

2013

# Understanding How Deciding and Relationship Confidence Predict Relationship Satisfaction

Elise M. Yoshida  
*Claremont McKenna College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Yoshida, Elise M., "Understanding How Deciding and Relationship Confidence Predict Relationship Satisfaction" (2013). *CMC Senior Theses*. Paper 685.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc\\_theses/685](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/685)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE**  
**UNDERSTANDING HOW DECIDING AND RELATIONSHIP CONFIDENCE**  
**PREDICT RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

SUBMITTED TO  
PROFESSOR COOK  
AND  
DEAN GREGORY HESS  
BY  
ELISE YOSHIDA

FOR  
SENIOR THESIS  
SPRING 2013

4/22/13



**Table of Contents**

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Method	12
Results	15
Discussion	16
References	26
Appendix	29
Tables	30

### Abstract

This study examines how gender, deciding, and relationship confidence predict romantic relationship satisfaction using the Relationship Deciding Scale (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). Deciding refers to the thoughtfulness regarding the decisions made in and about relationships. Relationship confidence is the confidence a person has toward their ability to maintain a healthy relationship and handle conflicts in the relationship. Using an online survey, participants (age range: 18-22 years) answered questions about relationship confidence, deciding, and relationship satisfaction. They rated relationship satisfaction using their most recent relationship, so single people were included in the study. Multiple regression determined that deciding and relationship confidence positively predict relationship satisfaction for both sexes. Relationship confidence predicts above and beyond gender and deciding. Men were more satisfied than women.

*Keywords:* relationship satisfaction, decision making, relationship confidence, romantic relationship

## Understanding How Deciding and Relationship Confidence Predict Relationship Satisfaction

Being in a satisfying relationship has been found to be an important component to maintaining and improving future life satisfaction. Dydral, Røysamb, Nes, and Vittersø (2011) showed that there was a strong positive association between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. With life satisfaction and general happiness being a relatively common goal for individuals, research on variables that contribute to happiness is relevant to improving quality of life for every person. Knowing that having a stable and satisfying relationship is a key component to overall life satisfaction means that what contributes to creating fulfilling relationships should be explored. By exploring how to influence relationship satisfaction positively, the findings could subsequently improve people's general happiness. This study's purpose was to look into how specific factors predict greater relationship satisfaction.

The structure of relationships has changed drastically over the last half century. Rather than being a straightforward process, the dating and relationship world has devolved into a process that is ambiguous and lacks an obvious route of development. The ambiguity that now defines the relationship process means that people are not sure when a relationship starts because there is no definitive progression. People can now just "slide" into relationships. Sliding indicates a lack of conscious decision making. Now people can slide past important relationship transitions without ever having to determine if they are ready for or even want to take the next step in the process (Manning & Smock, 2005). In the case of this study, these couples gradually entered cohabitation without reflecting on the decision that they made to live together. Lindsay (2000) found that many couples moved in together due to rationality rather than romance and that they

found themselves cohabiting because it simply happened as opposed to being a planned course of action. This lack of active decision making can apply to other important relationship transitions besides entering a relationship or moving in, such as having sex or getting married. Decisions like these used to necessitate active decision making and were not taken so lightly. Now, they hold less weight in our current culture so that sliding is a much more commonplace experience (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012).

The idea and experience of sliding into relationships is distressing because young adults may remain in bad relationships as a result of the inertia a relationship has gained due to the lack of decision making. Once constraints, like pregnancy, marriage, or cohabiting, have been added to a relationship, the momentum from these actions keeps moving people forward in the relationship even if they may not want to. Transitioning through these constraints can contribute to the perpetuation of a relationship regardless of the couple's commitment to the relationship, relationship problems, or fit of the couple (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Sliding through important relationship transitions without completely understanding the consequences can allow unhealthy relationships to continue (Stanley et al., 2006). Furthermore, this progression of lack of deciding can lead to marriages that are event-driven, like pregnancy or financial concerns. Marriages that are event-driven experience more conflict than those that come about due to positive aspects of a relationship (Surra, Chandler, Asmussen, & Wareham, 1987). By not actively deciding and sliding through transitions, relationships have a higher risk for undesirable consequences.

