, Husband). She said "we worked through it," which made me feel understood (Couple 66, Husband).	We didn't see eye to eye on it hurting our marriage. I felt we argued, he didn't see it that way (Couple 10, Wife). We couldn't agree if she told me the three reasons why her physical changes were different than expected (Couple 34, Husband). He was fidgeting a little to "defend" his side of the story (Couple 43, Wife).
Attentiveness-inattentiveness	She was making good eye contact (Couple 52, Husband). He stayed focused on me while I did most of the talking during this segment (Couple 61, Wife). [Smiled] [and had an open posture (not crossing arms or pulling her chin down to her chest)]** (Couple 101, Husband)	Orienting his body away from me (Couple 56, Wife). Shawna didn't really respond to me with words or body language when I had a point in this segment (Couple 7, Husband). Not much non-verbal [<i>sic</i>] or verbal feedback (Couple 8, Husband).
Relevant-irrelevant contribution	[She] contributed a "fill-in" when I was at a loss for words (Couple 9, Husband). Corroberating [<i>sic</i>] details . . . (Couple 14, Wife). She added some details that helped explain & amplified what I was saying (Couple 24, Husband).	My husband, I felt, got a bit side-tracked in the story . . . (Couple 98, Wife). Again, fills in with extraneous detail . . . (Couple 98, Husband). Goes off on a tangent (Couple 10, Wife).
Coordination-uncoordination	Alisha was finishing my sentences, so it was like we were both telling the story at the same time (Couple 39, Husband). We added to each other's input, but never took away from what the other was saying. We told the story as a team (Couple 15, Husband). . . . and we handed the story back and forth very smoothly (Couple 27, Husband).	Didn't give me a chance to say much, we talk over one another some (Couple 10, Wife). It was almost like I was expected to say something there and didn't. She looked at me as if it were my turn to talk, and I just had nothing to say . . . (Couple 13, Husband). I felt that she was lost because she didn't know how to respond to my expressions and feelings of death by her facial and tone expressions (Couple 54, Husband).

Positive tone– negative tone	Smile and laugh (Couple 8, Husband). As he has done for the past 34 years he likes to put humor in the conversation to make it easier to work with the problem (Couple 9, Wife). Stella has nodded and laughed (humorously) at what I've said (Couple 61, Husband).	Toward the end of the minute, she spoke, using my voice, saying "I know you only made \$25 today but it was \$25 we didn't have." Her tone was somewhat sarcastic(?) . . . (Couple 91, Husband). . . . She was a little irritated . . . (Couple 11, Husband).
Freedom in storytelling– constraint in storytelling	He didn't stop me or correct my part of the story (Couple 3, Wife). She could have cut me off quickly but allowed me the opportunity to start the story, progress the story, and add pertinent points without feeling any need to interrupt (Couple 4, Husband). What she didn't do was interrupt me and go into defensive mode . . . (Couple 9, Husband).	At this point, I believe she took it upon herself to direct the story (Couple 47, Husband). He focused on his story (Couple 54, Wife). She ended the story so I was not able to comment (Couple 59, Husband).

*All participant's names have been changed.

**Both [units] in this example coded under the same category.

Agreement-disagreement

The category of *agreement-disagreement* refers to (in)consistency in perspective, the occurrence of (dis)agreement, and the sense that the spouse (mis)understood one's point of view during the telling of the story. The most frequently reported behavior demonstrating perspective-taking across the minutes of the interactions fell under the category of agreement ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 3.13$ across interactions, $SD = 2.44$). Participants reported that behaviors that reflected higher levels of perspective-taking included confirmation, explicit agreement, acknowledgment of the other's perspective, the communication of understanding, a sense that the spouse was being supportive of ideas, and the communication that the spouse took ownership of his or her own faults during the interaction. Behaviors reflecting disagreement in perspective were not as frequent in the data ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.46$ across interactions, $SD = 0.97$). These included explicit disagreement, misunderstanding, an unwillingness to see the other person's point of view, instances in which the spouse "called [the other spouse] out," and/or a sense that the partner did not take ownership of the faults brought up during the story/interaction. In the subcategories of agreement and disagreement, spouses sometimes noted nonverbal behavior, such as eye contact or head nodding, as indicative of confirming or disconfirming perspective-taking. Because, as described below, nonverbal behaviors like these could also be coded as attentiveness or inattentiveness, as part of the coding rules nonverbal behaviors were only coded as agreement or disagreement when accompanied by an explicit reference to the nonverbal behavior communicating agreement (e.g., "he nodded in agreement"; see also Table 1).

