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Exploring Mate Value across Two Studies: From Perceptions to Enhancement

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Abstract

Study 1 followed a dual perceptive approach and compared romantic partners' mate value and mate value discrepancy to determine who the "better half" was in relationships. Results indicated both partners are the "better half" in relationships. Males and females perceived their partners to have higher mate values than themselves in *more established* relationships. Results also revealed a ceiling effect for commitment in engaged/married relationships, in that commitment no longer influenced perceptions of partner mate value in stabilized relationships. Thus, Study 2 explored perceptions of communication satisfaction and nonverbal immediacy and their influence on perceptions of partner mate value. Results found only communication satisfaction predicted how individuals viewed their partners' mate value.

Key words: Mate Selection, Mate Value, Mate Value Discrepancy, Commitment, Social Construction, Nonverbal Immediacy, Communication Satisfaction

Introduction

Mate value and mate value discrepancy (MVD) have the potential to impact ongoing relationships (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007). Depending on the context in which MVD is examined, it can be either beneficial or harmful to romantic relationships. MVD is the perceived difference in resource value between self and partner, and has proven to influence initial mate choices and continue as a long-term influence in ongoing relationships. Buss and Shackelford (1997b) analyzed mate value as a predictor of susceptibility to infidelity, finding that women who perceived their spouses to have higher mate value than they do also believed their husbands would have affairs in the next year. It is also likely men and women will report being more jealousy of external forces (e.g., third party threat) when they perceive their partners as having a higher mate value than themselves (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007). However, both sexes report being more committed to their relationships, and they are more likely to forgive partner transgressions if they report a negative MVD (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007). Mate value and MVD are frequently examined as a partner resource that can influence relationships over time. The first study explored mate value from a dual perspective to determine whether or not romantic partners would cancel each other out when their mate value reports were compared with one another. Moreover, Study 2 examined the impact communication may have on individuals' perceptions of their partners' mate value.

Study 1: Mate Value Discrepancy: Is It an Illusion or a Reality?

As Shakespeare wrote, "love is blind" and Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) reinforced that idea by suggesting as individuals are caught up in the experience of love they may "embellish their partners' virtues while... turning a blind eye to their faults" (p. 1155). Both partners may have a tendency to offer their mates higher evaluations and in turn cancel each other's MVD. Overall, a positive MVD indicates individuals report having higher mate values than their partners and a negative MVD would represent the opposite. MVD is a mathematical equation that could be cancelled out if we compare both partners' reports of mate value.

Social Construction of Relationships

Theories of social construction assume communication interaction is an essential tool in understanding social life. Realities are subjective creations that have been shared, interpreted, and internalized. Founding research in the area focused on understanding individuals as part of groups and their relationships to those groups as a type of perspective (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1985). Berger and Luckman (1966) argued that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs" (p. 1). Thus, it is assumed that individuals entering into relationships go through a process of co-constructing their realities. Individuals construct their relationships by interpreting shared experiences with each other and ultimately defining their sense of self based on those interactions.

How people see their relationships is a social construction based upon their "self theory" and how they perceive themselves in that relationship. Littlejohn (2008) highlighted Harr'e (1984; 1979) and his colleagues (Harr'e & Secord's, 1972) explanation of the self within episodes and their explanation of how people talk about common experiences. Based upon interaction in multiple episodes, couples will attach meaning to those events, which will give rise

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to rules that guide the actions of individuals within those relationships. Research has shown when dating and sexual activity come into play there are issues of gender convergence and divergence (Harper, et al., 2004). Based on interviews with adolescents in dating relationships, both sexes expressed similar expectations regarding sexual fidelity and condom use, but were different with regard to their method and process of talking with friends about shared social constructions about dating and sexual roles and expectations. The role peers played as socializing agents in the conceptualization and social construct of dating and sexual behavior processes for both sexes shows how guiding forces influence the actions of individuals as well as the construction of the relationships.