Besides an individual's propensity for deciding and making active choices, there are other factors that may lead to people staying in bad relationships. Parental conflict

and divorce may influence a young adult's view on commitment and relationships, which might lead to lower relationship satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010). A strong association between family of origin relationships and romantic relationships is a likely indicator of a person's ability to maintain a healthy relationship. Having a negative opinion of marriage or intimate relationships due to parents' divorce or conflicts is positively associated with a weaker level of dedication to relationships, which is ultimately linked to lower relationship quality (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Additionally, Cui and Fincham (2010) found that young adults with divorced parents possess a less positive attitude toward marriage and greater conflict behavior towards their partner. Roloff and Solomon (2002) found that commitment was positively associated with decision making. The more commitment an individual had to their relationship, the more likely they were to make decisions and act in ways that would preserve the relationship. Seeing how commitment can affect an individual's ability to make decisions in a relationship setting, it is important to also consider a person's background because that can indirectly affect their decision making aptitude. Thus someone's personal history impacts his or her willingness to remain in a lesser relationship.

Besides taking a person's background into account as a means to understand the individual's relationship choices and decisions, previous research has also looked into how couples make decisions together. Some studies researched the decision making processes involved when couples make decisions together and how those processes differ between satisfied and dissatisfied couples (Houlihan, Jackson, & Rogers, 1990). Differences between the couples included feeling that the relationship is equitable, which was significantly different for satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Satisfied couples felt that

the relationship was more equitable. A variety of norms, or the underlying motivation used to make decisions, was used by couples and the use of these norms varied by the difficulty of the decision at hand. Houlihan et al. (1990) found that situational norms were used most frequently across all levels of difficulty. This means that couples are more likely to use sex role stereotypes or religious doctrine to make decisions rather than considering the needs of either partner. When couples make choices together, they want the process to be fair and take the difficulty of the decision into account while choosing which process to use.

Some studies go even further and explore the importance of emotions in decision making, how the decision making process does not end once the decision is made, and how others outside of the relationship affect a couple's decision (Adams, 2004). These are all important concepts because they broaden the information on what helps couples remain content and how they can more effectively make decisions together. Couples must make many important choices together and understanding how they can do so while maintaining a stable, happy relationship is a necessary component to fully comprehending relationship satisfaction.

Although previous research has focused on how couples make decisions together, this study examines how an individual's decision-making ability influences relationship satisfaction. Specifically, this study inspects how the level of decision making of the individual participants, whether people are higher or lower deciders, affects relationship satisfaction. A factor that contributes to an individual's level of deciding is their impulsiveness. People higher on the deciding scale think about the consequences before they act, like moving in with their partner. People lower on the deciding scale prefer to let

things happen rather than actively planning or making choice (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). They do not deliberately make decisions regarding their relationship. Their lack of planning leads them to fall into the trap of sliding through major relationship transitions. By winding up in a situation rather than planning on being at a specific point in the relationship, lower deciders can have poorer relationship quality and create higher risk for potential relationship distress (Stanley et al., 2006).

One way that a high decider improves relationship quality is due to levels of self-control. Previous research has shown that people who are able to regulate their actions, whether through self-control or future directed thinking, are more successful in many areas when compared to those who are not (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Tangney et al. (2004) found that having higher self-control was correlated with better interpersonal skills and better relationships, among other things like better grade point average. The reasoning behind this is that if someone has more self-control, he or she is more likely to be able to understand the consequences of his or her actions as well as think of the pros and cons of a decision. This is clear in the case of having a higher grade point average. Instead of procrastinating or partying, people with more self-control put in the time and effort to study because they know that by doing so they will receive higher grades. The way this ability translates to better relationships is that, rather than rushing into a relationship or entering a situation they will regret, it seems that people with better self-control can see the effects that their actions will have and make purposeful decisions. This illustrates how having greater self-control could help improve a person's ability to consciously make decisions, and thereby leading to more satisfactory relationships.

