Introduction

> Seldom or never does a marriage develop into an individual relationship, smoothly and without crises. There is no birth of consciousness without pain.
>
> —C. G. Jung

A great deal of publicity has been given to the fact that more adults in western societies are remaining single than in the past, and that rates of cohabitation are continuing to rise. In fact, some writers have gone so far as to extrapolate from these recent trends, and to conclude that marriage is becoming an unpopular and outdated institution. Nevertheless, studies show that most young people still see marriage and children as an important part of their future, and still view marriage as playing a crucial role in meeting their needs for companionship and emotional security.

Consistent with this viewpoint, Waite and Gallagher (2000) present empirical support for the proposition that there are several major advantages to marriage. First, married men and women tend to enjoy better mental and physical health than the unmarried. Second, married men and women are likely to have more assets and income than the unmarried, with marriage even being described as a "wealth-enhancing institution" (Hao, 1996). Third, married people have more and better sex than the unmarried. Fourth, children of married parents also enjoy a number of advantages, including better physical and mental health, and higher levels of education and career success.

Although marriage has clear implications for individuals' general sense of well-being, it is important to remember that the essence of the marital relationship lies in the day-to-day interactions in which married couples engage. Marital interactions are, of course, immensely varied,

sometimes dealing with the more mundane aspects of married life, and sometimes involving highly emotional issues that may be either positive or negative in tone. As the quotation from Jung suggests, however, even negative interactions can be important in promoting growth toward a healthy and satisfying marriage.

In their discussion of close relationships, Kelley and his colleagues (1983) refer to interaction as "the give and take between two persons," involving regularities and recurrent patterns of behavior. A similar but somewhat more technical definition is offered by McLintock (1983), who has defined interaction as "a sequence of causally interconnected events within the behavior chains of two people" (p. 71).

McLintock (1983) notes that, in order to systematically understand couple relationships, researchers must not only describe the interactional regularities that characterize those relationships, but also explain these patterns by identifying causal factors and processes. As this position implies, understanding interaction involves studying the *couple* as a unit. In contrast to an individual perspective on behavior, the study of couple interaction recognizes that there is an intricate system that connects the two relationship partners and that needs to be understood. This system encompasses the psychological realities of both husband and wife, and hence, issues of agreement and understanding between partners are also relevant. As these concepts of agreement and understanding imply, the emphasis on interaction does not mean that couple relationships can be understood purely in terms of observable behavior. Rather, as we shall see throughout this book, cognition and emotion are also major components of the system that connects marital partners to one another.

The earliest attempts to formally study couple relationships focused primarily on issues of attraction and mate selection, rather than on the everyday aspects of couple interaction. For example, Harris's (1912) work on assortative mating was essentially a review of statistical facts about the mating process. By the 1930s, however, a number of researchers (such as E. L. Kelly, Terman, and Burgess) were beginning to explore the notion of marital success, and to apply longitudinal methods to this area of research.

A major shift in the study of couple processes came with the early observational research, such as that of Raush, Weiss, Gottman, and their colleagues (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Gottman, 1979; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). Although some of this early work involved audiotaping and coding of transcribed utterances, there is no

doubt that the advent of the video recorder made this work more feasible, and promoted the development of relatively complex systems for coding couple interaction. In fact, under the impetus of these technological advances, behavioral observation became the "gold standard" for work on relationship processes, with the result that cognitive and emotional processes tended to be largely ignored.

By contrast, as the work in the present volume illustrates, many recent studies of marital interaction have incorporated measures of cognition and emotion, as well as behavior. This current trend reflects the growing recognition of several key points: that close relationships are intensely emotional in nature, that our emotions are often driven by how we perceive and interpret events, and hence, that emotion, cognition, and behavior are inextricably linked. This recognition has led to the widespread consensus that multiple methods are essential for developing a complete understanding of marital processes. For example, studies reported in this volume include such diverse methods as self-report questionnaires, structured diary records, physiological recordings, and behavioral observation.

In preparing this volume, we had three interrelated goals. The first of these was to bring together the exciting research on marital interaction being conducted in a number of key centers, focusing particularly on new trends in the area. Our second goal was to highlight the theoretical underpinnings of recent work on marriage; as we note throughout this book, recent theoretical advances enable researchers to develop and test specific predictions about marital processes and outcomes. Third, we wanted to explore the implications of recent findings for the practice of couple enrichment and therapy. As Holmes and Boon (1990) pointed out roughly a decade ago, the study of interactional processes in marriage has developed to the point where theorizing about relationships, and the research findings that follow from those theories, can provide a basis for significant progress in programs of education, counseling, and therapy.

We have organized the chapters in this volume into six sections that draw out the major themes emerging from recent research. We acknowledge that the divisions we have made are to some extent a matter of convenience, and that there are overlapping themes. It is also important to note that the introductions to each section provide additional information about each of the chapters.