Moreover, Murray, Griffin, and Holmes (1996) studied “loving” dating couples for over a year and found “intimates who idealized one another appeared more prescient than blind; actually creating the relationships they wished for as romances progressed” (p. 1155). Focusing on the long-term benefits of positive illusions in dating relationships, they argued that positive illusions may be a romantic necessity. Murray (1999) expanded on the positive illusions as a predictor of well-being in relationships and what creates a sense of conviction for stabilizing less-than-perfect partners in romantic relationships. Murray claimed evidence is growing that suggests when individuals rid themselves of doubt and guard their convictions about the virtues of their partners they will be able to sustain satisfying relationships. However, certain realities can hinder this process such as not being able to transform faults into virtues (Murray & Holmes, 1993). Based on social construction literature, individuals may have a tendency to offer their romantic partners higher mates values than they would offer themselves, thus it is likely that all partner would report a negative MVD. However, does type of relationship impact report of MVD? The following research question is posed:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in MVD reports across relationship types?*Social Exchange and Mate Selection*

Individuals often evaluate others in terms of rewards versus costs determining who is rewarding or not (Deutsch, 1975). Berg and McQuinn (1986) highlighted Foa and Foa's (1974) categories of resources people exchange noting that all categories are not of equal importance. For example, exchanges of love and services lead to closer friendships than did exchanges of goods, money, or information (Berg & McQuinn, 1986). Individuals bring to a relationship their own resources, such as physical attractiveness, affection, and financial resources (Buss, 1988).

Niehuis, Huston, and Rosenband, (2006) contended that mate selection research encompasses the process of how two people court and commit to each other over time. Finding a mate can be viewed as a competition in which individuals use a variety of tactics to attract mates, especially if some characteristics are favored over others. Buss (1988) found such active tactics included increasing exposure to potential mates, displaying athleticism, showing off, being humorous and nice, and touching. Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield (1994) surveyed singles ranging from ages 19 to 35, and found good looks and youth are especially important to men in mate selection, while women prefer mates who offer economic potential. Ultimately, the degree to which a person possesses qualities that are desired by others determines mate selection. Buss (2006) stressed the idea that mate selection can vary depending on a variety of circumstances (e.g., long-term versus short-term goals). He stated, “...the characterization that men pursue a singular strategy of promiscuous mating while women pursue low-quantity monogamous mating is factually incorrect” (p. 690).

Figueredo, Sefcek, and Jones (2006) found individuals sought potential partners that were similar to themselves to some degree. Buss (1985) stated that perceptions of homophily is important in establishing relationships. People who are similar (e.g., level of attractiveness) are more likely to be attracted to each other. Zentner (2005) analyzed mate selection and the compatibility of unmarried romantic partners based on personality characteristics over the course of two studies, and found if partners perceive each other as being similar, they also viewed their relationships as being more satisfactory.

Interestingly, both sexes may overestimate what they think potential partners want in mates. Jacobi and Cash (1994) found women thought men preferred thin, muscular, large-breasted women, and men thought women preferred large men. In reality potential mates did not want physical characteristics to the extent in which individuals thought they did. Likewise, Frederick, Fessler, and Haselton (2005) stated men have a tendency to overestimate the degree of muscularity that is attractive to women, and women have a tendency to overestimate the degree of thinness that is most attractive to men. Overall, there may be a tendency for individuals to have skewed idea of what others' value in them as partners, and the difference in value between self and other is termed mate value discrepancy.

Only limited attention has focused on mate value discrepancy. MVD reflects an individual's own resources, desirability, or mate value, relative to that of the partner. MVD can influence mate retention. For example, partners with lower mate values might be at risk for losing their partners to potential alternatives (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). Buss and Shackelford (1997b) found that husbands who perceived their wives to be especially attractive reported tendencies to display resources and enhance appearance; they also sent out more verbal signals of possession and made intrasexual threats.

Not only do perceptions of mate value influence initial relational choices but it can also impact ongoing relationships. For instance, women who were married to men of higher mate value believed their husbands would have affairs in the next year, and they were likely to have affairs themselves (Buss & Shackelford, 1997b). MVD has the potential to influence behaviors and perceptions in romantic relationships over time. If we consider social construction research along with mate value, then there should be no difference between partners' reports of MVD, especially in committed, satisfactory relationships. Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

- H1a: There will be no significant difference in partners' report of MVD.
- H1b: There will be a significant difference between individuals' self-report of mate value and their partners' other-report of mate value.

Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction

Commitment is an essential aspect in the development of relationships (Rusbult, 1980; Sternberg, 1986), which Rusbult (1991) stated directly influences whether or not individuals decide to continue or terminate their relationships. Commitment can be viewed as a psychological experience of attachment, which is necessary for the continuation of a relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Rusbult, 1980). Thus, commitment can be considered critical for long-term stability in relationships (Kline & Stafford, 2004).