The present study also looked at how confidence affects relationship quality along with deciding. Without the confidence to act on their decisions, a person's relationship satisfaction will not improve irrespective of an individual's level of deciding. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory states that when people have efficacy with regards to certain tasks or behaviors, they will be more likely to take part in those tasks or tasks that require those behaviors. When people have confidence in their abilities to do something, they are more likely to do those actions and use those skills. With regards to relationships, if a person has confidence in their ability to influence their relationship, then they should believe that their decisions will affect their relationship either positively or negatively. They should then act on their decisions, thereby contributing to their happiness in the relationship. Even if someone thinks through their actions and knows what he or she wants, without the confidence to believe they can change their relationship they will not take steps towards fulfilling their decisions. This indicates that a person's deciding should correlate with their relationship confidence.

Based on Bandura's (1986) theory, confidence should influence relationship satisfaction more than the level of deciding. An example of confidence being a stronger factor than deciding is in Cate et al. (1993). The results showed that when participants felt greater feelings of obligation and pressure to have sexual intercourse for the first time, there were greater feelings of guilt for both men and women. The relationship experienced negative effects with increased guilt. Because these participants felt pressured into sex shows that those individuals had previously made the decision that they did not want sex. Considering that they proceeded to have sex, regardless of their personal beliefs, could be an indicator that they lacked the confidence to express their

opinions and choices to their partner. If an individual had higher confidence in their ability to influence their relationship, they might not have decided to proceed with sex out of obligation or pressure. Since guilt negatively correlated with the effect on the relationship, having greater relationship confidence could have a positive effect on relationship by reducing the amount of guilt an individual feels and enabling people to act on their own decisions.

The present study investigated how an individual making decisions consciously and having confidence in one's ability to change or alter a relationship leads to more relationship satisfaction. Using their Relationship Deciding Scale, Vennum and Fincham, (2011) found that deciding and relationship confidence have strong positive correlations with relationship satisfaction. Relationship confidence reflects one's belief in his or her capacity to influence the relationship, make it last, and deal effectively with conflicts regarding the relationship. Deciding refers to the extent to which individuals think about the consequences of their actions beforehand as well as if they actively make decisions rather than letting things happen to them. Since people higher in relationship confidence and higher in deciding should be better able to communicate with their partners, address problems in the relationship, and maintain healthy relationships, both higher relationship confidence and higher deciding should positively predict greater relationship satisfaction. However, because confidence is necessary to use the knowledge gained from being high in deciding (Bandura, 1986), higher relationship confidence should predict greater relationship satisfaction better than deciding. Each of these factors should predict relationship satisfaction equally for men and women given that there were no gender

differences for relationship confidence or deciding with regards to relationship satisfaction in Vennum and Fincham (2011).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Students from the Claremont Colleges, a group of 5 small, private liberal arts schools in Southern California, participated in the study online. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old with a mean of 19.75 years. The study needed a minimum of 74 participants but a total of 186 participants' responses (109 women, 77 men) were analyzed (Green, 1991).

For the students that participated due to course requirements they received credit for their classes by taking the survey through SonaSystems. If participants were not in lower level Claremont McKenna College psychology courses, they were recruited online through Facebook where they could choose to enter a raffle. Participants did not need to currently be in relationships. If they were single at the time they took the study, they were asked to answer the questions regarding relationship satisfaction by recalling the midway point of their most recent relationship. Responses from people who had never been in a romantic relationship were omitted from the results.

### **Procedure**

Preceding the actual survey there will be a consent form for the participant to read and sign before they can continue. There was no time limit for the participant. They will then be asked two questions. Have they ever been in a relationship before and are they currently in a relationship. If they answered "No" to the first question their responses were not included in the analysis. The second question is used to determine which set of

instructions the participant will receive for the Relationship Satisfaction questions. The participant will first answer the four questions on Relationship Confidence and five questions on Deciding and then proceed to the next page to answer the five questions on Relationship Satisfaction. If the participant said they are currently in a relationship, they were instructed to think of their current partner and relationship when answering the Relationship Satisfaction questions. If they are not currently in a relationship, they were told to think of the halfway point in their most recent relationship. So if their relationship lasted 6 months, then they should recall the 3-month period while determining relationship satisfaction.

After the 14 questions are answered, the next page will be demographic questions. These will come after the relationship questions so that there are no stereotype threats or other biases adding error to the results. If they took the survey via Facebook, there will be a slide where they can enter their email address to be eligible for a raffle for a gift card. The final page thanks the participant for answering the questions and debriefs them.