The first section deals with the effect of cognitions on couple interaction patterns; the chapters in this section include work on attributions

for partners' behavior, on how spouses process feedback about their own and their partner's strengths and weaknesses, and on spouses' thoughts about one another during their conflict interactions. The second section focuses on the role of positive marital interaction, including such issues as individual differences in expressions of love and intimacy, the importance of partners' adopting a communal norm for meeting each other's needs, and the effects of shared involvement in novel and challenging activities. The third section explores how partners cope with instances of disappointment, criticism, and betrayal in their relationships. In particular, the chapters in this section contrast constructive and destructive ways of responding to negative relationship events. The following section also deals with negative relationship events, but with regard to issues of power, conflict, and violence. These chapters explore the nature of the complex links among communication, emotion, and violence. The fifth section describes marital interaction patterns at important transition periods in the marital lifecycle, from first-time parenthood to caregiving for an elderly spouse. Such transition periods generally require spouses to negotiate major changes to their lifestyles and their patterns of interaction. The final section deals with interventions for strengthening marital relationships. These chapters suggest ways in which couples can be assisted in communicating more effectively and working toward achieving their relationship goals.

In brief, the chapters in this book represent some of the best scholarship in the expanding area of couple interaction. This volume is unique because we have assembled eminent researchers whose latest work reflects the enormous breadth of research on marital processes. The new procedures and findings presented in the book provide a strong case for further research that is theoretically based, rigorous in its methodology, and provides a basis for the development of programs of education and intervention.

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SECTION ONE

THE EFFECT OF COGNITION ON INTERACTION PATTERNS

Introduction to Section One

One feature of the study of marital relationships over the past 20 years has been a focus, not just on couple behaviors, but on the cognitive processes that may drive those behaviors. A wide range of cognitive processes have been studied including appraisals, attributions, beliefs, standards, expectations, rules, perceptions of intention, and subjective interpretations of ongoing interaction. (Some of these cognitive processes are discussed further in the section on coping with disappointment, criticism, and betrayal.) These cognitive processes can be even more powerful than observed behaviors in discriminating between satisfied and dissatisfied couples. The chapters in this section illustrate something of this diversity of cognitive processes and their impact on marital relationships.

Although attributions have been frequently studied by marital researchers, a novel aspect of Manusov's work is its exploration of couples' attributions for their partner's nonverbal behavior, and the effect of these attributions on their own nonverbal behavior. As she notes, one of the intriguing aspects of nonverbal communication is its ability to be interpreted in a myriad of ways. Spouses' interpretations of their partner's nonverbal communication are likely to be affected by many factors including their level of relationship satisfaction. An innovative feature of Manusov's work is the recruitment of one member of each couple to act as a confederate who is instructed to use particular kinds of nonverbal behavior in structured interactions with their spouse. This approach ensures that clear examples of positive and negative behavior are displayed by couples, irrespective of marital satisfaction. In earlier research, Manusov found that satisfied couples made more relationship-enhancing attributions for partners' nonverbal behavior than dissatisfied couples (for example, attributing positive

communication to more internal, stable, and global factors; attributing equally positive motives to the partner as to themselves).

In the new research reported in this chapter Manusov focuses on the link between attributions for partners' nonverbal behavior and the emotion displayed by the attributor. Spouses who made relationship-enhancing attributions for their partner's behavior tended to display positive facial and vocal cues; conversely, those who made distress-maintaining attributions tended to display cues indicative of discomfort in the interaction. This study provides evidence that spouses' interpretations of their partners' behaviors have a powerful effect on their responses to those behaviors, with the links between attributional patterns and nonverbal cues being particularly strong for positive behavior.

Neff and Karney take a different approach to considering the types of feedback that spouses give to, and receive from, one another. This approach focuses on the roles and characteristics that spouses assume within the relationship, and the processes by which they come to understand and accept each other's relational identities. Neff and Karney focus on self-evaluation motives, noting that two views have emerged in the literature about the type of feedback that enhances relationship quality. On the one hand, self-enhancement theory proposes that individuals prefer positive feedback, assuring them of their partner's positive regard. On the other hand, self-verification theory argues that individuals prefer feedback that accurately mirrors their own self-perceptions, even when those perceptions are relatively negative. Although many researchers have seen these two views as in opposition to each other, Neff and Karney suggest that both enhancement and verification processes are important to successful relationships.

Central to their position is the argument that motives to be enhanced or verified operate at different levels of abstraction. Specifically, enhancement motives seem to operate at a global level; in other words, people generally want their spouses to affirm them as worthwhile people. In contrast, verification motives operate at the specific level, with spouses wanting partners to understand them and agree with their own views of their various strengths and weaknesses.

Neff and Karney report on two studies of married couples, in which they tested the prediction that the happiest spouses would be those whose partners provided them with both global affirmation and specific understanding. These studies confirmed that satisfied spouses were accurate in their perceptions at the specific level and positive at the global