Attentiveness-inattentiveness

The next most frequently occurring category of behaviors noted by spouses was attentiveness ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 2.88$ across interactions, $SD = 4.43$). The overall category of *attentiveness-inattentiveness* encompassed primarily nonverbal involvement or listening behaviors that demonstrated (dis)engagement in the interaction. Confirming behaviors of attentiveness included eye contact, head nodding, back channeling (e.g., “mmm hmm”), “looking at me,” demonstrating patience through listening, being generally (nonverbally) supportive of the spouse, touch (e.g., patting the spouse on the knee, holding hands), and asking interested questions. Inattentiveness ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.34$ across interactions, $SD = 1.10$) referred to disengagement, not being attentive, and/or not listening. Disconfirming or inattentive behaviors noted by spouses in our sample included not acknowledging the spouse, tuning the spouse out, not looking at the spouse, and acting as if the story is going on too long (i.e., acting exasperated or bored).

Relevant-irrelevant contribution

Relevant-irrelevant contribution behaviors referred to content that the other person added to the story. Relevant contribution behaviors ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 1.17$ across interactions, $SD = 1.62$) included adding details or content to the story that filled in information or that added to what the teller (i.e., the spouse who was observing the behavior) wanted to say. Relevant contributions also included explaining details that may have acknowledged different perspectives but also acknowledged the other person’s perspective within the added details. Irrelevant contributions were cited relatively infrequently ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.08$ across interactions, $SD = 0.30$) but included contributions that, according to the reporting spouse, were self-centered or self-absorbed, represented going off on a tangent or getting off track/off topic, and/or engaging in irrelevant talk. In other words, reporting spouses seemed to suggest that deviating from the story at hand represented disconfirming or ineffective perspective-taking behaviors.

Coordination-uncoordination

Coordination-uncoordination referred to the way in which couples interacted together and coordinated their behaviors during the interaction. This referenced how spouses’ behaviors fit together and might also be called synchrony or joint behavior. Coordination requires a reference to both people’s behaviors in relationship to each other. When coordinated in timing or collaboratively building the narrative together ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.70$ across interactions, $SD = 1.29$) behaviors resulted in smooth intertwined storytelling. The behaviors cited by spouses that fit in this category included questioning and answering, stopping and starting together, continuing where the other left off, tag-teaming in their telling of the story, and/or “knowing our parts and telling them.” Uncoordinated behavior ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.08$ across interactions, $SD = 0.38$), on the other hand, referred to instances of the spouse being unresponsive or not working together to tell the story.

Positive tone–negative tone

Spouses also referred to behaviors that contributed to *positive tone–negative tone* of the interaction as relevant to evaluating their partners’ perspective-taking behaviors. In other

words, these were behaviors that referenced the other person's mood or the mood of the minute. Behaviors that contributed to positive tone ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.43$ across interactions, $SD = 0.92$) included demonstrating or expressing love, showing kindness, consideration, and respect, demonstrating selflessness, using humor/being humorous, and/or disagreeing but in a kind and respectful way. Negative tone behaviors ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.09$ across interactions, $SD = 4.43$) included nonverbal cues such as rolling eyes and/or scoffing at the other person, demonstrating contempt, using sarcasm, criticizing the other person, and/or displaying discomfort, anxiety, or negativity in the interaction.

Freedom in storytelling—constraint in storytelling

The final category of *freedom in storytelling—constraint in storytelling* encompassed behaviors that indicated to participants that their spouses gave them appropriate space to talk and tell their parts of the story versus not giving the other person space or interrupting. Behaviors within the subcategory freedom in storytelling ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.33$ across interactions, $SD = 0.68$) included letting the observing spouse talk and not interrupting or “focusing on me.” Spouses who demonstrated constraint in storytelling ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 0.18$ across interactions, $SD = 0.54$) reportedly exhibited behaviors such as correcting the other person's version, interrupting, being dismissive, insisting on their own version, or not letting the observing spouse talk.

To summarize the results of RQ₁, six supra- and 12 subcategories emerged in husbands and wives' reports of behaviors indicative of perspective taking. Specifically, perspective-taking behaviors included those that communicated agreement, attentiveness, relevant contribution, coordination, positive tone, and freedom in storytelling. In contrast, behaviors indicating a lack of perspective-taking included disagreement, inattentiveness, irrelevant contribution, uncoordination, negative tone, and constraint in storytelling.