### **Measures**

The study used a survey administered electronically. Before the questions, there will be an informed consent form, which is followed by an instructions page. This tells them that they will be answering questions about their most recent romantic relationship and that the survey should take no more than 30 minutes. After the instructions, come two questions that determine whether or not the data will be used and which slide the participant will see for the Relationship Satisfaction questions. Then the survey questions for the variables begin.

The questions will be randomized and some will use reverse coding. The three topics in the survey are relationship confidence, deciding, and relationship satisfaction. The questions came from the Relationship Deciding Scale which was created by Vennum and Fincham (2011). This scale was used because it included the same variables with identical operational definitions that were examined in this study. An example of a relationship confidence question is “I have the skills needed for a stable, lasting relationship.” The deciding category covers a participant’s ability to make conscious choices, like “It is important to make conscious decisions about whether to take each major step in romantic relationships.” The questions regarding relationship confidence and deciding will be on the same page because those share the same scale. They were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). Two of the questions for the deciding factor are reverse coded, for instance “It is better to ‘go with the flow’ than think carefully about each major step in a romantic relationship.”

Relationship satisfaction questions, such as how much do you love your partner, will be on the next page. These will be on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very*). The instructions will vary depending on whether the participant said that they are single or currently in a relationship. Their answer will direct them to the slide with the appropriate instructions. Appendix A shows these questions in their entirety (Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

After the survey, there will be a demographics page. The demographic questions will include age, gender, sexuality, duration of longest relationship, how long ago the most recent relationship was, and duration of the most recent relationship. The question regarding sexuality will ask the participants if their partner in their most recent

relationship was same sex, opposite sex, or they can decline to answer. Those who declined to answer were not analyzed because it was unclear if they had been in a same sex or opposite sex relationship. Responses from people who had been in same sex couples were not analyzed because there were not enough people to run same sex couples separately. An additional reason is that the previous research on these topics did not include same sex couples so including them could lead to confounds.

This experiment will be using a multiple hierarchical regression with three predictors. Deciding, relationship confidence, and gender will be the predictors for the criterion, relationship satisfaction.

## **Results**

The variables relationship confidence, deciding, and relationship satisfaction each had between 4 and 5 items. After averaging the responses for each of the items for the variables, correlation and multiple hierarchical regression analyses were run to examine the relationship between gender, relationship confidence, deciding, and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, these analyses were used to determine if being high in relationship confidence and deciding lead to greater relationship satisfaction and if relationship confidence more positively predicts relationship satisfaction than deciding.

Table 1 summarizes the correlations, which shows that all three predictors are significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Based on the results of Vennum and Fincham (2011), deciding and relationship confidence are already known to be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. However, they did not examine the specific relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction which was  $r(184) = -$

.126,  $p < .043$ . Gender was coded as Male = 0 and Female = 1. This result suggests that males reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than females.

Table 2 shows the three steps of the hierarchical regression. Gender was entered in the first model in order to control for the effects of gender in successive models. Gender did not predict relationship satisfaction, which was to be expected given previous findings. Next, relationship satisfaction was regressed onto deciding and gender. Deciding was a stronger predictor than gender. Specifically, as deciding levels increased, so did relationship satisfaction,  $\beta = .247$ ,  $t(184) = 3.476$ ,  $p = .001$ . Deciding also explained a significant amount of the variance above what gender explained,  $R^2 \text{ Model} = .077$ ,  $F(2, 183) = 7.626$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In the final step of the regression, relationship satisfaction was regressed onto relationship confidence, deciding, and gender. Relationship confidence was shown to be the strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction. In particular, as people had greater relationship confidence, they had greater relationship satisfaction,  $\beta = .402$ ,  $t(183) = 5.712$ ,  $p < .001$ . Relationship confidence added a significant proportion of variance in relationship satisfaction,  $\Delta R^2 = .14$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 182) = 32.625$ ,  $p < .001$ . Altogether, the three variables predicted relationship satisfaction significantly,  $R^2 = .217$ ,  $F(3, 182) = 16.838$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### **Discussion**

Based on the analyses, relationship confidence was shown to predict above and beyond the other variables. This means that regardless of gender and deciding, having higher relationship confidence will lead to greater relationship satisfaction. The much larger Beta value for relationship confidence than for deciding further demonstrates that

relationship confidence is more important in predicting relationship satisfaction. However, deciding is also a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. This means that people who are higher deciders, or people that think through consequences before making decisions, will be more satisfied in their relationships. Both deciding and relationship confidence were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction so people who have more confidence or are more likely to be deciders will generally have greater relationship satisfaction.

