

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Couples Conflict Study

I. How does he/she describe the relationship? (warm up; 1st 5 minutes)

- When you think about your relationship to _____(partner) what's the first thing that comes to your mind?
- What's the best/worst thing about your relationship right now?
- Would your answers (best, worst) have been different 6 months ago (a year ago?)

Negotiation and conflict resolution process (15 min)

- *Think about the conflict that you and _____ have, what do you tend to have conflict about?*
- *Think about times when you have conflict about _____ (as mentioned above), what happens? What do you/he do? (process)*
- How would you like to handle that situation? What do you think is going on that you handle it this way instead of that way.....(How does this make sense; is this a skill deficit?)
- What has changed about the way you and your partner deal with conflict since you were first together? What do you think accounts for the change? (change over time)

Use of and motivation for using power, control, coercion (20 min)

- *Think about a time when you want to do something/ think one way and [partner] wants to do it another: What things do you do when you want _____ to do something/or think your way? How do you try to influence him? How does he respond to that? What happens when its something you both feel really strongly about?*
- *Think about a time when he wants you to do something/ think his way What does he do to try to get you to change your way? How does that affect you when he does _____? How do you respond?*

- *Think about a time when you felt that _____ was trying to make you do something his way*
Have you ever felt that he tried to force/bully you? What was that like? What happened?
 - *If yes to above* When did this type of behavior first begin in your relationship? How do you account for the change? What was it like before? How do you make sense of what happens when he tries to bully you?
 - Are there times when you have differences about how things should go and nobody bullies?
 - Has the way you try to influence each other changed over time? (change over time)
- Do you ever feel like your partner tries to control you? If yes, how does that work? What does he do that makes you feel controlled by him?

Making sense of the violence. (20 min)

- When there has been some pushing or shoving, who is more likely to start it? How does it usually end? When did the first incident happen? How had it evolved from that incident? (change over time; process)
- *Think about a time when you have gotten physical with _____. [pushed; shoved; grabbed]:* What do you think was going on with you at the time? What makes you decide to be violent? (process; motivation)
- *Think about an incident when he has gotten physical with you.* What do you think was going on for him when he _____ [pushed, shoved] you? Why do you think he get to that point? Why do you think he chooses to be violent? (process; motivation)
 - What impact does it have on you when things get physical? How does it affect your relationship, level of commitment? (impact)

APPENDIX B

Selecting Couples' Interviews for Research

Eliminated couples

Couple 001 (Blacksburg) is an engaged couple with evidence of a lack of trust, automatic arousal followed by exhaustion, commitment, rejection, withdrawal, insecurity and threats of abandonment coexist with violence. Female is strong, independent and controlling, according to fiancé, who complains of a lack of affection. Verbal abuse is present. Here, however, there seems to be an overpowering desire for control on the part of the male, which overshadows the significant attachment issues.

Couple 002 (Blacksburg) is a couple who are emotionally disengaged. The woman suffered abuse and abandonment as a child, and is struggling to do better with her own children. She has a family heavily impacted by legal issues, parentless children, and a sixteen year old son she says is more like a brother. Her partner cheats on her and her own mental health is of course, suffering. She is constantly telling her partner to leave. He complains that he is physically abused by his wife, and says that her bingo games and money cause their fights. It is hard to see either partner as a secure base for the other.

Couple 002 (NVC) had explosive violence and control issues that were so dominant that the focus of the interview did not indicate that working on attachment issues would enable this couple to resolve their conflicts. Class and cultural differences were included in partners' complaints about one another.

Couple 003 (Blacksburg) are physically and verbally hurtful to each other. The issues are heavily control and power related, although there are some attachment markers. There are examples of alcohol abuse, past trauma, lack of secure base, dependency, criticism that has eroded self-esteem, disregard for feelings, inequality and degradation of the wife. There is depression, threats of abandonment, and evidence of the intergenerational transmission of violence.

Couple 004 (Blacksburg) are newlyweds suffering financial stress. The husband appears to be the caretaker. Drinking, avoidance of intimacy, jealousy, and wife's attacks seem to come from insecurity about where the husband has been. Wife is hypervigilant, lacks self-esteem, and requires close proximity, so her husband's autonomy is limited. There is a lack of sexual intimacy and trust. He nags and is treated like a boy, in an unbalanced relationship with an emphasis on control.

Couple 007 (NVC) is a recent match that occurred via the internet. The husband, sees himself as a caretaker, but appears enmeshed with his mother, and is very controlling. The wife, a woman with financial problems, has a son and emotional issues he preys upon. The partner is eroding her self-esteem with critical remarks, highlighting dependent personality issues which overshadow their insecure attachment.

Couple 008 (NVC) were eliminated because the husband makes it clear he has never claimed to have a loving commitment to his partner, and barely engages in the relationship.

They conflict over religion, the wife's dependency issues and the man's sense of entitlement. It was a very brief interview without much description.