Correlating Communicated Perspective-Taking Behaviors with Partner Ratings

The second research question asked which behaviors related to (a) husbands' and (b) wives' respective ratings of the degree to which their partner attended to, understood and confirmed their perspective during the storytelling. Tables 2 and 3 provide the bivariate correlations between perceived perspective-taking averaged across minutes and the ratio for how often each of the 12 subcategories was identified in a given interaction for husbands and wives, respectively. As noted in the methods section, the independent variables were represented as a ratio score (i.e., the frequency of the coded category of behavior across minutes/the total number of behaviors coded across minutes) to account for variation in the number of minutes for each couples' story ($M = 7.63$, $SD = 4.01$) and the number of behavioral units coders identified in participants' written responses about their interaction across minutes ($M = 10.00$, $SD = 7.36$). These ratios were calculated for each participant, and analyzed separately for husbands and wives to account for interdependence in the data. The findings for RQ₂ presented in Table 2 indicate that husbands' ratings of their wives' overall enactment of perspective-taking across the interaction was significantly positively correlated with the frequency with which they mentioned wives' coordination and attentiveness behavior and negatively correlated with the frequency with which they de-

scribed their wives' communication as including uncoordination, inattentiveness, constraint in telling the story, disagreement, and negative tone. As Table 2 illustrates, the strongest correlations with perceptions of perspective-taking were negative tone, disagreement, and constraint in telling the story for husbands.

As illustrated in Table 3, for wives, the overall rating of their perceptions of their husbands' perspective-taking across the interaction was significantly negatively correlated with the frequency with which the coded description of their husbands' behavior included irrelevant contributions, inattentiveness, constraint in telling the story, and disagreement. For wives, inattentiveness was the strongest correlate of their feelings about husbands' perspective-taking.

In order to test RQ₃, which asked if the correlations between ratings of partners' perspective-taking and the ratio of perspective-taking behaviors differed for husbands and wives, Fisher's *z* tests were run to compare bivariate correlations across husbands and wives. Table 4 presents the comparison of correlations for husbands and wives as well as the Fisher's *z* test for each of the 12 perspective-taking ratio variables. Results indicate that none of the correlations between perceptions of perspective-taking and the perspective-taking behavior ratios was statistically significant. The Fisher's *z* test could not be run for negative tone as only one wife reported negative tone from her husband as a variable relevant to perspective-taking across the data set. In sum, although the pattern of correlations between husbands' and wives' perceptions of their partners' behavior differed according to the ratio of behaviors they identified (RQ₂), these differences were not statistically significant (RQ₃).

Discussion

In marriage, understanding each other's perspective and acting upon one's knowledge of the other person's point of view contributes in important ways to sustaining a positive relationship (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997). Perspective-taking behavior constitutes one way in which partners may communicate understanding, attentiveness, and confirmation to their spouse. The findings from this study provide insight into the types of behaviors that contribute to perceptions of perspective-taking during couples' stories about stressful relational experiences. Results also indicate which behaviors may be most meaningful to husbands and to wives.

Communicated Perspective-Taking

Agreement, attentiveness, relevant contributions, coordination, positive tone, and freedom in storytelling were the categories of behaviors coders identified from spouses' written descriptions of positive perspective-taking behaviors. Disagreement, inattentiveness, irrelevant contributions, lack of coordination, negative tone, and constraining the spouse's telling of the story all were coded as contrasting examples of behavior low in perspective-taking.

Table 2. Correlations among Ratios of Perspective-Taking Behaviors and Husbands' Perceptions of Perspective-Taking

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Perspective-taking perceptions	—												
2. Agreement	-.10												
3. Disagreement	-.48**	-.07											
4. Attentiveness	.33**	-.39**	-.12										
5. Inattentiveness	-.33**	-.18	.31**	-.04									
6. Relevant contributions	.20	-.32**	-.23*	.03	-.09								
7. Irrelevant contributions	-.12	-.01	.11	-.13	-.08	.01							
8. Coordination	.25*	-.19	-.15	-.25*	-.18	-.06	.07						
9. Lack of coordination	-.26*	-.05	.25*	-.09	.22*	-.05	-.01	-.11					
10. Positive tone	-.08	-.08	-.03	-.02	.14	-.15	-.09	-.10	-.01				
11. Negative tone	-.52**	-.12	-.24*	-.24*	.22*	-.02	.34**	-.05	-.01	.16			
12. Freedom	-.07	-.21*	-.09	.21*	-.07	-.17	-.07	.02	-.03	-.08	-.09		
13. Constraint	-.43**	-.16	.13	-.15	.20	.17	-.02	-.14	.11	-.16	.24*	-.05	—