Although gender was significantly correlated to relationship satisfaction, in that men were more likely to be more satisfied than women with their relationships, gender did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction. This is consistent with the hypothesis that relationship confidence and deciding predict relationship satisfaction equally for both men and women. With this in mind, irrespective of gender, women and men are just as likely to be satisfied in their relationships and have similar levels of relationship confidence and deciding.

The importance of these results is that there is now a direct relationship between relationship satisfaction and relationship confidence and deciding. Before, Vennum and Fincham (2011) only showed that these variables had a positive correlation to relationship satisfaction. By knowing that relationship confidence and deciding are strong indicators of relationship satisfaction, we can help people change their behaviors and cognitions in order to improve their relationship satisfaction.

To help people alter their level of deciding, we can assist them in being cognizant that their choices have consequences and understanding what those consequences will be. The difference between being low or high in deciding is whether a person has the ability

to be aware of the effects of their actions and the pros and cons of their decisions. Being impulsive and spontaneous may seem like fun and harmless to some. However, by making choices without proper thought processes, these people can be hurting their ability to be satisfied in relationships. This is not to say that people low in deciding are not satisfied, rather this is to say that by increasing their deciding level they could also increase their relationship satisfaction. The proper way to address a person's level of deciding will need to be explored in future studies, but altering a person's cognitive processes is doable and can be a successful form of treatment relating to social issues (Beck, 2005). Through increasing their deciding, people will have better skills to build more satisfying relationships.

As important as it is to increase people's awareness of the importance their level of deciding has on their relationship satisfaction, it is far more imperative to improve people's relationship confidence. This is because relationship confidence is a much stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction so that having higher confidence would lead to more satisfaction than just increasing a person's deciding would. Because relationship confidence is specifically someone's confidence in their ability to maintain a long-term relationship and to deal with conflicts, ways to develop a person's relationship confidence should focus on giving them tools to address issues within a relationship context. This could be done by teaching individuals how to resolve interpersonal conflicts successfully, through couple's therapy or other techniques (Stanley, Markman, Blumberg, & Eckstein, 1997). This would in turn promote not only better relationship satisfaction, but also the ability to maintain healthier relationships with less tension and fewer avoidant behaviors.

Although this study expanded what is known to predict and contribute to relationship satisfaction, it was not all encompassing. One of the study's limitations was that it included people who were not currently in relationships. The survey attempted to control this confound by asking participants who were single to think of the midway point of their last relationship while answering relationship satisfaction questions. These specific instructions were given because the midpoint is the most neutral point in the relationship. The halfway point does not include the inflated satisfaction due to the "honeymoon" period at the beginning of the relationship and it avoids the end of the relationship, which usually has negative emotions and memories associated with it. However, this does not wholly control for the confounds that having single participants introduces. For one, the participant's most recent relationship may have occurred so long ago that they do not have an accurate memory of it. For another, although the instructions explicitly told participants to recall the time halfway through the relationship, participants could still be biased by other time periods. If the break up was extremely dramatic or painful, that pain could retroactively taint the participant's impression of the relationship, thereby potentially creating a warped sense of decreased relationship satisfaction. Additionally, if the relationship was incredibly short, then participants could be recalling the honeymoon phase, which could artificially increase their satisfaction. In order to control for this in future studies, only people in relationships should be included as participants. Knowing that single people could increase the amount of error in the results, they were still included to increase the power of the results and to ensure there were enough participants to run the tests.

To look further into how including singles affected the results, the same multiple hierarchical regression was run using only the data from participants who were currently single. Singles did not replicate the original results, which included single people and people in relationships. The mean relationship satisfaction for singles was much lower than the original mean of relationship satisfaction. Even though the participants were instructed to only answer the satisfaction questions by using the time period halfway through the relationship, the negative effects of the break up might have affected the participants' ability to accurately recall their relationship satisfaction during the requested time frame. Perhaps the single participants are no longer in those relationships because they were less satisfied than participants that are currently in relationships. Whatever the reason, people who were not in relationships reported a lower average for satisfaction of their most recent relationship.