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Relationship satisfaction is also vital to the success of relationships, in that satisfying relationships are significant sources of social support and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and contribute to a better quality of life (Arriaga, 2001). Yum & Alicesteen (2005) defined relationship satisfaction as, “a complex factor that largely hinges on the circumstances of the relationship” (p. 13). One such circumstance to be considered is communication which is an essential key to the success of romantic relationships (Burleson & Denton, 1997; Sprecher, 2002). Moreover, partners themselves may contribute to relationship satisfaction. Securely attached individuals in romantic relationships tend to maintain higher levels of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and trust over time (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998).

As stated before, a negative MVD score indicates individuals perceive their partners as having higher mate value than themselves. When individuals perceive their partners as having a higher mate value than themselves, they should report being satisfied and committed to their relationships. Thus, there should be an inverse relationship between MVD and relationship satisfaction; and MVD and commitment:

H2: There will be an inverse relationship between MVD and the interpersonal variables: relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Moreover, since commitment may vary across the lifespan of a relationship (Kline & Stafford, 2004), that variance may impact MVD differently across relationship types. Therefore, the following research question is asked:

RQ2: Does commitment and relationship satisfaction impact MVD differently across relationship types?

Method

Participants and Procedure

For a dual perspective, 145 heterosexual romantic couples (N=290) made up the network sample for this study. Students, in an upper-level communication course at a mid-Atlantic university, were asked to participate if they were romantically involved. If they were not in a romantic relationship, the students could use their social networks and find couples to fill out the surveys¹. Each participant was given two surveys in separate envelopes with matching numbers. Each couple was asked to separately fill out the surveys, seal them in the envelopes and return them to the researchers or to the students to return to the researchers. The packets addressed individuals who were involved in some type of romantic relationship, ranging from casual dating (i.e. little or no commitment) to engagement/marriage (i.e. stabilized, long-term commitment). The remainder of the packets included a self- and other-report of mate value, self- and other-report of commitment, and a self-report of relationship satisfaction. Participants completed the packets outside of class and the students received minimal course credit.

¹ There is always concern about verifying who actually completed outside-of-class surveys. We attempted to maximize the veracity of reports by (a) weighing out-of-class participation minimally to avoid providing incentive for falsification, (b) allowing sufficient time for students to share the questionnaires with partners or couples, (c) comparing handwriting, and (d) noting some unsolicited comments on the returned participants' forms (several individuals wrote brief comments or clarifications in margins).

The female ($n=145$) participants' mean age was 28.66 ($SD=12.14$), range 18 to 66, and the mean age of the male ($n=145$) participants was 30.43 ($SD=12.40$), range 18 to 67. The mean length of casual relationships was 8.0 weeks ($SD=5.43$), serious dating relationships was 21.64 months ($SD=22.35$), and engaged/married relationships was 17.65 years ($SD=11.86$); and 16% of the participants were in casual dating relationships, 50.7% were in serious dating relationships, and 33.3% were engaged or married.

Measures

Mate Value. Participants responded to 14 items reflecting perceptions of their own and their partner's mate value. The original scale (Kugeares, 2002) was altered and on a 9-point, Likert-type scale, participants evaluated themselves and their romantic partners. The adapted mate value measure obtained a mean of 51.68 ($SD=7.56$), $\alpha=.78$ for other-report, a mean of 47.36 ($SD=9.12$), $\alpha=.89$ for the self-report version, and a MVD mean of -4.33 ($SD=10.71$) (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007). For females, the mate value measure had a mean of 52.8 ($SD=7.54$), $\alpha=.82$ for other-report, and a mean of 50.0 ($SD=7.20$), $\alpha=.85$ for the self-report version. For males, the mate value measure had a mean of 53.0 ($SD=6.83$), $\alpha=.78$ for other-report, and a mean of 49.9 ($SD=6.74$), $\alpha=.80$ for the self-report version. Females' MVD mean was -3.00 ($SD=8.07$) and males' mean was -3.07 ($SD=7.77$).

Commitment. Self- and other-report of commitment assessed relationship commitment (Samp and Solomon, 2001). On a 6-point, Likert-type scale, participants reported how committed they were in their relationships and how committed they perceived their partners to be to the relationships. Previous reliability was reported at .87 (Samp and Solomon, 2001). For females, self-report commitment had a mean of 21.7 ($SD=3.51$), $\alpha=.82$, and a mean of 21.01 ($SD=4.06$), $\alpha=.89$ for the other-report version. For males, self-report commitment had a mean of 21.14 ($SD=3.62$), $\alpha=.87$, and a mean of 21.65 ($SD=3.14$), $\alpha=.86$ for the other-report version.