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

Table 3. Correlations among Ratios of Perspective-Taking Behaviors and Wives' Perceptions of Perspective-Taking

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Perspective-taking perceptions	—												
2. Agreement	.20												
3. Disagreement	-.27*	-.19											
4. Attentiveness	.15	-.44**	-.24										
5. Inattentiveness	-.50**	-.22	.10	-.08									
6. Relevant contributions	.10	-.14	-.06	.09	-.16								
7. Irrelevant contributions	-.30*	-.01	.05	-.08	-.05	.07							
8. Coordination	.16	-.20	.01	-.23	-.10	-.10	-.06						
9. Lack of coordination	-.11	.01	.01	-.08	-.04	-.06	.45**	-.07					
10. Positive tone	.04	-.26*	.08	-.01	.01	-.02	-.07	-.10	-.08				
11. Negative tone	— ^a	.13	-.06	-.07	-.04	.04	-.04	-.06	-.03	-.05			
12. Freedom	.16	-.09	-.07	-.06	-.12	.09	-.07	-.08	-.09	-.04	-.06		
13. Constraint	-.23*	-.10	.08	-.07	.03	-.01	.27*	-.10	.36**	.02	-.03	-.07	—

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

a. Correlation could not be calculated because only one wife reported negative tone across the sample.

Table 4. Comparing Bivariate Correlations among Ratios of Perspective-Taking Behaviors and Perceptions of Perspective-Taking across Husbands and Wives

	Perspective-Taking Perceptions		
	Husbands	Wives	Fisher's z test
Agreement	-.10	.20	1.67, <i>ns</i>
Disagreement	-.48**	-.27*	1.38, <i>ns</i>
Attentiveness	.33**	.15	1.04, <i>ns</i>
Inattentiveness	-.33**	-.50**	1.11, <i>ns</i>
Relevant contributions	.20	.10	0.56, <i>ns</i>
Irrelevant contributions	-.12	-.30**	1.02, <i>ns</i>
Coordination	.25*	.16	0.53, <i>ns</i>
Lack of coordination	-.26*	-.11	0.82, <i>ns</i>
Positive tone	-.08	.04	0.65, <i>ns</i>
Negative tone	-.52**	—	n/a
Freedom	-.07	.16	1.26, <i>ns</i>
Constraint	-.43**	-.23*	1.27, <i>ns</i>

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

The categories that emerged suggest that perspective-taking is not a simple skill. Although paraphrasing and restating the other's feelings are specific skills taught in many basic interpersonal communication classes (e.g., Adler & Proctor, 2011), participants instead seemed to notice more nuanced and subtle ways in which spouses both verbally (e.g., "he added to what I wanted to say"; he said "right") and nonverbally (e.g., nodded in agreement, maintained eye contact) demonstrated perspective-taking in the interaction. That spouses identified a number of more nuanced behaviors as constituting perspective-taking seems to confirm Heyman's (2001) assertion that explicitly and simply paraphrasing or restating each other's feelings is not necessarily a hallmark of happy couples.

At the same time, the most common categories of communicated perspective-taking identified in the current study connect with important cognitive and communicative concepts in relationship research. Behaviors falling into the agreement category were the most common evidence of confirming perspective-taking noted by spouses. The value of agreement for understanding is not surprising. Other research has found similarity to be important for couples coping with difficulty. For example, Verhofstadt et al. (2008) observed that couples with more emotional similarity better provided emotional support to one another. Behaviors communicating similarity or agreement reveal a shared understanding between spouses of the stressful experience and of the meaning to be drawn from the relational stressor. These behaviors reflect a shared construing that family therapy research suggests is important to coping with stressful experiences (e.g., Reiss, 1981).