Another difference between analyzing single participants and all of the participants together was that deciding was no longer a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. Although relationship confidence remained a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction for single people. Because most studies researching relationship satisfaction use only participants in relationships, there are no precedents for people who were once in relationships and their relationship characteristics or satisfaction. It would be interesting to look at how people who have been in relationships differ from those currently in relationships. Studies could explore everything from the differences in perceptions of relationship satisfaction to the differences of abilities or traits in relationships. Maybe being in a relationship leads to more salient experiences, which causes people to believe they possess more relationship confidence. Meaning that

when people who are in a relationship use the availability heuristic they have more prominent memories that lead them to view themselves as high deciders. Whereas single participants, might not be able to recall instances of deciding as easily due to their memories of their relationship fading.

Considering most relationship satisfaction studies only run participants that are in relationships, the multiple hierarchical regression was run again using solely participants currently in a relationship to see if these results differed from the original results. The results of these tests replicated the results discussed earlier. This is indicative that the scale is reliable given that when participants in a relationship, like those in the Vennum and Fincham (2011) study, completed the survey they had the same significant results.

An additional confound could be due to the varying durations of the relationships for those participants who were currently in a relationship. Participants who have been in a relationship for years will possess different views on relationship satisfaction and their abilities within a relationship context than participants who have been in their current relationship for less than a month. The duration of the relationship could affect satisfaction, and the difference in perceived satisfaction could be influenced by the use of the memory bias (Karney & Coombs, 2000). Memory bias as it relates to relationships is the extent to which a person's present level of happiness with their relationship affects their perception of past levels of happiness in the relationship. Karney and Coombs (2000) found that by using the memory bias wives could better maintain relationship satisfaction in long-term relationships. Examining the effect that duration has on relationship satisfaction would contribute to further comprehending what affects relationship satisfaction. However, because there are more constructs and factors to count

for, like the memory bias, including duration as another factor would have gone beyond the scope of the current study.

Another limitation of the present study is that it did not differentiate between the commitment levels of participants in their relationships. A person who is only casually dating someone until summer will have drastically different expectations of their relationship than someone who perceives their relationship as one that is leading to marriage. These varying levels of commitment could lead to variance in the responses for relationship satisfaction regardless of the individual's level of deciding or relationship confidence. One way to restrict the impact of these differences would be to limit the sample to married or cohabiting couples. This would help ensure that all the participants have similar commitment levels, because they would all be in long-term relationships and living together. Alternatively, a future study could include commitment as a predictor for relationship satisfaction by asking participants to rate their commitment and their partner's perceived commitment to the relationship. The commitment level of a participant and their partner's commitment level could impact someone's relationship satisfaction (Givertz, Segrin, & Hanzal, 2009). Dedication is certainly an important variable to take into consideration while studying relationship satisfaction and should be included in future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence relationship satisfaction.

By furthering the knowledge on what factors are significant predictors of happiness in relationships, a hierarchy of factors and a comprehensive theory on how to maximize satisfaction in relationships could eventually be created. After understanding what contributes to a person's satisfaction in relationships and how the different variables

interact, we can then begin to focus on therapies to improve people's functioning in those areas. One way to begin forming a relationship satisfaction hierarchy would be to bring in other previously studied factors and see how strongly they predict relationship satisfaction when directly compared to relationship confidence and deciding. These factors could include self-esteem, attachment styles, partner supportiveness, or commitment (Cramer, 2006; Givertz et al., 2009; Naud et al., 2013; Robinson & Cameron, 2012). All of those factors have previously been shown to affect relationship satisfaction, but they have not been compared to each other or tested on their strength of predicting satisfaction within the same model. By including more factors, more variance could be accounted for in the regression model. At the same time, the importance of each factor could be looked into more thoroughly. Exploring all these factors together could potentially lead to new, more valid scales as well as more effective couples counseling.