Relationship Satisfaction. The Quality Marriage Index operationalized relationship satisfaction (Norton, 1983). Since participants reported on romantic relationships and not necessarily marriages, the first item of the measure was changed from "we have a good marriage" to "we have a good relationship". The reliability for the QMI measure was previously reported at .76 (Norton, 1983), and for the current study the mean for the 6-item measure was 38.14 ($SD=7.42$), $\alpha=.95$ for females and the mean was 37.58 ($SD=7.45$), $\alpha=.94$ for males.

Results

The first research question asked if MVD significantly differed across relationship types. Results of the first oneway ANOVA indicated significant MVD differences across three relationship types for females: casual dating ($M=.875$, $SD=11.31$), serious dating ($M=-3.69$, $SD=7.39$), and engaged/married ($M=-3.87$, $SD=6.65$), $F(2,144)=3.44$, $p=.05$. However, the Bonferroni *post hoc* test revealed MVD significantly differed ($p<.05$) between casual dating and serious dating relationships ($M=4.57$, $SD=1.87$), and between casual dating and engaged/married relationships ($M=4.75$, $SD=1.97$), but there was no significant difference between serious dating and engaged/married relationships ($p=1.0$). Females tended to report a positive MVD when the relationship was less involved.

Results of the second oneway ANOVA indicated significant MVD differences across three relationship types for males: casual dating ($M=1.08$, $SD=7.63$), serious dating ($M=-4.04$,

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$SD=7.30$), and engaged/married ($M=-3.68$, $SD=7.99$), $F(2,141)=4.34$, $p=.05$. However, Bonferroni *post hoc* test revealed MVD significantly differed ($p<.05$) between casual dating and serious dating relationships ($M=5.12$, $SD=1.78$), and between casual dating and engaged/married relationships ($M=4.77$, $SD=1.89$), but there was no significant difference between serious dating and engaged/married relationships ($p=1.0$). Males also reported a positive MVD when the relationship was less involved.

Hypothesis 1a examined partners' MVD to determine if no difference existed between the two reports. A paired samples t test indicated no difference in MVD report between female and male partners, $p=.959$. The hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 1b examined self- and other-report of mate value to determine if significant differences existed between self-report of one partner and other-report of the other partner. Results indicated significant differences for females and males. Females' self-report mate value differed from males' other-report mate value, $t(143)=-4.79$, $p<.0001$. Males' self-report mate value differed from females' other-report mate value, $t(143)=-4.39$, $p<.0001$. Both partners perceived their mates as having higher mate value. Hypothesis 1b was supported.

Hypothesis two stated participants report of MVD will be inversely related to perceptions of relationship satisfaction and commitment. A series of Pearson's correlations supported this hypothesis. For females' MVD and relationship satisfaction, $r=-.258$, $p<.05$; MVD and self-report of commitment, $r=-.297$, $p<.0001$; and MVD and other-report of commitment, $r=-.198$, $p<.05$. For males' MVD and relationship satisfaction, $r=-.397$, $p<.0001$; MVD and self-report commitment, $r=-.432$, $p<.0001$; and MVD and other-report commitment, $r=-.200$, $p<.05$. Both partners perceived their relationships as being satisfactory and committed when they also perceived their partners to have higher mate values than their own mate values.

A series of Fisher's z -tests further explored hypothesis two to determine if significant differences existed between male and female partners. The correlation between females' satisfaction and males' satisfaction was not significant ($z=1.35$, $p=.094$); females' self-report commitment and males' self-report commitment was not significant ($z=1.32$, $p=.094$); and females' other-report commitment and males' other-report commitment was also not significant ($z=.018$, $p=.493$).

To examine the first hypothesis more closely, a series of Pearson's correlations were analyzed across relationship types (see Table 1), and then Fisher's z -tests were utilized to determine if significant differences existed between male and female partners across relationship types. Only self-report commitment, in casual dating relationships, proved to differ between males and females ($z=2.29$, $p<.05$). All other correlations were not significant.

Research question two asked if self- and other-report of commitment and relationship satisfaction predicted MVD differently across the three relationship types. For females in casual dating relationships, a stepwise multiple regression revealed that the only significant predictor of perceptions of MVD was self-report commitment, $\beta=-.464$, $p<.05$. The regression indicated that the model including self-report commitment, $F(1, 22)=6.04$, $p<.05$, accounted for 18% ($R^2=.18$) of the variance in perceptions of MVD. For males in casual dating relationships, a stepwise multiple regression revealed that the only significant predictor of perceptions of MVD was self-report commitment, $\beta=-.591$, $p<.005$. The regression indicated that the model including self-report commitment, $F(1, 22)=11.83$, $p<.01$, accounted for 32% ($R^2=.32$) of the variance in perceptions of MVD.