In addition to agreement, behaviors reflecting attentiveness were frequently noted by spouses. Corresponding to behaviors reflecting nonverbal involvement and immediacy, these behaviors demonstrate engagement in a conversation (Coker & Burgoon, 1987) and approach or warmth (Mehrabian, 1981). The findings of this study, however, also suggest

that behaviors that show that "I am listening" communicate perspective-taking more specifically as well. This fits with research showing that nonverbal involvement and immediacy contributes to perceptions of supportiveness (Jones & Guerrero, 2001; Trees, 2000).

Two of the remaining categories reflect positive affirmation of the spouse's contributions (positive tone) and creating space for the spouse to share his or her views (freedom in storytelling). Along with attentiveness, these categories reflect behavior that encourages the spouse to tell more about what he or she thinks through positive reinforcement and talk time. In *Minding Theory*, Harvey and Omarzu (1997) suggest that knowing one's partner, continually updating that knowledge, and acting on that knowledge are all important, proactive strategies for maintaining a happy marriage. The perspective-taking behaviors noted by participants in this study reflect, in part, the need to create space for knowledge to develop in order for perspective-taking to be possible. Attentiveness or listening, letting the partner tell his or her story, and positive tone are all behaviors that encourage the disclosure of the partner as a part of the perspective-taking process.

Finally, in terms of confirming perspective-taking behaviors, two categories, coordination and relevance, include behaviors that facilitate the sharing of ideas and experiences through synchrony and coherence. Both of these categories attend to how the spouses' behaviors intersect with the behaviors of their partners. Coordination, for example, reflects a general meshing of the partners' behaviors that demonstrate awareness of the partner and a general rapport (Bernieri, 1988). Similarly, relevant contributions require an appropriate connection to and fit with the spouse's statements in the interaction. These types of behaviors reflect an understanding of the point the spouse wanted to make and/or what is important to him or her in the telling of the story in terms of verbal and nonverbal contributions.

Disconfirming behaviors, although more infrequently reported in our relatively satisfied sample, are also important to understand. The disconfirming behaviors identified by spouses reflected the mirror opposites of the behaviors that indicated perspective-taking was occurring in the interaction. These disconfirming behaviors demonstrated a relative disinterest, disengagement, and negativity in the interaction. Several, such as inattentiveness and negative tone, correspond to relationally corrosive behaviors (e.g., withdrawal, contempt) identified in Gottman's (e.g., Driver, Tabares, Shapiro, Nahm, & Gottman, 2003) marital research.

In short, the behaviors spouses identified in their written responses that constituted communicating perspective-taking and the categories that emerged from our coding of their responses correspond with previous constructs relevant to functional and dysfunctional marital communication. At the same time, this study offers a new and parsimonious categorization for understanding the behaviors that help spouses feel acknowledged, attended to, and confirmed by their partners during interactions about marital stress. A parsimonious scheme for understanding communicated perspective-taking is important for a number of reasons. First, according to confirmation theorists and research, validating the other person is the most fundamental of human needs (see Dailey, 2006, 2008). The categories of behaviors derived within the current study offer a synthesized analysis of the kinds of behaviors that not only (dis)confirm spouses but also the types of behaviors that help couples jointly make sense of difficulty about a particular topic. Thus, these categories may be developed further into observational, self-, and other-report measures to advance

future research on the power of communicated perspective-taking in the context of discussing difficulty, conflict, or stress. Second, given the relatively high marital satisfaction in the current sample, the behaviors catalogued in the current study lend insight into Heyman's (2001) call for research that identifies what happy couples do to promote relational functioning. Therefore, the set of behaviors identified in the current study may be usefully applied to the need for premarital or preventive interventions on prosocial marital behavior (see Bradbury et al., 2001).

Husbands' and Wives' Perceptions of Perspective-Taking

The pattern of findings in the current study indicate that certain behaviors were related to both husbands' and wives' perceptions of their spouses' perspective-taking across the interaction. For husbands, the strongest relationships were negative, between their perceptions of how well their wives took their perspective across the interaction and disconfirming behaviors, including negative tone, disagreement, and constraint in telling the story. In other words, when husbands noted those disconfirming behaviors more frequently, they were also less likely to rate their wives as having attended to, understood, and confirmed their perspectives across the interactions. Although for husbands, coordination and attentiveness also correlated with their ratings of wives' perspective-taking; for wives, disconfirming behaviors were the *only* behaviors that related significantly with their perception of the degree to which their husbands attended to, understood, and confirmed their perspective across the interaction. Specifically, significant negative correlates included inattentiveness, irrelevant contributions, constraint in telling the story, and disagreement. Notably, the strongest correlate for husbands was negative tone and the strongest correlate for wives was inattentiveness suggesting that husbands perceive less perspective-taking from wives when wives are sarcastic, uncomfortable, critical, or contemptuous and wives perceive less perspective-taking from husbands when husbands are disengaged.