Another future direction could be looking into communication styles and how they affect relationship satisfaction in conjunction with relationship confidence and deciding. Even if people have high relationship confidence and view themselves as high deciders, they will not be able to get their needs met if they cannot communicate their needs or opinions effectively. Communication styles have been shown to affect relationship satisfaction (Smith, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2008). Comparing communication directly to relationship confidence and deciding could give further insight into why people use the styles they do and how to best address ineffective or harmful communication styles. Addressing these issues could be an additional direction of future research to explore whether increasing relationship confidence or improving someone's

level of deciding would be more effective in improving communication in couples to further increase their relationship satisfaction.

An interesting variation on the present study would be to see how factors that significantly predict relationship satisfaction affect satisfaction in more casual encounters. “Hook-up” culture is becoming more prevalent and socially acceptable while traditional relationships are evolving to encompass new standards and expectations (Garcia et al., 2012). Due to the new acceptability of casual sex and relationships, like “friends with benefits,” it is important to understand what leads such relationships to function or be satisfying to the individuals that choose them. For example, if someone is a high decider in a traditional relationship, when they apply their deciding skills to their single life and sex outside of a relationship, will they have a more satisfying sex life than someone who is low in deciding? Additionally, does having relationship confidence correlate with having confidence in regards to having satisfying hook-ups? Because many young adults and adolescents partake in this culture, it is a natural progression to apply knowledge of traditional relationships to the newer forms of relationships. By applying what is known about traditional relationships to the hook-up culture, findings in future research will be applicable to more people.

By exploring the many factors involved in romantic relationships, we can figure out which factors are the most important in predicting relationship satisfaction and what leads to healthy, fulfilling relationships. With the knowledge that relationship confidence and deciding are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction counselors can tailor their therapy to improve individual’s levels in these traits when addressing relationship issues. This study also helps cross validate the Relationship Deciding Scale as an

accurate tool for assessing relationship confidence, deciding, and relationship satisfaction. Although further research is needed to more fully understand relationships and characteristics that affect their success, this study is an important step towards building a comprehensive theory on relationship satisfaction.

## References

- Adams, J. (2004). 'This Is Not Where I Belong!' The Emotional, Ongoing, and Collective Aspects of Couples' Decision Making About Where to Live. *Journal Of Comparative Family Studies*, 35(3), 459-484.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ US: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Beck, A. T. (2005). The Current State of Cognitive Therapy: A 40-Year Retrospective. *Archive Of General Psychiatry*, 62(9), 953-959.
- Cramer, D. (2006). How a supportive partner may increase relationship satisfaction. *British Journal Of Guidance & Counseling*, 34(1), 117-131.
- Cui, M., & Fincham, F. D. (2010). The differential effects of parental divorce and marital conflict on young adult romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 17(3), 331-343.
- Dydral, G., Røysamb, E., Nes, R., & Vittersø, J. (2011). Can a happy relationship predict a happy life? A population-based study of maternal well-being during the life transition of pregnancy, infancy, and toddlerhood. *Journal Of Happiness Studies*, 12(6), 947-962.
- Garcia, J. R., Reiber, C., Massey, S. G., & Merriweather, A. M. (2012). Sexual hookup culture: A review. *Review Of General Psychology*, 16(2), 161-176.
- Givertz, M., Segrin, C., & Hanzal, A. (2009). The association between satisfaction and commitment differs across marital couple types. *Communication Research*, 36(4), 561-584.
- Houlihan, M. M., Jackson, J., & Rogers, T. R. (1990). Decision making of satisfied and