For females in serious dating relationships, a stepwise multiple regression revealed that the only significant predictor of perceptions of MVD was self-report commitment, $\beta=-.208$,

$p < .05$. The regression indicated that the model including self-report commitment, $F(1, 71) = 3.97$, $p < .05$, accounted for 4% ($R^2 = .04$) of the variance in perceptions of MVD. For males in serious dating relationships, a stepwise multiple regression revealed that the only significant predictor of perceptions of MVD was self-report commitment, $\beta = -.478$, $p < .0001$. The regression indicated that the model including self-report commitment, $F(1, 71) = 19.84$, $p < .0001$, accounted for 20% ($R^2 = .20$) of the variance in perceptions of MVD.

Table 1: Correlations for Females' and Males' MVD with Self- and Other-Report Commitment and Relationship Satisfaction across Relationship Types

	Self-Report	Other-Report	Satisfaction
<u>Females</u>			
Casual Dating			
MVD	-.46***	-.23	-.45***
Serious Dating			
MVD	-.23***	-.06	-.09
Engaged/Married			
MVD	-.07	.09	-.15
<u>Males</u>			
Casual Dating			
MVD	-.59*	.20	-.48**
Serious Dating			
MVD	-.47*	-.24***	-.32**
Engaged/Married			
MVD	-.10	-.14	-.27***

* $p < .0001$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .05$

For engaged/married relationships, a multiple regression indicated no significant relationship for females ($p = .255$) or males ($p = .259$). Self- and other-report commitment and relationship satisfaction did not predict MVD in engaged/married relationships for either sex. Overall, self-report commitment predicted MVD for both partners in casual and serious dating relationships, but neither commitment nor relationship satisfaction predicted MVD in engaged/married relationships (see Table 2 for female and male means).

Discussion

The phrase “my better half” proved to be true in this study; however, both partners are the *better* half. This study examined romantic partners and their perceptions of mate value and MVD across relationship types. In general, both partners have a tendency to perceive their mates as having higher mate values than themselves. A closer examination of relationship types revealed both males and females only offered their mates a higher value in more committed relationships. Individuals in casual, dating relationships viewed themselves as having higher values than their partners. Future research should consider at what point in the relationship individuals transition from valuing the self more than their partners to valuing partners more than the self. Going beyond the role of commitment, we should also consider how love alters our perceptions of self and other.

Results also indicated a significant difference between individuals self-report mate value and partners’ other-report mate value. Previous research indicates MVD can impact ongoing relationships, for example, Buss & Shackelford (1997b) found when partners perceive their mates as having a higher mate value than themselves they also believe their partners are more likely to commit infidelity in the first year of marriage. Moreover, Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield’s (2007) MVD research revealed an inverse relationship between MVD and reports of jealousy. Individuals experience more jealousy when they report a negative MVD. Thus, it is important for partners to communicate how much they value their mates. Since individuals have a tendency to rate themselves lower than their mates it is paramount that they self-disclose their mate value perceptions to avoid any negative relational consequences. If we find out how much our partners value us, that in turn, could bolster how we view ourselves. Future research should examine the role self-disclosure plays in perceptions of mate value and whether or not individuals reveal how much they value their partners. If individuals openly communicate their perceptions of partner mate value, that may, in turn, deter the experience of negative feelings and attitudes such as jealousy and infidelity.

Moreover, as stated before, the more committed individuals are in relationships they more likely they will report a negative MVD. There was an inverse relationship for the interpersonal variables commitment and relationship satisfaction and MVD. Hence, when individuals value their mates more so than themselves, they will also be committed and satisfied in those relationships. This proved true for both sexes. Except for commitment in casual, dating relationships, in which men reported being more committed than women. Moreover, even though it was not significant, men also reported a slightly higher positive MVD than women in casual dating relationships. We may infer that commitment is more essential for women than men when it comes to offering their mates higher value than themselves. This follows along with previous research, Floyd and Wasner (1994) found that sex differences do exist in commitment reports in dating relationships. When it came to availability of possible relational alternatives, males perceived their availability to be much greater than the general female perception. If commitment does not affect a change in MVD for men as it does for women, then what does? This finding needs to be further explored with other interpersonal variables such as love or immediacy.

Lastly, we found only self-report commitment predicated MVD in casual and serious dating relationships. Based on the results, engaged/married couples may offer their partners’ higher values for reasons other than their perceptions of commitment and satisfaction, even

though they reported being the most committed and satisfied across relationship types². Therefore, there may be a ceiling effect for commitment in relationships. Once relationships have stabilized, commitment may be expected and no longer have an impact on partner perceptions. Hence, other interpersonal variables that may enhance mate value especially in long-term relationships when commitment no longer plays a role in perceptions of mate value. In terms of enhancing mate value it may be useful to determine if communication can add to perceptions of partner mate value. Duck and Pittman (1994) claimed that communication is a building block of interpersonal relationships, and therefore, satisfying interpersonal communication should promote relational development (Hecht, 1978). If communication aids in the longevity of relationships, it may also influence perceptions of mate value.

Study 2: Enhancing Mate Value

Intimacy often reflects how personal a relationship is between people. Duck (1991) highlighted that we sit closer to people whom we know than those we do not know, and are less polite when we are around friends, family, and romantic partners than others we hardly even know. “Conceptions of intimate sharing have referred to both verbal and nonverbal behaviors” (Prager, 1995, p. 21). For example, self-disclosure is part of verbal sharing and nonverbal sharing ranges from shared meaningful glances to shared sexuality (Prager, 1995). Ultimately, communication theory and research indicates that verbal and nonverbal messages function differently in the communication process (Burgoon, 1994). Essentially, verbal messages convey the content of a message whereas nonverbal messages help to establish the overall relationship between interactants (Burgoon, 1994; Mehrabian, 1971). The second study determined if perceptions of partners’ nonverbal immediacy and communication satisfaction serve to enhance mate value in ongoing romantic relationships.

Nonverbal Immediacy

Mehrabian (1967) defined immediacy as “the degree of directness and intensity of interaction between a communicator and the object of his communication” (p. 414). Displays of immediacy behaviors are signaled through nonverbal communication, and include close proximity, gazing, smiling, and touching (Hinkle, 1999). These nonverbal immediacy behaviors are approach behaviors that promote intimacy and communicate psychological closeness (Myers & Ferry, 2001). Immediacy behaviors tend to be presented unconsciously and individuals may be unaware of the messages they are sending (Hinkle, 1999). Whether intentional or unintentional, Myers and Ferry (2001) found nonverbal immediacy plays a significant part in our daily communication interactions and may be an indication of an individual’s incentive to communicate.

We can observe nonverbal immediacy in many different relational contexts. Guerrero (1997) established that many nonverbal immediacy cues are far more prevalent in romantic

² A post hoc analysis examined self-report commitment and relationship satisfaction across relationship types. A oneway ANOVA indicated significant differences for females’ self-report commitment across relationship types, $F(2,147)=14.03, p<.0001$; and also for males’ self-report of commitment across relationship types, $F(2,146)=65.53, p<.0001$. A oneway ANOVA also revealed significant differences for females’ report of relationship satisfaction across relationship types, $F(2,147)=6.82, p<.001$; and also for males’ report of relationship satisfaction across relationship types, $F(2,147)=20.69, p<.0001$.

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relationships than in friendships. Still, the use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors can be observed in different types of interpersonal relationships. Although this is true, the idea that nonverbal immediacy suggests intimacy and affection as well as signals availability for communication, demonstrates the prevalence in the romantic relationship context. Previous research found that individuals within the context of intimate relationships have the highest use of the majority of nonverbal immediacy behaviors (Myers & Ferry, 2001). Duck (1991) noted lovers will gaze at each other at least eight times longer than strangers do during silent moments. Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, and Altemus (2006) found more sexual cues such as licking, touching of the lips, and puckering of the lips in more loving relationships. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Perceptions of partner nonverbal immediacy will significantly differ across romantic relationship types.

Communication Satisfaction

Having and maintaining communication satisfaction within a relationship is a long, difficult process (Thomas, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). Allen and Thompson (1984) explored agreement, understanding, realization, and feeling understood in marital dyads and found that agreement and feelings of being understood were the greatest predictors of communication satisfaction in marital dyads. Moreover, Ebesu Hubbard (2001) researched conflict between relationally uncertain romantic partners and discovered when a partner was responsive, in a conflict, to dominance they also experienced communication satisfaction. Results also showed general and specific communication satisfaction increased as the relationship developed and when the disengaging phase was reached, they decreased. Ultimately communication satisfaction may be contextual in nature and vary across romantic relationship types. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2: Perceptions of communication satisfaction will significantly differ across relationship types.

Lastly, in Study 1, it was determined that commitment did not impact perceptions of MVD or partner mate value in engaged/married relationships. As stated in the first study, there may be a ceiling effect for commitment in relationships. Once relationships have stabilized, commitment may be expected and no longer have an impact on partners' perceptions. Therefore, it is important to consider other relational variables such as nonverbal immediacy and communication satisfaction.

RQ1: Do perceptions of partner nonverbal immediacy and communication satisfaction influence perceptions of partner mate value?

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 199 ($n=72$ males, $n=126$ females, $n=1$ no response) romantically involved

individuals made up the network sample for the second study. The procedures employed in the first study were also used in this study. The packets included a self- and other-report of mate value, and other-report of communication satisfaction and nonverbal immediacy. The participants' mean age was 25.07 ($SD=10.64$), range 18 to 63, and the partners' mean age was 25.99 ($SD=11.07$), range 18 to 70. The mean length for casual relationships was 5.69 weeks ($SD=1.28$), serious dating relationships was 30.15 months ($SD=22.35$), and engaged/ married relationships was 11.81 years ($SD=7.90$). Twenty-six participants were in casual dating relationships, 109 were in serious dating relationships, 58 were in engaged/married relationships, and six offered no response.

Measures

Nonverbal Immediacy. The 26-item Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Observer Report reflects specific low inference immediacy behaviors. Responses are solicited using a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from *very often* (5) to *never* (1). Richmond, McCroskey, and Johnson (2003) reported reliabilities ranging from .90 to .93. For this study $\alpha=.85$ ($M=107$, $SD=11.71$).

Communication Satisfaction. The 19-item Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory, developed by Hecht (1978), is a 7-point, Likert-type scale (1=*strongly agree*, 7=*strongly disagree*). Madlock (2006) reported reliability of .90 ($M=92.75$, $SD=14.1$), and for the current study $\alpha=.86$ ($M=105.97$, $SD=16.02$).

Mate Value. The mate value measure had a mean of 52.51 ($SD=7.09$), $\alpha=.79$ for other-report, a mean of 49.85 ($SD=6.54$), $\alpha=.80$ for the self-report version, and MVD mean was -2.54 ($SD=7.07$), range -27 to 20.

Results

Hypothesis one indicated perceptions of partner nonverbal immediacy will significantly differ across the three relationship types: casual dating, serious dating, and engaged/married. A oneway ANOVA revealed partner nonverbal immediacy significantly differed across relationship types, $F(2, 191) 3.15$, $p<.05$; for casual dating relationships ($M=107.69$, $SD=8.92$), serious dating ($M=109.43$, $SD=11.51$), and engaged/married ($M=104.73$, $SD=12.72$). A Bonferroni *post hoc* procedure indicated only individuals in serious dating relationships significantly differed ($p<.05$) in perceptions of partner nonverbal immediacy from those in engaged/married relationships ($M=4.7$, $SD=1.87$). Hypothesis one was partially supported.

Hypothesis two suggested reports of communication satisfaction with partners would significantly differ across relationship types. A oneway ANOVA found no significant differences, $p=.192$; for casual dating relationships ($M=101.76$, $SD=11.65$), serious dating ($M=107.79$, $SD=14.64$), and engaged/married ($M=105.32$, $SD=18.55$). Hypothesis two was not supported.

Research question one asked if nonverbal immediacy and communication satisfaction would increase perceptions of partner mate value in romantic relationships. A stepwise multiple regression revealed that the only significant predictor of perceptions of partner mate value was communication satisfaction, $\beta=.634$, $p<.0001$. The regression indicated that the model including communication satisfaction $F(1,190)=107.62$, $p<.0001$, accounted for 36% ($R^2=.36$) of the variance in perceptions of partner mate value. Thus, only communication satisfaction enhanced perceptions of partner mate value.

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To further explore this question we also examined it across the three relationship types. A series of stepwise multiple regressions also indicated that the only significant predictor of perceptions of partner mate value was communication satisfaction for the three relationship types. For casual dating $F(1,23)=9.46, p<.005, R^2=.29$; serious dating $F(1, 106)=51.37, p<.0001, R^2=.33$; and engaged/married $F(1,54)=46.16, p<.0001, R^2=.46$. A closer examination of variables indicated that communication satisfaction was a greater predictor of perceptions of partner mate value in more committed relationships: for casual dating $\beta=.54, p<.005$; serious dating, $\beta=.571, p<.0001$; and engaged/married, $\beta=.679, p<.0001$.

Discussion

Study 2 proved communication matters over the lifespan of romantic relationships. Regardless of romantic relationship type, communication satisfaction influenced perceptions of partner mate value. This follows along with previous communication research, for example, Zunin (1972) suggested the first four minutes of a communication episode in an initial interaction predicts the length and quality of the relationship. Even later on in the relationship, the initial communication episode after a couple reunites after the separation of a workday can also predict the quality of the relationship. Communication satisfaction did not significantly differ across relationship types which may mean not matter how involved a relationship is it is critical for individuals to be satisfied with the communication that occurs within the current relational stage. Even though communication satisfaction proved to influence perceptions of partner mate value, it had the greatest impact in the more stabilized relationships.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for Females' and Males' MVD, Self- and Other Report Commitment, and Relationship Satisfaction across Relationship Types

	MVD		Self-Report		Other-Report		Satisfaction	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u>Females</u>								
Casual	.875	11.31	18.62	4.54	16.92	5.31	26.00	7.57
Serious	-3.43	7.69	22.12	2.82	21.05	3.45	29.97	5.22
Engaged/ Married	-3.88	6.64	22.69	3.13	22.77	2.69	31.28	6.02
<u>Males</u>								
Casual	1.08	7.62	15.87	3.65	18.58	3.37	23.33	6.55
Serious	-3.89	7.36	21.35	2.66	21.57	2.84	29.39	5.92
Engaged/ Married	-3.89	7.95	23.34	1.90	23.38	2.03	32.51	3.82

Interestingly, even though perceptions of partner nonverbal immediacy varied across relationship types, it had no impact in the way individuals perceived their partners' mate value.

Even though people become more nonverbally immediate as relationships progressed and then decreased slightly in more stabilized relationships, it did not affect their mate value. Increases and decreases in nonverbal immediacy may be expected as relationships move forward and therefore offer no impact on mate value. Future research may consider nonverbal immediacy expectancy violations. What happens to perceptions of partner mate value when their level of nonverbal immediacy is unexpected? Individuals who progress too slowly or too quickly may negatively affect the way their partners perceive their mate value.

Limitations and Conclusions

Overall, in ongoing, committed relationships, individuals had a tendency to offer their partners higher mate values than themselves. Even though both studies considered various types of relationships and sampled couples across the lifespan, neither study necessarily included dysfunctional couples, which may be a limitation. In terms of happiness alone, all couples reported being relatively happy with their relationships (for study 1, females $M=8.26$, $SD=1.62$, and for males, $M=8.21$, $SD=1.55$). Dysfunctional or unhappy couples may have very different perceptions of mate value. Moreover, Study 1 only examined heterosexual couples and Study 2 did not ask partner's sex. It may be useful to explore same-sex romantic relationships to determine if they have similar perceptions of mate value.

Since there seemed to be a ceiling effect for commitment and its impact on perceptions of partner mate value in the first study, the second study examined other interpersonal variables and their impact on partner mate value. Essentially, communication satisfaction proved to influence perceptions of partner mate value. Hence, when individuals are satisfied with their partner's communication they are likely value them more as well. Even though we may enter relationships with a certain level of mate value, our communication skills may offer opportunities to enhance how our partners perceive our mate value over the lifespan of the relationships.

From a social constructionist perspective how people create their sense of self is based on attributions from their own perspectives as well as from their mates and from others (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1985). In more established relationships perceptions from others outside of the relationship become less important. Hence, the partners are more concerned about the co-construction of "us" rather than "you" or "me". As commitment grows in a loving relationship partners start to attribute more positive values and feelings towards their mates and away from themselves. The positive attributions of their "better halves" perpetuates a social construction of the relationship that allows it to continue to deepen. Whereas, partners in less committed relationships are able to still test the rewards of being in the relationship with someone with positive mate values versus the cost of staying with someone with a negative mate value. The value placed upon partners also indicates the importance of trust in relationships. Mates who viewed partners as having a higher value perceived the ability of a partner to cheat as a real threat. This draws our attention to the importance of communicating expectations and working together to co-create relationships open to trust. Ultimately, it may be concluded that the feelings partners share with each other impact mate value at any point in romantic relationships.

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