Couple 010 (NVC) was eliminated because the couple is struggling primarily with control issues and language problems are a barrier to clear understanding in the interview. Neither partner seemed to have had any role model.

Couple 014 (NVC) was eliminated because they struggle primarily with verbal abuse, not physical violence. The wife's language limitations are a major irritant for the husband, and somewhat of a barrier in the interview. It seems that cultural and social class are at the center of their misunderstandings with power and control at the heart of their arguments over money.

Couple 017 (NVC) was eliminated because power and control on the part of the male outweighed limited disturbed attachment. The gender focus of the violence can be attributed to entitlement on the part of the husband. In addition, answers given in this interview were very disjointed and often vague.

Selected Couples

Couple 001 (NVC) have described significant emotional abuse fueled by alcohol, with less emphasis on physical violence, but definitely the use of fear, manipulation and control. They demonstrate a lack of reciprocity in caretaking. There is cruelty, frustration, jealousy, insecurity, withdrawal, communication problems, abandonment behaviors, lack of trust, dependency issues and yet, a sexual closeness. They have known previous abuse before marriage.

Couple 005 (BLACKSBURG) have serious attachment issues around trust, autonomy, cautiousness, miscommunication, withdrawal, jealousy, lack of reciprocity and depression. There is even evidence of being triggered by a partner's affect (automatic arousal) and interference with a partner's self-soothing activities.

Couple 013 (NVC) were both physically assaultive with each other in the past. Now they are more upset by their verbal abuse of each other. Lots of attachment markers are verbalized here. There are examples of internal working models, automatic arousal, lack of reciprocity in domestic chores juxtaposed against a commitment to each other, and a hopefulness founded on recent, positive change complicated by husband's use of marijuana to self-medicate against anger.

Couple 016 (NVC) are caught up in the husband's overwhelming neediness and demand for his wife's attention. He cannot grant her autonomy, is jealous of the time she spends with grandchildren, and is perpetually insecure. His need to win, and his attachment needs cause frustration that erupts in violence. Emotional abuse is mutual, and when he yells, she withdraws, increasing the escalation. There is a history of previous abuse.

Couple 019 (NVC) both partners share control issues complicated by alcohol and drugs, as well as attachment problems. Both have internal working models of angry parental relationships, and there is serious violence in the marriage. They use avoidance, fear, withdrawal and show a lack of caretaking toward each other. They engage in verbal abuse, hold grudges, and are not differentiated from their families. The husband's interview is less descriptive than his wife's.

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Educational Background 1968-2004

August 2004 - M.S. in Human Development from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Falls Church, VA. Original research on Attachment and Intimate Personal Violence, defended July 28, 2004.

May 1971 – M.A. in English Literature from Northeastern Illinois University.

June 1968 - B.A. in the English Education from the University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana.

Clinical Background 2003-2004

Nine months of clinical experience at the Center for Family Services and Loudoun County Mental Health, as a therapist-intern completed May 2004.

Completed over 600 client-contact hours, derived from live sessions with supervision behind the mirror, a clinical internship at LCMH, and volunteer work with adolescents and homeless women and children.

Academic Studies

Completed two courses in play therapy in addition to courses in theory, clinical technique, ethics and the law, life span development, couples therapy, family group therapy, substance abuse/domestic violence, sex therapy and medical family therapy.

Additional Life Experiences

1986-2000 - President, Creative Corporate Gifts, LLC (marketing)

1973-1974 - Substitute English Teacher in Washington, DC for the Capitol Hill School for Senate Pages

1968-1973 – Chicago Board of Education, High School English Teacher

Professional Memberships

University of Illinois Alumni Association, AAMFT (American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists). Brandeis University Volunteer Women, American Association of University Women

Volunteer Experiences

2003-2004 – Clinical internship at Loudoun County Mental Health Outpatient Clinic (20+ hours a week).

2002-2003 - Co-facilitating teen talk group and a women's issues talk group at the Embry Rucker Homeless Shelter in Reston.

Summer 2002 - Data collection and test scoring for statistical research at the Kellar Center for Abused Children's Center with Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

2001 - Fairfax County CSB - Northwest Mental Health Center volunteer support for the Adolescent Day Treatment Program once a week (with emotionally-impaired teens).

2000 - Spearheaded community campaign, with the support of AAUW members, to increase awareness of the underfunding of Fairfax County women's shelters, and insured \$300,000 was added to the Fairfax County budget to increase shelter beds.

1994-1999 - Founded a medical research fund/ website/international support group for parents and victims of ARVD. Help raise awareness of the ARVD Registry of the United States.

Past interests included community volunteer work for the Donaldson Run Pool and Taylor Elementary School PTA

Personal

I have been a resident of the Washington, DC metropolitan area for the past 30 years and raised my family in Virginia. I have a strong interest in art, crafts, reading, writing and public speaking, and reside in Reston, VA. You are welcome to email lstoppel@vt.edu to communicate further.