The correlation analyses indicated, therefore, a different pattern of behaviors that mattered for husbands and wives. Despite those patterns, the differences generally were not statistically significant. However, husbands and wives did differ on the frequency with which they reported negative tone. Specifically, only one wife across the entire sample mentioned negative tone in her report on the behaviors influencing her assessment of her husband's perspective-taking. Although the correlation comparison was incalculable, husbands ($M = 0.02$) and wives ($M = 0.002$) were significantly different in their reports of spouses' negative tone, $t(127) = 2.26$, $p < .05$, and, notably, this variable was the most important negative correlate of perceptions for husbands.

Overall, the results indicate that positive relational messages, including good listening, supportive responses, and synchronized interaction mattered less for understanding spouses' impressions of their spouses' perspective-taking behaviors than did behaviors reflecting dominance (e.g., constraint in storytelling), criticism (e.g., dissimilarity and negative tone), and lack of harmony (e.g., uncoordination, inattentiveness, irrelevant contribution). This suggests that behaviors communicating a lack of respect, disagreement, and disconfirmation were influential for spouses' perceptions about their partners' perspective-taking abilities. Negative messages may be a stronger predictor of perceptions than positive messages. This is consistent with research on the attributions couples make for each

other's behavior. Manusov (1990), for example, found that spouses were more likely to notice and make attributions for their spouses' negative rather than positive behaviors. Gottman's (e.g., Driver et al., 2003) research also highlights the prominent role that negative behavior plays in marital interaction, linking behaviors like criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal to marital decline. Moreover, research shows evidence of "negativity effects" such that negative, rather than positive, behavior is linked more strongly to individual (see Rook, 1998) and relational (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) well-being. In short, our research may parallel Rook's "analyses [which] tend to support a view of negative exchanges as somewhat more potent than positive exchanges" (2001, p. 94). Thus, although the current study paints a portrait of what relatively satisfied couples do in interactions to confirm one another (Heyman, 2001), this pattern of findings may also mean and reinforce the notion that interventions designed to teach husbands and wives how to engage in more effective perspective-taking will need to focus on avoiding disconfirming rather than teaching confirming perspective-taking behaviors.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study provides insight into what wives and husbands notice about their spouses' behaviors as they jointly tell stories about shared, stressful marital experiences. It is likely, however, that perspective-taking behaviors differ somewhat in other kinds of interaction contexts. In conflict, for example, where disagreement is a defining feature of the interaction, behaviors other than agreement may take on more significance for demonstrating perspective-taking. In addition, the types of behaviors indicating perspective-taking may differ between spouses in marital conversations about individual (instead of shared) stressors. It would be helpful to expand our understanding of communicated perspective-taking to several different kinds of marital interactions in which perspective-taking is likely to be a meaningful activity for both conversational quality as well as individual and relational well-being.

In addition, this study involved relatively happy, satisfied couples, and they were generally positive about their spouses' perspective-taking. Disconfirming responses occurred much less frequently than confirming perspective-taking. Indeed, the perspective-taking ratings were negatively skewed, indicating a propensity to rate their partners' perspective-taking skills positively. Obtaining a sample with wider variation in both couple satisfaction and degree of perspective-taking would allow for closer investigation into a wider variety of communicative and cognitive perspective-taking processes in marital relationships.

Despite these limitations, this study provides important insight into communication about perspectives. Feeling understood and confirmed represent important relational messages in marital interaction, particularly in the context of difficulty or stress. Although the cognitive processes of perspective-taking have received attention in the literature (e.g., Davis, 1983; Long, 1993; Long & Andrews, 1990), this study directs our focus to the ways in which spouses communicate perspective-taking to their partners. These important behaviors communicate confirmation and understanding, even when potentially divergent versions of the shared relational story are being told together. The behaviors identified and the

emergence of meaningful relationships between spousal perception and disconfirming behaviors, in particular, should assist researchers and practitioners interested in understanding and helping spouses improve their marital communication.

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Note

1. Although averaging across minutes sacrifices some nuance in the data, alternative approaches such as structural equation or growth curve modeling were not possible based on statistical power/sample size.

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