- dissatisfied married couples. *The Journal Of Social Psychology*, 130(1), 89-102.
- Karney, B. R., & Coombs, R. H. (2000) Memory bias in long-term close relationships: Consistency or improvement?. *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(8), 959-970.
- Lindsay, J. M. (2000) An ambiguous commitment: Moving in to a cohabiting relationship. *Journal Of Family Studies*, 6(1), 120-134.
- Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2005). Measuring and modeling cohabitation: New perspectives from qualitative data. *Journal Of Marriage And Family*, 67(4), 989-1002.
- Naud, C., Lussier, Y., Sabourin, S., Normandin, L., Clarkin, J.F., & Kernberg, O. F. (2013). How attachment and excessive self-sacrificing depressive dynamics are related to couple relationship satisfaction over time. *Couple And Family Psychology: Research And Practice*, 2(1), 14-33.
- Robinson, K. J., & Cameron, J. J. (2012). Self-esteem is a shared relationship resource: Additive effects of dating partners' self-esteem levels predict relationship quality. *Journal Of Research In Personality*, 46(2), 227-230.
- Roloff, M. E., & Solomon, D. H. (2002). Conditions under which relational commitment leads to expressing or withholding relational complaints. *International Journal Of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 276-291.
- Sanderson, C. A., & Karetsky, K. H. (2002). Intimacy goals and strategies of conflict resolution in dating relationships: A mediational analysis. *Journal Of Science And Personal Relationships*, 19(3), 317-337.
- Smith, L., Ciarrochi, J., & Heaven, P. L. (2008). The stability and change of trait

- emotional intelligence, conflict communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction: A one-year longitudinal study. *Personality And Individual Differences*, 45 (8), 738-743.
- Sprecher, S., & Hendrick, S. S. (2004). Self-Disclosure in Intimate Relationships: Associations With Individual and Relationship Characteristics Over Time. *Journal Of Social And Clinical Psychology*, 23(6), 857-877.
- Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Blumberg, S. L., & Eckstein, D. (1997). The Speaker/Listener Technique. *The Family Journal*, 5(1), 82-83.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding Versus Deciding: Inertia and the Premarital Cohabitation Effect. *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Applied Family Studies*, 55(4), 499-509.
- Surra, C. A., Chandler, M., Asmussen, L., & Wareham, J. (1987). Effects of premarital pregnancy on the development of interdependence in relationships. *Journal Of Social And Clinical Psychology*, 5(1), 123-139.
- Tangney, J. P., Baumeister, R. F., & Boone, A. (2004). High Self-Control Predicts Good Adjustment, Less Pathology, Better Grades, and Interpersonal Success. *Journal Of Personality*, 72(2), 271-322.
- Vennum, A., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Assessing decision making in young adult romantic relationships. *Psychological Assessment*, 23(3), 739-751.

## Appendix

### Relationship Confidence (4 questions)

Scale: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

- I believe I will be able to effectively deal with conflicts that arise in my relationships.
- I feel good about the prospects of making a romantic relationship last.
- I am very confident when I think of having a stable, long term relationship.
- I have the skills needed for a lasting stable romantic relationship.

### Deciding (5 questions)

Scale: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

- With romantic partners, I weigh the pros and cons before allowing myself to take the next step in the relationship (e.g., be physically intimate).
- It is important to make conscious decisions about whether to take each major step in romantic relationships.
- Considering the pros and cons of each major step in a romantic relationship destroys its chemistry. (reverse coded)
- It is important to me to discuss with my partner each major step we take in the relationship.
- It is better to “go with the flow” than think carefully about each major step in a romantic relationship. (reverse coded)

### Relationship Satisfaction (5 questions)

Scale: not at all (1) to very (7)

- How satisfied were you with your partner during the previous week?
- How well does your partner meet your needs?
- Is your current relationship better than your previous relationships?
- How much do you love your partner?
- How well does your partner meet your expectations?

*Note:* The questions and scales as determined by Vennum and Fincham (2011).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Relationship Satisfaction	5.1419	1.25257	-	-.126*	.239**	.449***
2. Gender	.59	.494	.043*	-	.060	-.114
3. Deciding	3.7763	.50498	.001**	.207	-	.338***
4. Relationship Confidence	3.9449	.62492	.000***	.061	.000***	-

*Note.*  $N = 186$ . Correlations appear above the diagonal, while 1-tailed significance

appears below the diagonal. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2

*Summary of Regression Analysis Relationship Satisfaction (N = 186).*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Step 1				
Gender	-.321	.185	-.126	.085
Step 2				
Gender	-.358	.180	-.141	.048*
Deciding	.613	.176	.247	.001**
Step 3				
Gender	-.221	.168	-.087	.190
Deciding	.269	.174	.108	.124
Relationship Confidence	.806	.141	.402	<.001**

*Note.*  $\Delta R^2 = .061$  for Step 2;  $\Delta R^2 = .140$  for Step 3; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .