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**RELATIONAL TURBULENCE AND MARITAL COMMUNICATION**

**WHEN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM START SCHOOL:**

**A LONGITUDINAL DYADIC DIARY STUDY**

A Dissertation in

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws upon two theories to frame an investigation of communication strategies for alleviating the stress associated with raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Relational turbulence theory highlights relationship qualities that emerge during transitions and complicate marital functioning. In particular, the theory explains how doubts about the future of the relationship and perceptions of goal interference amplify negative experiences in romantic relationships. The experiencing life transitions model from the field of nursing identifies how attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence contribute to a successful transition. In a preliminary study, these behaviors were associated with improved relational quality, as well as more positive transition experiences and outcomes among married partners in the general population. Building on that foundation, the dissertation presents two studies that examine the communication strategies that help parents of children with ASD reduce relational turbulence during stressful transitions throughout their child's life.

Study 1 surveys the landscape of transitions specific to parents of children with ASD, examines how characteristics of married relationships vary based on the type of transition experienced, and explores the communication and cognitions couples use to navigate marital transitions in this context. The study examined the transition experiences of 298 parents of children with ASD who were currently married. Participants detailed an important transition throughout the life span of their child with ASD using open-ended questions. They completed scales assessing qualities of the relationship during the transition and communication behaviors used to navigate the experience. Results demonstrate significant differences in relational qualities based on the type of transition described. In particular, the initial diagnosis received the

highest ratings for transition magnitude and relational turbulence, and it was considered the most negative transition experience compared to other common transitions. Starting school for the first time was associated with the most positive transition experience ratings. Transition processing communication predicted participants' experiences of relational uncertainty and facilitation from a partner, which predicted relational turbulence.

Study 2 expands on the results from Study 1 by incorporating a longitudinal, pre- and post-test design with diary surveys. Specifically, the goal of Study 2 was to examine how married partners' transition processing communication affects their own and their spouse's experiences of relational uncertainty, changes in interdependence, and relational turbulence. Fifty-three couples, parents whose child with ASD started school for the first time this year, completed a pre-test, 14 dairies, and a post-test. Participants completed diary entries every three days over a 42-day period of time, beginning on the child's first day of school.

Findings for Study 2 suggest that married partners' engagement in transition processing communication (and perception of their spouse's communication) significantly affect their own and their spouse's daily experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Parents' reported turmoil in the relationship increased over the course of the transition, while the use of transition processing communication decreased or stayed the same. For daily experiences, spouses' perception of their partner's attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence in the relationship were associated with decreased relational uncertainty and relational turbulence, and increased facilitation from a partner. In assessments of participants' linear trends on the variables of interest, increases in husbands' and wives' transition processing communication throughout the course of the study coincided with improvement in their own reports of relational turbulence

variables from pre-test to post-test. Perceptions of a spouse's engagement in transition processing communication demonstrated similar effects, particularly for women; however, increases in one's perceptions of a partner's engagement in transition processing coincided with increases in partner uncertainty. Husbands' and wives' reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication demonstrated few significant effects on their partner's reports of relational turbulence variables.

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## CHAPTER ONE

A relational transition is a “period of discontinuity in relationships between times of relative stability, during which partners adapt to changing roles, identities, and circumstances” (Solomon, Knobloch, Theiss, & McLaren, 2016, p. 5). For married adults, any life transition that may occur within and around their family is also, at least in part, a relational transition. In particular, changes in behaviors and identity associated with life transitions disrupt the scripts, schema, and communicative patterns of the relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Thus, transitions within the family can have significant consequences for the relational quality of married partners. For example, when a married person is diagnosed with cancer, the partnership is faced with increased marital distress (Baucom, Porter, Kirby, Gremore, & Keefe, 2005), increased risk of infertility and sexual dysfunction (Arai, Kawakita, Okada, & Yoshida, 1997), and ultimately a greater risk of divorce (Kirchoff, Yi, Wright, Warner, & Smith, 2012). Similarly, a meta-analysis by Hanisch (1999) found that a husband’s job loss led to a multitude of negative effects for his wife and for the relationship, including increased risk for: spousal abuse, marital dissolution, spousal stress, depression, wife mortality, and psychiatric disorders. Finally, a multitude of studies have indicated that the transition to parenthood decreases relational satisfaction for both women and men (for review, see Mitnick, Heyman & Smith, 2009). In general, the experience of stressful life events has demonstrated negative associations with relational satisfaction and is positively correlated with negative affect toward one’s married partner (Tesser & Beach, 1998). The focus of this dissertation is on understanding marital transitions and communication activities that can help forestall or alleviate their negative relational consequences.

Although any life transitions can initiate the relational transitions of interest, the focus of this dissertation is on the marital relationships of parents during major transitions associated with raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Four sets of findings converge to suggest that transitions for children with ASD may negatively impact their parents' relationship. First, raising a child with ASD is associated with high levels of stress for parents across the lifespan of the child (e.g., Brobst, Clopton, & Hendrick, 2009; Dabrowska and Pisula 2010). Their daily lives and routines are changed as they are faced with new challenges concerning their child's behavior, new treatment decisions, new roles and expectations within the family, and new interpersonal relationships with the child's formal support network (Drake, Couse, DiNapoli, & Banach, 2008; Hutton & Caron, 2005; Neely et al., 2012). Second, raising a child with ASD is also associated with marital conflict and distress, generally (for review, see Saini et al., 2015). These parents are faced with increased time and financial constraints, which decreases their ability to engage in relational maintenance (Saini et al., 2015). Thus, parents of children with ASD report lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Brobst et al., 2009) and expressed affection (Gau et al. 2011; Higgins et al. 2005). Third, studies in psychology and health and human development also demonstrate how specific transitions for children with ASD, such as the initial diagnosis or starting school, increase stress for their parents (e.g., Baxter, Cummins, and Polak, 1995). Finally, studies applying the framework of relational turbulence theory indicate that stressful transitions in and around marriages lead to increased feelings of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, which have negative outcomes for relationships and relational communication (Solomon et al., 2016).

The experiences of parents of children with ASD can be illuminated by framing events over the course of their child's life as transitions. Doing so points to proactive strategies for

alleviating the stress associated with raising children with autism. The aim of this dissertation is to explore ways in which to help parents maintain strong and resilient marriages in the face of the numerous transitions throughout the life course of their child. To achieve this goal, I first seek to understand how transitions in the life of the child impact the relationship of the parents. Next, I aim to test specific communication behaviors and cognitions that will help married partners successfully navigate transition experiences. More specifically, I engage the theoretical frameworks of relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) and the experiencing life transitions model (Meleis et al., 2000) to lay the groundwork for single time-point intervention materials that are inexpensive and free of cost to parents of children with ASD, who already face significant time and financial burdens.

The goal of this chapter is to integrate existing research to shed light on how transitions for children with ASD impact their parents' relationship. In service of this goal, I begin by briefly defining and describing autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Second, I survey previous research on the impact of raising a child with ASD on parents. Third, I describe how the stress involved in raising a child with ASD impacts marital relationships. Finally, I examine the major transitions in the life course of children with ASD and their effects on parents as described in previous literature.

### **What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is “a lifelong developmental disability defined by diagnostic criteria that include deficits in social communication and social interaction and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities” (Baio, 2014, p. 2). According to a study by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), approximately 1 in 68 children in the United States is diagnosed with ASD and the prevalence continues to increase. Although ASD affects

individuals of all genders and ethnicities, the CDC identified significant differences in the prevalence of ASD across demographic groups. First, ASD is more prevalent in boys (1 in 42) than girls (1 in 189). Second, white children are the most likely racial group to be diagnosed with autism, but were the least likely to be in the IQ range of intellectual disability (Baio, 2014). These demographic differences may be the result of inadequate resources for testing and identifying autism in some minority groups.

Three aspects of child behavior distinguish individuals with ASD from other forms of developmental disabilities (APA, 2000). First, ASD is characterized by difficulty socializing with others. Individuals with ASD often have trouble understanding social cues and may not enjoy interacting with other children (Blacher & Christiansen, 2011; Kanner, 1943). Second, individuals with ASD often face deficits in communication, ranging from issues following and understanding gestures, to trouble maintaining conversations, to a complete inability to use and understand words. Third, people may exhibit idiosyncratic, repetitive behaviors (e.g., fidgeting, rocking, hand flapping), as well as overly focused interests and resistance to change. Because ASD is, in fact, a spectrum, the behaviors of individuals with a diagnosis can vary. For example, high functioning individuals may have a large vocabulary, understand conversations, and perform successfully in most circumstances, but their interactions with others may seem odd or may not conform to some social norms. In contrast, low functioning individuals with autism may have violent outbursts, be hyper-sensitive to external stimuli, or be completely nonverbal.

Researchers now believe that ASD is strongly influenced by genetics (Muhle, Trentacoste, & Rapin, 2004) and that each of the three characteristics of ASD is associated with different genetic components. As a result, autism is incurable and a single form of treatment for individuals with ASD is seemingly impossible (Mandy & Skuse, 2008). The most commonly

used form of intervention with children with ASD is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is the systematic implementation of behavior interventions based on learning theories (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). Interventions for social interactions focus on one small, repetitive action (e.g., repeating a sound or short pattern of behavior) until relative mastery before adding another behavior. This method has received support through a number of clinical and controlled studies; however, the approach still maintains only a 50% success rate for those children who participate in an extensive treatment. The rate of success for those participating in programs less than 20 hours a week range from 5 to 10 percent. Thus, even the most successful interventions achieve normal or near normal functioning in relatively few instances (Charles, Carpenter, Jenner, & Nocholas, 2008; Cohen, Amerine-Dickens, & Smith, 2006; Eikeseth, Smith, Jahr, & Eldevik, 2002).

Research described in this section indicates that autism spectrum disorder is common, difficult, and incurable. As such, the need for research concerning the well-being of those with autism, along with those most closely affected by their symptoms and behaviors is high. The following section describes the ways in which the difficult and on-going nature of ASD impact parents.

### **General Effects of ASD on Parents**

Raising children can be stressful, but raising a child with ASD has proven particularly burdensome as parents are faced with volatile conduct from the child and on-going concerns about future independence (Osborne & Reed, 2010; Tehee, Honan, & Hevey, 2009). In general, children with special needs require more time, effort, and resources from parents (Mailick Seltzer, Greenberg, Floyd, Pettee, & Hong, 2001). In particular, parents of children with ASD face greater child behavior problems, dependency, family disharmony, stress, and personal



burden than parents of children with other disabilities and parents of children without disabilities (Brobst et al., 2009; Dabrowska & Pisula 2010; Higgins, Bailey, & Pearce, 2005; Rao & Beidel, 2009). These findings have been consistent across a range of ages, ethnic groups (Blacher & McIntyre, 2006; Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2005), and countries (e.g., Mugno et al., 2007; Pisula, 2007). Recent studies have reported parenting a child with ASD to be more difficult than caring for children with Down Syndrome or attention-deficit/hyper-activity disorders, and typically developing children (Brobst et al., 2009; Dabrowska & Pisula 2010; Hayes & Watson, 2013).

According to a study by Sharpley, Bitsika, and Efremidis (1997), the three most stress-inducing aspects of raising a child with ASD for parents are: (a) the on-going nature of the disorder (b) a lack of understanding of the child's problems by family members and (c) a lack of support. In a review of literature on the effects of raising a child with ASD on families, Meadan, Halle, and Ebata (2010) identified additional areas of stress for parents, including: (d) financial burden and (e) fear about the future. The impact of these stressors is moderated by two characteristics, the severity of the symptoms and the gender of the care-giver.

Several studies have identified links between child behavior problems and parental stress, such that increased child maladaptive behaviors was associated with increased stress and decreased emotional well-being (e.g., Abbeduto, Seltzer, Shattuck, Krauss, Orsmond, & Murphy, 2004; Hastings, Beck & Hill, 2005). In a study across several pervasive developmental disorders including autism, the effects for child behavior were more predictive of stress and well-being than the type of diagnosis, the amount of developmental delay, or gender of the child (Herring, Gray, Taffe, Tonge, Sweeney, & Einfeld, 2006). In particular, Tomanik, Harris, and Hawkins

(2004) found that maternal stress was highest when children were hyperactive, noncompliant, unable to interact with others, irritable, withdrawn, or unable to care for themselves.

Although mothers and fathers both report increased stress, parents are not impacted equally by the strain associated with raising a child with autism. Previous research indicates that mothers tend to take on the majority of the burden (Aylaz, Yılmaz, & Polat, 2012; Gray, 2006). A multitude of studies on parents of children with ASD suggests that mothers tend to be more negatively impacted by issues associated with ASD than fathers as a result of their role as primary care-givers. In particular, mothers have reported feeling more stress, anxiety, and depression than fathers (e.g., Hastings, 2003; Herring et al., 2006). Parenting children with ASD has also demonstrated significant negative impacts on the health-related quality of life for mothers, but not fathers (Allik, Larsson, & Smedje, 2006). In addition to mental and physical well-being, raising a child with ASD also impacts mothers' lives outside of the home. In studies by Gray (2002, 2003), mothers reported the inability to work, or to work full-time, due to the responsibility of taking care of their child's needs, including working with educational, mental health, and physical health providers. In contrast, work-related problems were relatively minor for fathers.

Though few demographic variables impact the experience of stress for parents of children with ASD, studies indicate that child behavior problems are positively associated with parental stress and negatively correlated with parental well-being (e.g., Hastings et al., 2005). These findings are particularly true for mothers, who tend to take on the lions' share of care-giver burden (e.g., Aylaz et al., 2012; Gray, 2006). A wealth of research also identifies unique effects of raising a child with ASD on the parent's relationship. The following section outlines those findings.

### **Effects of ASD on Marital Relationships**

The everyday stressors faced by parents of children with ASD serve as sources of strain on romantic relationships. In a review of literature, Saini and colleagues (2015) identified several predominant, relational stressors reported by parents of children with ASD across multiple studies, including lack of quality time alone and an inability to be spontaneous. Previous research has also identified increased conflict and negative interactions in this population. For example, parents of children with ASD reported higher levels of conflict over childrearing than other parents and that conflict was related to their higher levels of life stress (Knapp, 2004; Weber, 2012). In qualitative studies, married partners report arguing over incompatible coping strategies, disagreements over discipline, attribution of blame, and differing opinions of child treatment (Aylaz et al., 2012; Phelps, Hodgson, McCammon, & Lamson, 2009; Weber, 2012). Previous research indicates that the negative effects of raising a child with ASD on marriage quality stem, at least in part, from inequity between parents in terms of child care, with mothers taking on the majority of the burden (Aylaz et al., 2012; Gray, 2006).

In addition to the conflict associated with parenting a child with ASD, mothers and fathers report lower levels of relationship satisfaction, marital happiness (Brobst et al., 2009), and expressed affection (Gau et al. 2011; Higgins et al. 2005), and a greater sense of isolation (Woodgate, Ateah, & Secco, 2008). Empirical research has demonstrated a significant increase in the divorce rate for parents of children with ASD. For example, Hartley and colleagues (2010) found that parents of children with ASD had a 23.5% divorce rate (compared to 13.8% for parents of typically developing children). Additionally, the divorce rate for parents of children with ASD remained high across the child's adolescence and early adulthood, while rates for other parents decreased after early childhood (following the typical pattern of divorce rates

for parents). The stability of the divorce rate among parents of children with ASD is thought to be a result of continued parenting demands and stress throughout the lifespan of a child with ASD.

Although most studies have demonstrated negative impacts on the marriages of parents of children with ASD, several studies have seen resiliency and growth, with parents successfully managing both their relationship and their child's care (Mailick Seltzer et al., 2001). Some partners even indicate increased levels of marital satisfaction when raising children with special needs (King, Zwaigenbaum, King, Baxter, Rosenbaum, & Bates, 2006). Hock, Timm, and Ramisch (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis in which married partners identified parenting a child with ASD as "make or break" for their relationship, such that marriages under increased stress either came together to develop a deeper intimacy and commitment, or they broke-down. These studies suggest that, while many marriages suffer in the face of parenting a child with ASD, others find ways to rally under the pressure and stress.

The research described in this section points to the circumstances associated with raising a child with ASD as major stressors for the romantic relationships of parents. The level of stress experienced by parents of children with autism also varies as a function of events in the child's development. The following section describes particular transitions throughout the life of an individual with ASD that have been associated with heightened stress for parents in previous research.

### **Transitions in Children with ASD**

Major transitions in the lives of children with ASD require parents to adapt in a number of ways. First, when circumstances change, parents have to make treatment decisions and choose a new course of action for their child's continued development. Second, a change in

circumstances often involves developing relationships with new support providers. For example, when a child moves to a new grade level or school, the parents have to educate new teachers, para-educators, and administrators on their child's condition. They must form new interpersonal relationships and become familiar with a new set of rules (explicit or implicit) for navigating the bureaucracy associated with providing care to children with special needs (Drake, Couse, DiNapoli, & Banach, 2008; Neely et al., 2012). Third, parents must create or re-create roles within the family. When families experience transitions, the needs of the family change, which leads to changes in daily routines and behavioral patterns (Hutton & Caron, 2005; Neely et al., 2012). Though no quantitative data has surveyed the landscape of transitions experienced by parents of children with ASD specifically, longitudinal research has identified the initial diagnosis as the most stressful period for parents of children with developmental disabilities, followed by the transition to school and then the transition from school to community life (Baxter et al., 1995). Similarly, Neely et al. (2012) described the demands associated with parenting a child with ASD during initial diagnosis, puberty, and the transition to adulthood. These important transitions are described below.

### **Initial Diagnosis**

The first major transition that parents of children with ASD face is the diagnosis. Parents often report that the actual process of getting a diagnosis is stressful in and of itself (Hutton & Caron, 2005; Schall, 2000). The symptoms and severity of autism vary greatly, making it difficult for parents and doctors to identify the disorder, particularly in high functioning children (Howlin & Moore, 1997; Osborn & Reed, 2008). Additionally, the age at which symptoms manifest can vary. More severe cases are often diagnosed in infancy, but some parents do not see any signs of a problem until the child demonstrates a developmental regression at ages 2 to 3.

Still, some children do not receive a diagnosis until they enter elementary school (Volkmar, Chawarska, & Klin, 2005).

The process of receiving a diagnosis often requires multiple trips to different doctors, mental health practitioners, social workers, and educators. The ambiguity present in ASD diagnoses can cause parents to feel the need for multiple opinions. In previous research, parents of children with ASD reported experiencing significant delays, false reassurances, and incorrect information before receiving an accurate diagnosis (Howlin & Moore, 1997; Midence & O'Neill, 1999). Most parents (across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom) do not receive an accurate and final diagnosis of ASD until the third visit to their healthcare provider (Goin-Kochel, Mackintosh, & Myers, 2006; Howlin & Asgharian, 1999; Howlin & Moore, 1997; Mandell, Ittenbach, Levy, & Pinto-Martin, 2007; Siklos & Kerns, 2007; Smith & Chung, 1994).

Once the diagnosis is finally received, parents are faced with a new set of challenges: coping with the news and planning for the future. Previous research indicates that receiving the ASD diagnosis is associated with increased care-giver and family burden (Pakenham, Samios, & Sofronoff, 2005; Stuart & McGrew, 2009). Parents are faced with a number of emotions, including feelings of grief, shock, anger, relief, and self-blame (Fleischmann, 2004; Hutton & Caron, 2005). First, they may be mourning the relationship they had envisioned with their child. Due to deficits in communication and social interaction, many children with ASD lack the ability to form close relationships in the way that typically developing children do (Kanner, 1943; Neely et al., 2012). Second, they may be concerned about the loss of a future they had imagined for their child. Many individuals with ASD never achieve the level of autonomy and independence expected from neuro-typical children (Johnson, McGrew, Bloomberg, Bruininks, & Lin, 1997).

After diagnosis, parents are left with the overwhelming task of trying to chart a course forward for their child and their family. Before seeking treatment, intervention, and support, they must obtain information; however, many parents report receiving little to no help or advice from medical professionals about how to best support their child (Mansell & Morris, 2004; Osborn & Reed, 2008).

### **Transition to School**

Though few studies have focused on the impact for parents, research involving the transition to school for the first time identifies this change as a major transition for families of children with ASD, one that can lead to increased stress or a sense of relief. Children with disabilities are more likely to have trouble adapting to the school environment. They tend to have poorer teacher-student relationships and more reported behavior problems (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006). Before the child begins the transition, parents first choose a school and an individual enhancement plan that will benefit their child and hopefully, maximize their potential, all while navigating a complex bureaucracy (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2005). Parents report receiving conflicting professional advice about the types of schools and programs that would most benefit their child (Lilley, 2014).

In a longitudinal study starting with diagnosis, Baxter, Cummins, and Polak (1995) found that many parents, particularly mothers, reported heightened stress during the transition to school and that their sources of stress had changed. In particular, parents were worried about the child's ability to be calm, the teacher's ability to communicate with the child and meet the child's needs, and bullying from other students. In contrast, some parents reported feeling relieved when their child started school. They were happy to have more time to engage in daily activities or re-join

the work force. Many parents also viewed the child's successful entry into school as an achievement, as well as a sign that the child may one day lead a normal life (Baxter et al., 1995).

### **Puberty and Adolescence**

A third major transition faced by parents of children with ASD is the development into adolescence and puberty. These parents report higher levels of concern for their child during adolescence than parents of children without disabilities (Stokes & Kaur, 2005). In a study by Nichols & Blakely-Smith (2010), parents reported fear about their child's ability to have social and romantic relationships and felt their child had a hard time understanding norms of privacy and social space. These concerns are seemingly warranted, given that children with ASD report high levels of stress during adolescence and face greater social isolation and bullying when compared to their neuro-typical peers (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Humphrey & Lewis 2008). Due to their lack of social and communication skills, adolescents with ASD are less likely to acquire the abilities one needs to navigate romantic relationships, sexual feelings, and the peer interactions necessary for success during their teenage and adult years (Stokes et al., 2007). Additionally, new problem behaviors often arise as they reach puberty due to fluctuating hormones, new sensations, and developing sexuality (for review, see Sullivan & Caterino, 2008). Previous research indicates that adolescents with autism often demonstrate inappropriate sexual conduct. In particular, students may touch others without permission, discuss sex in inappropriate situations, publicly undress, or masturbate in public (Hellemans, Colson, Verbraeken, Vermeiren, & Deboutte, 2007; Ruble & Dalrymple, 1993). Teens with ASD were also found to have less knowledge about sexual health than their neuro-typical classmates (Stokes & Kaur, 2005).



In addition to changes in sexual feelings and behaviors, parents have new concerns for safety when children change physically. As children become bigger and stronger, parents must make accommodations and often seek help in managing their child on a daily basis. This is particularly true for male children with ASD when mothers are no longer strong enough to restrain their sons during outbursts (Gray, 2002). Parents may also face increased social isolation when their young child develops into an intimidating teen, thus limiting their ability to participate in social outings (Krauss, Seltzer, & Jacobson, 2005).

### **Transition to Adulthood**

The third major transition that parents of children with ASD must navigate is the shift to adulthood. Approximately 80 percent of individuals with autism live at home after leaving high school, while only 4 percent live independently (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Thus, the transition to adulthood is associated with increased burden for the parents of children with ASD, primarily as a result of the parent's perceptions of their child's unmet needs (Cadman et al., 2012). At the age of 21 or 22 (depending on the state), children with disabilities "age out" of the public school system and (in some cases) no longer receive financial support from the state, as well as respite care in the form of school aids (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Additionally, concerns such as recognizing changes in behavior and identifying interventions are left up to the parents. This transition is particularly stressing given that parents of children with ASD have indicated that schools were often the most helpful source for treatment and formal support for their child (Mansell & Morris, 2004). Once they leave the public school system, adults with autism that live with their parents face social isolation, discontentment, and a lack of independence (Krauss et al., 2005).

Research has consistently found poor outcomes for individuals with ASD in terms of employment and independent living (Cederlund, Hagberg, Billstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2008; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Adults with ASD can engage in meaningful work and integrate successfully into the community with appropriate education and preparation; however, opportunities for work and post-secondary education for these individuals after high school are generally limited (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2002, 2004). Thus, parents are faced with the burden of seeking opportunities for employment and preparing the child for work. Since the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, educational professionals have been required to provide transition teams to assist in identifying and preparing for opportunities after high school for children with disabilities, but these services can prove confusing and unsatisfying for parents. A qualitative study by Cooney (2002) describes parents' frustrations with the inflexibility, unfamiliarity, and uncertainty associated with these programs.

Though previous research has identified specific transitions throughout the lives of children with ASD that are associated with high stress for parents, the question still remains of how transitions directly impact the marriage of parents of children with autism and how parents can maintain healthy relationships in the face of stressful transitions. Additional theoretical frameworks are necessary to answer these questions.

### **Conclusion**

Autism spectrum disorder is a pervasive, difficult, and on-going disability that has the potential to impact parental and marital well-being. Though raising a child with ASD can be continually stressful for parents, transitions throughout the life course of the child have proven particularly burdensome. Additionally, a convincing body of research suggests that the increased burden of raising a child with ASD can lead to decreased marital satisfaction and increased

conflict. Despite these negative consequences for parents of children with autism, little research has been undertaken to identify the means by which married partners can attenuate the harmful effects.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the communication behaviors that parents of children with ASD use to navigate marital transitions, particularly during transitions associated with their child. In service of this goal, I test the relationship between married partners' use of transition processing communication and experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence using both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. In the following chapters, I provide an overview of marital experiences for parents of children with ASD, describe the theoretical frameworks on which this project is based in more detail, and discuss two related studies. Chapter 2 discusses a previous framework used in examining married partners raising a child with ASD and describes the meta-theoretical framework on which this project is based. In Chapter 3, I describe two relevant theories that work together to provide guidance for parents of children with ASD navigating transitions. I also propose a series of research questions and hypotheses linking specific cognitions and communication behaviors to transition experiences and outcomes. In Chapter 4, I describe the methods of a cross-sectional study designed to explore the experiences of parents of children with ASD during transitions. Chapter 5 describes the procedures used in a longitudinal, diary study designed to examine the associations between transition processing communication and parents' experiences of turmoil during their child's transition to school for the first time. Chapter 6 reports the results of the study described in Chapter 5 and discusses the implications of the findings. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the methods and findings of the two studies described in this dissertation and discusses the overarching theoretical and practical implications.

## CHAPTER TWO

Thus far, research on the impacts of raising a child with ASD on family and marital quality has been conducted largely without a theoretical framework. Scholars in the areas of health, human development and family studies, and psychology have focused primarily on identifying trends using qualitative and quantitative data, without much attention to underlying mechanisms (Johnson, 2012; Pakenham et al., 2005; Stuart & McGrew, 2009). The field of psychiatry offers a single exception to the rule with the use of the double ABCX model (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983) as a framework for examining how stress, perceptions of crises, and available resources impact the families of children with ASD. In this chapter, I first describe the double ABCX model, as well as the empirical findings discovered by employing the framework. I also discuss the limitations of the model. Next, I propose the systems and cognitive instrumentalist approaches to communication as alternative and preferable perspectives for the study of parents of children with ASD. In doing so, I provide the meta-theoretical assumptions of the current project.

### Double ABCX Model

The double ABCX model (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983) is based on the ABCX family crises model (Hill, 1949). The original ABCX model used an  $A + B + C = X$  formula to explain how a stressor ( $A$ ), existing internal resources ( $B$ ), and the perception of that stressor ( $C$ ) combine to predict how families adapt to crises ( $X$ ). The double ABCX model expanded the original to suggest a second, parallel set of post-crisis characteristics that affect family adaptation and outcomes: the pile-up effects on their demands ( $A$ ), available external resources ( $B$ ), and coping strategies engaged ( $C$ ).

Research using the double ABCX model has identified severity of ASD symptoms, behavior problems, problem appraisals, additional life demands, and negative coping strategies as aspects of raising a child with ASD that negatively impact perceptions of care-giver burden and family adaptation (Pakenham et al., 2005; Pozo, Sarria, & Brioso, 2014; Stuart & McGrew, 2009). Previous research also points to social support, positive coping strategies, and positive reframing as aspects that may be associated with decreased care-giver burden and more positive family function (Manning, Wainwright, & Bennett, 2011; Pozo et al., 2014). Thus, the double ABCX model provides some general insights into variables associated with individual and family outcomes of transitions or crises involving children with ASD; however, only one study (that I know of) thus far gives attention to how marriages are impacted by crises using the double ABCX model.

Stuart and McGrew (2009) used the model to examine how social support, care-giver appraisals and coping strategies predicted individual, marital, and family burden in families of children with ASD after the initial diagnosis. In this study, the only variable found to increase positive adaptation was social support, which negatively predicted all three forms of burden. The authors identified pile-up demands, negative appraisals, and passive avoidance coping as factors associated with increased marital burden. In contrast to their hypothesis (and other work using the double ABCX model), the use of problem-focused and emotional coping strategies was not associated with decreased burden in any form. This finding is consistent with work by Higgins and colleagues (2005), who found no associations between the use of coping strategies and marital happiness or family adaptability in families of children with autism. Thus, the types of strategies and characteristics of relationships that may attenuate the negative impacts of raising a child with ASD remain largely unidentified.

While the double ABCX model has been used in several studies of families of children with ASD generally (Pakenham et al., 2005; Stuart & McGrew, 2009), these studies have several limitations. First, studies using the model tend to focus on primary care-givers (usually mothers), instead of marital dyads or entire families. Second, despite the flexibility of the double ABCX model, studies to date have focused on general outcomes, such as care-giver burden, quality of life, and psychological well-being. Thus, the studies overlook the many aspects of family and marital life that may be affected by events associated with raising a child with ASD. Third, these studies have identified characteristics that negatively impact family adaptation, but they have identified few aspects of family and marital communication that might positively impact adaptation during changes and events surrounding the child with autism, particularly those affecting the marital relationship.

In addition to the limitations of existing research engaging the double ABCX model, the framework itself has several limitations that restrict its utility for improving the marriages of parents of children with ASD. First, although the model attends to specific coping strategies that families might use during stressful crises, the theory largely ignores the role of communication in family and marital functioning and how communication impacts family adaptation. The focus on coping strategies is particularly problematic given that research in the context of families raising children with ASD have consistently found little or no effects for engagement in positive coping strategies and family or marital adaptability (Higgins et al., 2005; Stewart & McGrew, 2009). Second, the model focuses on how perceptions affect family coping. As such, it provides a mechanism for evaluating potential problems in families, without suggesting practical avenues for improving family adaptation during crises. Ramisch (2012) suggested the double ABCX model as a framework for family therapists to improve adaptation in families raising children

with ASD; however, the proposed method involved separate, discussion-based, therapy sessions for each aspect of the model. This form of intervention is costly and time-consuming, particularly for parents of children with ASD who are already faced with increased time and financial constraints.

The double ABCX model has provided insight into how families raising children with ASD adapt during and after crises; however, the model has several limitations for scholars looking to understand the marital relationships of the parents. Scholars seeking to examine and improve the marriages of parents of children with autism may be better served by engaging the meta-theoretical perspectives of systems theories and cognitive instrumentalism to understand the role of communication in navigating relational transitions stemming from events that occur throughout the lifespan of a child with ASD. In the following sections, I briefly describe the systems and cognitive instrumentalist perspectives and how each informs scientific research in this area and the development of this dissertation project.

### **Systems Perspective**

Research from the systems perspective views the family as a set of interconnected parts working together to form a whole in a changing environment. From this perspective each family maintains two important characteristics, interdependence and nonsummativity. *Interdependence* captures that idea that every member of the family is so connected that a change in the life of one member of the family affects all of the other family members and the family system as a whole. *Non-summativity* reflects the notion that the family system is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, even if one knows each family member, one will not know the family system as a whole. Family members take on different characteristics and patterns of interaction when they are together, the system maintains a unique dynamic. Additionally, systems are made up of

hierarchies, systems within systems. Each individual part of the system, each family member, has a unique relationship with each other family member. Within these relationships family members communicate in distinct patterns.

From the systems perspective, the husband and wife can be considered a subsystem within the family. For this reason, the systems approach to studying the marriages of parents of children with ASD allows researchers to ask questions beyond that of the relationship between the husband and wife. Given the assumption of interdependence between all parts of the system, a transition or change in the life of a child with ASD is assumed to cause changes in the relationship of the parents. Evidence for this assumption can be found in the wealth of research describing the negative impacts of raising a child with ASD on parental and marital well-being (for review, see Saini et al., 2015). In particular, parental health and well-being is closely tied to the child with ASD's behavior problems (Hastings, Kovshoff, Ward, Espinosa, Brown, & Remington, 2005).

Assumptions of non-summativity also prompt scholars to consider questions about the unique attributes of individual families, beyond characteristics often associated with raising a child with ASD, and how they impact the marriage. For example, while many studies suggest that raising a child with autism has negative implications for the parents and their relationship, several qualitative studies have shown varying affects, with some parents even reporting positive outcomes (Hock et al., 2012; King et al., 2006; Mailick Seltzer et al., 2001). Quantitative studies have not yet been able to identify these variations in outcomes, perhaps because self-report questionnaires targeting individual family members do not account for the non-summative nature of the family as a system. The distinctive characteristics of individual family systems points to



the utility of flexible interventions that can be adapted to meet the unique needs of family systems that may not be observable to the researcher.

Systems theories suggest that individuals within the family unit each communicate using unique and distinguishable patterns. For parents of children with autism, when changes occur within the system, those patterns are disrupted and roles change (Hutton & Caron, 2005; Neely et al., 2012), providing the opportunity for disruption and in some cases dissolution of the system. Thus, the systems perspective points to times of change within and around the system as moments in which to explore and intervene with regard to maintaining positive communication patterns within the family. Systems theory recognizes that family systems adapt in response to changes in the environment. When children with ASD experience developmental, behavioral, or social changes, the entire family must adapt. Previous research suggests that parents' changes in behavior during transitions are often maladaptive, including increased conflict and decreased affection (Gau et al., 2011; Weber, 2012). The question still remains of how married partners can adapt in positive ways to maintain homeostasis and decrease negative relational outcomes. Engaging theories developed in the cognitive instrumentalist perspective provides a blueprint for answering this question.

### **Cognitive Instrumentalism**

Theories from the perspective of cognitive instrumentalism use mental processes to explain behavior. In this approach, constructs that are within the mind, such as attitudes and beliefs are real and serve as a mediator between stimulus and response. In cognitive theories, the stimulus is a source of information from the environment and the response is a behavior prompted by the individual's perception of the stimulus. Early social scientists described the cognitive process as a conceptual filter through which all new information passes. This filter

transforms the new information based on perceptions (e.g., biases, attributions) stemming from past experiences. Therefore, from the perspective of cognitive instrumentalism, communication is two individuals providing stimuli for one another, which is then transformed using conceptual filters to prompt a behavioral response. Cognitive processes can impact the communication process in terms of input processing, memory, and/or response creation (Fisher, 1978; Pavitt, 2001).

The cognitive instrumentalist perspective on theory in the social sciences does not try to explain the processes that exist within the mind, but rather, use those processes as a way of drawing connections between observable stimulus and response in order to make predictions. Even though mental processes cannot be directly observed and measured, they are assumed real. Instead, scientists capture indicators of their existence through self-report scales of perceptions (attitudes, beliefs, emotions) or by observing behaviors.

Two specific assumptions are present in cognitive theories that impact the study of parents of children with ASD. First, the cognitive processes within the mind are real and valid constructs for scientific research. Second, these cognitive processes predict observable behaviors (Pavitt, 2001). These assumptions lead to specific types of questions for the study of marital relationships in parents of children with ASD. First, how does the stress associated with raising a child with ASD impact the parent's relationship? In this question, stress is identified as part of the conceptual filter that transforms parents' response to stimuli involving their relationship. Though few studies have examined parent responses to and behaviors during specific interactions, research has demonstrated a negative association between parenting stress and evaluations of the relationship broadly (Brobst et al., 2009). In this project, I examine how the cognitions and emotions associated with increased stress during transitions affect aspects of

the relationship. In particular, I engage the framework of relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) to assess how parenting stress impacts feelings of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence.

Second, the cognitive approach guides a consideration of how married partners can improve perceptions of their relationship. More specifically, how can married partners provide stimuli that impact the ways in which their spouse conceptualizes their marriage? Consistent with a systems perspective, previous research indicates that transitions within and around marriages are associated with changes in roles, relational schema, and patterns of communication (Solomon & Theiss, 2011). As a result, married partners engage in biased cognitive appraisals when they lack the information necessary to make sense of relationally relevant stimuli (Solomon et al., 2016). When married partners provide stimuli that re-affirms their relationship and helps to re-establish relational roles and schema, they may be able to change their partner's cognitive processing and reduce bias. With this in mind, the goal of the dissertation project is to explore relationship-focused communication that serves the purpose of re-programming a spouse's conceptual filter by reducing feelings of uncertainty within the relationship and improving perceptions of partner interdependence. To do so, I incorporate transition processing communication introduced by the experiencing life transitions model (Meleis et al., 2000) into the framework of relational turbulence theory to serve as guidelines for relational maintenance during major life transitions throughout the life of a child with ASD.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described the existing theoretical framework used to examine the families of children with ASD and described several limitations of the model, as well as existing research. I proposed systems and cognitive instrumentalist perspectives as meta-theoretical approaches to

the study of marital relationships among parents of children with ASD. From these perspectives, I provided evidence that parenting stress negatively impacts marital relationships. I also posited that married partners have the potential to change their spouse's conceptual filter with regard to their relationship through communicative processes that re-affirm the relationship. Given this claim, a closer look at the specific ways in which parents of children with ASD are affected by stress and navigate stressful events throughout the life of their child is warranted. In Chapter 3, I engage relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) to propose the cognitive mechanisms (relational uncertainty and changes in interdependence) whereby changes around the couple impact communicative behavior and perceptions of the relationship. The experiencing life transitions model (Meleis et al., 2000) provides an outline of specific behaviors in which marital partners can engage during transitions to reduce negative cognitions about the marriage.

### CHAPTER 3

The research described in Chapter 1 points to the circumstances associated with raising a child with ASD as major stressors for the romantic relationships of parents. Though previous research has identified specific transitions that are associated with high stress for parents, little research thus far has examined how those transitions impact the marital qualities of parents of children with autism. This chapter introduces two theoretical frameworks to shed light on how transitions in the life of a child with ASD affect the marital relationship of his or her parents and how parents can navigate those transitions successfully using relational communication. First, I use the framework of relational turbulence theory to explain how transitions associated with raising a child with ASD may negatively impact the couple's relationship. Second, I describe the experiencing life transitions model as a blueprint for navigating marital transitions using concrete cognitions and communicative behaviors.

#### **Relational Turbulence and Transitions**

Relational turbulence theory explains that couples experience heightened relationship focus, higher levels of conflict, more direct communication, and more intense emotions during relational transitions (Solomon et al., 2016). These transitions occur as a result of circumstances involving a single partner, such as illness or job loss, or both partners, such as the birth of a new child, crises involving children, or moving to a new location. According to relational turbulence theory, these major events change the interdependence of the relational partners, such that former relational schema may not be relevant and everyday routines and expectations are disrupted, causing a sense of chaos and disorder. As partners renegotiate their interdependence and reestablish routines, they experience heightened reactivity to relationally relevant information, which further impacts their relational communication (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004).

Two primary explanations for relational turbulence are set forth by the theory: relational uncertainty and changes in interdependence. *Relational uncertainty* refers to an individual's ability to understand their partner's actions, predict relational outcomes, and make choices concerning their own behavior (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001, 2004; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005). This uncertainty stems from three sources of questions. *Self uncertainty* refers to questions about the individual's own involvement in the relationship ("Do I know how I feel about my marriage?"). *Partner uncertainty* refers to the questions about a partner's feelings toward the relationship ("Do I know how my spouse feels about our marriage?"). Finally, *relationship uncertainty* refers to general doubts about the relationship itself ("What is the status of my marriage?"). These three aspects of relational uncertainty are highly correlated and have strong (though sometimes different) effects on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). For example, when partners are uncertain about their relationship, they interpret unforeseen events more negatively (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002), employ more topic avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), perceive social networks to be less supportive and more intrusive (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006), and feel more negative emotions (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007). For parents of children with ASD, relational uncertainty stems from the challenges and transitions related to their child's disability throughout the course of their marriage. As the child develops, the burden associated with these transitions causes changes to previously established roles, patterns, and schema for the parents and their relationship (Hock et al., 2012; Neely et al., 2012). Additionally, children with ASD require more time, energy, and resources than neuro-typical children, which can leave less time for relational maintenance (Brobst et al., 2009; Dabrowska & Pisula 2010; Rao & Beidel, 2009).

The second explanation for feelings of turbulence in parents of children with ASD is interdependence. During times of transition, change in daily routines can cause partners to influence each other's lives in new ways. *Facilitation from a partner* is the perception that a partner helps one to achieve daily goals, while *interference from a partner* is the perception that a partner disrupts one's daily goals (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001, 2004). Repeated goal interference from a relational partner can cause intense negative emotional reactions (e.g. sadness, anger, jealousy) and greater relational conflict (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007). For parents of children with ASD, interference from a partner stems from increased childcare burden and decreased family and community involvement (Lee, Harrington, Louie, & Newschaffer, 2008). Couples are more reliant on each other to create and maintain new schedules and behaviors that work toward both individual's goals. At first, transitions may be messy, causing partners to get in each other's way as they negotiate new routines and establish a new "normal."

During a relational transition, feelings of relational uncertainty and interference from a partner impact relational communication through biased cognitive processing and intensified emotions. The build-up of volatile communication episodes as a result of these feelings leads to the global perception of one's relationship as turbulent. *Relational turbulence* is a quality of relationships characterized by feelings of chaos, confusion, and fragility (Knobloch et al., 2007; McLaren, Solomon, & Priem, 2011; Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010).

Previous research has demonstrated the impact of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence on a multitude of transitions throughout marriage (e.g. breast cancer, the birth of a child, return from military deployment). For example, in the months after a couple brings home a new baby, changes in relational uncertainty and partner interference

are negatively related to relational satisfaction over time (Theiss, Estlein, & Weber, 2013).

Weber and Solomon (2008) found that among couples coping with breast cancer, uncertainty and interference are associated with decreased positivity in communication, stronger negative feelings about stress related to the cancer, and more direct communication about stressors. In military families post-deployment, relational uncertainty and interference from a partner were positively associated with depressive symptoms (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011) and interference from a partner was negatively related to conflict management and partner responsiveness (Theiss & Knobloch, 2014).

According to relational turbulence theory, transitions that occur within and around a partnership cause relational schema and behavioral norms to change. When raising a child with ASD, parents may feel like they are constantly in a state of transition as they face the initial diagnosis, the transition into the school system, puberty, or the transition out of the school system, along with other transitions specific to the child. Changes in the child's behavior, needs, and levels of independence cause changes in the parents' routines and communication (Hutton & Caron, 2005; Neely et al., 2012). The first goal in my dissertation project is to survey the landscape of transitions specific to parents of children with ASD and to assess which of these transitions are associated with aspects of relational turbulence. Thus, I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the major relationship transitions for parents of children with ASD?

RQ2: For parents of children with ASD, how do perceptions of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence differ according to the type of transition experienced?



Previous research suggests that married partners in the general population experience heightened relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence during major life transitions (Brisini et al., 2017). With this in mind, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Parents of children with ASD experience heightened relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence during a recalled transition when compared to the time of the survey.

In the general population, stress has consistently been associated with negative outcomes for romantic partners, including negative evaluations of the relationship (Tesser & Beach, 1998; Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000), increased conflict (Story & Repetti, 2006) and a greater likelihood of marital dissolution (Bodenmann, 2005; Bodenmann et al., 2007). For parents of children with autism, in particular, parenting stress has been negatively correlated with marital satisfaction (Hartley et al., 2011), the positivity of marital interactions (Hartley et al., 2016), and marital quality (Harper et al., 2013).

Relational turbulence theory suggests that experiences of turmoil within a relationship can interfere with married partners' ability to provide support for their partner during stressful periods and to manage their own stressful experiences. Though this aspect of the theory has not been thoroughly tested, experiences of relational turbulence are thought to negatively impact stress due to heightened emotions, polarized reactions, and disrupted relational communication (Solomon et al., 2016). In the only study to date that addresses the relationship between aspects of stress and turbulence, Priem and Solomon (2011) found a positive association between experiences of relational uncertainty and physiological stress indicators. They also found that participants who were uncertain about how their partners felt about their relationship had less

cortisol recovery during supportive interactions after a stressful event. Following relational turbulence theory, I propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Greater perceived parenting stress related to raising a child with ASD will be positively associated with experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence; and negatively associated with perceptions of facilitation from a partner.

Though no studies have directly tested ways in which transitions impact the marital qualities of parents of children with ASD, the framework of relational turbulence theory may shed light on some of the underlying mechanisms causing the conflict and dissatisfaction described in previous research. In particular, the increased burden placed on parents of children with ASD during transitions may lead to relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and subsequent relational turbulence, which have demonstrated negative outcomes for relational communication in past research. The following section examines the means by which married partners can handle these stressful transitions by describing the experiencing life transitions model.

### **Experiencing Life Transitions Model**

Life transitions models were conceived to measure and chart successful medical transitions. In particular, nursing scholars, such as Meleis and colleagues (Meleis, 2010; Meleis et al., 2000), have developed the experiencing life transitions model, which identifies four categories of communication and cognitions that serve as process indicators of a successful transition: increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence. These patterns have been identified in individual transitions through multiple studies (e.g. Im, 1996; Messias, 1997; Sawyer, 1997). Due to the interdependent nature of married partners, particularly

parents, these four categories may also be used as markers of successful transitions within couples. In conjunction with relational turbulence theory, the experiencing life transitions model can provide a framework for navigating stressful transitions in parents of children with ASD, such that engaging in this processing communication may attenuate experiences of relational uncertainty and interference from a partner.

### **Increasing Interaction**

The first category of response associated with a successful transition is increasing interaction. During times of transition, individuals rely on social networks to provide emotional, esteem, and instrumental support (Meleis, 2010). By interacting with friends, family, and healthcare professionals, individuals find meaning in the transitions, develop new patterns of interaction, gain information, and maintain their well-being.

Increasing interaction may also be an indicator of successful relationship transitions in parents of children with ASD as it helps to reduce uncertainty that occurs as a result of changes in circumstances. When married partners experience relational uncertainty, it often leads to decreased partner responsiveness (Theiss & Knobloch, 2014), decreased directness of communication (Theiss & Solomon, 2006), and the perception of hurtful messages as more hurtful, more intentional, and associated with more negative emotions, such as anger, sadness and worthlessness (McLaren et al., 2011). Maintaining frequent interaction with one's spouse may serve to combat relational uncertainty and its negative effects by providing couples with opportunities to re-negotiate relational norms and gain information from which to make inferences about their relationships (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). Thus, although relational communication may be more difficult during transitions due to experiences of relational turbulence (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005),

increasing interaction may help parents of children with ASD to successfully navigate periods of change.

### **Feeling Connected**

The second indicator of successful transitions for individuals is feeling connected with family, friends, and healthcare professionals. By sharing their transition with social network members, the individual uses self-disclosure and discussion to garner support, information and tangible resources (Meleis et al., 2009). Feeling connected may also act as a marker of successful relationship transitions as couples reduce uncertainty through open communication about their relationship during the transition.

Despite the increased difficulty of engaging in relationship talk during times of relational turbulence (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005), communication becomes particularly necessary when schemas have changed or been made uncertain. In a longitudinal study by Knobloch and Theiss (2011), partners who reported more relationship talk one week, reported less uncertainty about their relationship in the following week. Previous research also demonstrates that open communication about sexual intimacy (Theiss & Nagy, 2010), jealousy (Theiss & Solomon, 2006), and relational uncertainty (Theiss & Solomon, 2008) increases relational partners' feelings of satisfaction and intimacy. Thus, parents of children with ASD may use self-disclosure and relationship talk to reduce relational uncertainty by maintaining a positive connection with their spouse during stressful transitions.

### **Feeling Situated**

The third indicator of successful transition processing is feeling situated. When individuals experience major changes, they situate themselves within the transition by comparing life after the change to the life they knew before the change. Comparison is one way that individuals can

create new meaning in light of their circumstances and reflect on the nuanced changes that occur as part of the transition process.

In the context of marriage, partners can make sense of their new routines and the new characteristics of their relationship by recognizing changes that exist as a result of the transitional event. This relational sense-making may occur between the partners or with the help of network members (Parks, 2007). Research on narratives indicates that when individuals contemplate the events that occur in their lives, they focus on particular aspects of those events. The aspects on which they choose to focus affect individual well-being (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). In particular, individuals often reframe negative transitions in order to recognize positive outcomes. Doing so leads to an increase in emotional well-being and resiliency (Pals, 2006), and a decrease in emotional distress (Slotter & Ward, 2015). Thus, during hectic changes in their child's life, feeling situated may reduce uncertainty by helping parents of children with ASD to make sense of changes in their relationship in a positive light through the use of narratives.

### **Increasing Confidence**

Finally, the nursing literature identifies steps toward successful transitions through patterns that indicate that the individual is developing confidence and coping strategies. Confidence during times of transition manifests as the individual's understanding of the process, the resources, and the strategies necessary to navigate the event. As individuals move through the process of transition, they gain a better understanding of their circumstances and challenges and therefore, are more confident in their abilities to handle them. Similarly, during relational transitions, couples start to reduce uncertainty as they establish new routines and behavioral schema and increase confidence in their relationship (Solomon & Theiss, 2011).

Spouses can increase each other's confidence in the relationship through expressions of commitment. In marriages, partners show their commitment in a multitude of ways throughout their daily lives; during times of transition, these indicators may promote confidence within the relationship. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) identified ten indicators that relational partners use to demonstrate their commitment to one another (e.g., providing affection, verbally expressing commitment, and providing support). Commitment indicators demonstrate a negative correlation with relational uncertainty, and positive correlations with relational commitment and satisfaction (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002; Weigel, Brown, & O'Riordan, 2011). These studies converge to suggest that increasing the use of behavioral commitment indicators may decrease relational uncertainty during times of turbulence. Thus, parents of children with ASD may improve marital outcomes during stressful transitions by demonstrating their commitment to their partner verbally and non-verbally.

So far, Brisini, Solomon, and Nussbaum (2016) have conducted the only study to examine the relationship between the types of transition processing communication described by the experiencing life transitions model and experiences of marital transitions. In this preliminary study, each of the four indicators was negatively associated with married partners' ratings of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence. Increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence were also associated with more positive transition experiences and more positive transitions outcomes. These associations were consistent across a range of commonly experienced marital transitions, including crises involving children (Brisini et al., 2016). No studies have specifically applied the framework of the experiencing life transitions model to marital transitions experienced by parents of children with ASD; however, the model's emphasis on specific behaviors and

cognitions that improve relational quality and closeness may provide a unique advantage in this context. Guidelines for improving relational quality that provide general concepts to consider, while providing specific, small actions to perform may prove particularly helpful for parents of children with autism, given the extra burden and time constraints associated with the disability.

With this in mind, I propose several hypotheses that predict general, daily, and over-time associations between transition processing communication and marital qualities:

H3: The extent to which people report interacting, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence is negatively associated with the degree of relational uncertainty, interference from partner, and relational turbulence associated with the transition and positively correlated with perceptions of facilitation from partner.

H4: Relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and facilitation from a partner mediate the link between transition processing communication and relational turbulence.

H5: Husbands' and wives' use of transition processing activities negatively predicts changes in their own and their partner's reports of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence (a) on the same, (b) three days later, and (c) 42 days later, and positively predicts facilitation from a partner.

H6: Husbands' and wives' perception of their spouse's engagement in transition processing activities negatively predicts changes in their reports of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence (a) on the same, (b) three days later, and (c) 42 days later, and positively predicts facilitation from a partner.

RQ3a: How do married partners' experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty,

interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence change over the course of a child's transition to school?

RQ3b: How do married partners' engagement in transition processing activity (increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, increasing confidence) change over the course of a child's transition to school?

### **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the relationship between stress associated with raising a child with ASD, experiences of relational turmoil, and transition processing communication. In particular, I proposed research questions exploring the types of transitions reported by parents of children with autism and the experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence associated with the transitions described. Following previous research engaging the framework of relational turbulence theory, I also described the hypothesized relationships between experiences of parenting stress and qualities of turbulence. Finally, I highlighted the predicted associations between husbands' and wives' participation in transition processing communication and experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence.

The research questions and hypotheses proposed in this section are tested in two studies. In Chapter 4, I describe the methods used in exploratory, cross-sectional, self-report study in which individuals who are currently married and raising a child with ASD reflect on an important transition in the life of their child, the ways in which that transition affected the marital relationship, and the means by which married partners navigated the transition. In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss a longitudinal study in which participants report on their use of transition processing communication and marital experiences using daily diaries.



## CHAPTER 4

To examine the types of transitions that most impact the marital relationships of parents of children with ASD, Study 1 consisted of a cross-sectional, self-report, recall study. Parents were asked to recall the transition in the life of their child with ASD that most affected their marriage. These reports were then compared to measures of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence, and transition processing communication. Results from Study 1 were used to determine which transition would be the focus of the longitudinal project in Study 2 and which scale items would be used in the daily diary portion of Study 2.

### Methods

To test Research Questions 1 and 2, as well as Hypotheses 1 through 4, I recruited participants using a Qualtrics national, medical panel of married persons for whom their child's diagnosis had been verified by a medical professional. Qualtrics recruits participants based on criteria selected by the researcher and provides incentives including cash payments, gift cards, and online vouchers (see Brandon, Long, Loraas, Mueller-Phillips, & Vansant, 2014).

### Participants

Participants were parents (Male = 150, Female = 148) who were currently married and who raised or were currently raising a child that was diagnosed with ASD. In total, 298 parents were included in the study. Participants were primarily European American (79%) and ranged in age from 19 to 72 ( $M = 38.29$ ,  $SD = 8.49$ ). Partners reported being married between 1 year and 40 years ( $M = 12.06$ ,  $SD = 7.52$ ), with 46 (15%) having been married previously.

## Procedures

Participants completed a series of open and closed-ended measures indexing their experiences raising a child with ASD and its impacts on their marriage. After completing informed consent, respondents completed measures indexing experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from partner, relational turbulence, marital satisfaction, and parenting stress at the time of the survey. They were then asked to describe how raising a child with ASD affects their lives on a day to day basis. Next, they detailed an important transition that occurred in their marriage as the result of parenting a child with ASD.

Instructions for describing the event are as follows:

A relational transition is a period of change in your relationship that occurs as a result of a life event marked by shifts in how people think about their relationship and behave toward each other. **These transitions can be positive or negative, large or small.** Raising a child with autism, one might feel like the family is constantly in transition. We would like to know what transitional event in the life of your child with autism had the greatest impact on your marriage or created a relational transition (for example, the initial ASD diagnosis, your child's transition to puberty or adulthood, starting or finishing school, etc.).

Participants described a relational transition and the impact the transition described had on their marriage using open-ended responses. Then, they completed closed-ended scales indexing perceptions of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from partner, and relational turbulence during the time of the transition, as well as qualities of the transition. Finally, married partners indicated the extent to which they and their spouse engaged in transition processing communication throughout the transition.

## Content Analysis

As a preliminary step, I used content coding to identify which participants reported experiencing a transition related to their child with ASD. Responses were coded as identifying a transition (e.g., "The diagnosis," "starting school"), not identifying a transition (i.e., participants

claimed to have experienced no transitions or identified qualities of their marriage instead of a transition), or describing a transition without identifying the type (e.g., “It was very difficult,” “It felt chaotic and hectic”). After training separately on 10 percent ( $n = 30$ ) of the responses ( $\kappa = .86$ ), the coders independently reviewed the remaining 90 percent ( $n = 268$ ) of the responses. Intercoder agreement was adequate ( $\kappa = .82$ ) and disagreements were adjudicated by the primary investigator. Based on the content analysis, participants who identified a transition ( $N = 234$ ) or described characteristics of the transition ( $N = 33$ ) were included in subsequent analyses. I eliminated participants who did not describe a transition, leaving 267 responses. Chi square and independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between the participants who reported a transition and those who did not report a transition in terms of age, sex, years married, or ethnicity. Time since the transition ranged from less than one month to 43 years ( $M = 3.16$  years,  $SD = 4.60$ ).

I also used content analysis to identify the types of transitions experienced by parents of children with ASD. First, I developed a coding scheme that included 10 categories of transitions to examine the open-ended responses (see Table 4.1). Then, two independent coders read the responses and identified the type of transition described using the criteria. Intercoder reliability was adequate ( $\kappa = 0.89$ ) and disagreements were adjudicated by the primary investigator.

### **Measurement Analysis**

All variables in the study were assessed using scales validated in previous studies. Items were measured on 6-point Likert items (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree) unless otherwise stated. Descriptive statistics for each of the measures are reported in Table 4.2. I used confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS/SPSS version 23) to test the measurement properties of variables. I constructed separate measurement models for items assessing participants’

experiences at the time of the survey and at the time of the transition. Per Hu and Bentler (1999), I used the following criteria to define adequate model fit:  $\chi^2/DF < 3.00$ , CFI  $> .90$ , RMSEA  $< .08$ . Both models were constructed following Solomon and Brisini's (2017) measurement analysis, in which one item was removed from the self uncertainty scale and two items were removed from each of the partner and relationship uncertainty scales, and error terms for reverse-coded items within the relational turbulence scale were also allowed to covary. Each item was assigned to its respective latent construct and latent constructs were allowed to covary.

The model consisting of scales focused on the time of the survey included measures of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence, relational satisfaction, and parenting stress. The measurement model fit the data,  $\chi^2/DF = 1.98$ , CFI = .92, RMSEA = .06. The model consisting of scales focused on the transition included measures of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence, transition magnitude and valence, and transition processing communication. This model also fit the data,  $\chi^2/DF = 1.74$ , CFI = .93, RMSEA = .05.

**Qualities of relationships.** Participants reported perceptions of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from partner, and relational turbulence concerning their relationship at the time of the survey, as well as in reference to their relationship during the reported transition. Scales items were identical in both instances, except the stem and verbs were adjusted to their past tense forms for items referencing their relationship during the transition. Relational uncertainty captures the questions individuals have about their relationship. Per Solomon and Brisini (2016), relational uncertainty was operationalized using 18 Likert items on three scales adapted from Knobloch and Solomon (1999). Six items measured *self uncertainty* (e.g., "Sometimes I wonder how strongly I am committed to my

spouse”), 6 items measured *partner uncertainty* (e.g., “Sometimes I wonder how strongly my spouse is committed to me), and 6 items measured *relationship uncertainty* (e.g., “Sometimes I am unsure of the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in our relationship”). Interference and facilitation from a partner were indexed using five Likert items (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). *Interference from a partner* captured respondents’ perceptions that a partner hindered his or her daily goals (e.g., “My spouse makes it harder for me to schedule my activities”). *Facilitation from a partner* assessed the extent to which individuals perceived a partner as helping achieve his or her goals (e.g., “My spouse helps me to do the things I need to do each day”). *Relational turbulence* captured the feelings of turmoil experienced by the partners in the wake of the transition. Four, 6-point semantic differential scales assessed participant perceptions of their relationship as being chaotic to stable (reverse coded), calm to turbulent, tumultuous to running smoothly (reverse coded), and peaceful to stressful (McLaren, Solomon, & Priem, 2012). Finally, Norton’s (1983) Marriage Quality Index was used to assess *marital satisfaction*. The scale measures the overall strength and quality of the relationship and consists of five Likert items, including “Our marriage is strong” and “My relationship with my partner makes me happy.”

**Parenting stress.** The participants’ experiences of *parenting stress* related to their child with ASD were assessed using the Autism Parenting Stress Index (Silva & Schalock, 2012). The scale consists of 13 items listing potential areas of stress associated with raising a child with ASD. Parents were asked to indicate the extent to which the particular concern caused him or her stress on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = not stressful, 6 = so stressful, I can’t cope). Sample items include, “your child’s social development,” “tantrums/meltdowns,” “not feeling close to your child,” and “concern for your child’s future.”

**Qualities of transitions.** To further explore the nature of the transitions reported by parents of children with ASD, I measured participant appraisals of the magnitude of the transition, valence of the experience, and the valence of the outcome. *Transition magnitude* was measured on four Likert items indexing the perceived seriousness of the transition (e.g., “This was a major event in our lives”). The *valence of the transition experience* was measured on two 6-point semantic differential scales ranging from negative to positive and unpleasant to pleasant. Similarly, the *valence of the transition outcome* was assessed using two 6-point semantic differential scales ranging from negative to positive and destructive to constructive (Brisini et al., 2017).

**Transition processing communication.** Eight scales operationalized the four forms of transition processing communication (Brisini et al., 2017). Four scales consisted of four 6-point Likert-type items (1 = not very often, 6 = very often) indexing the frequency with which the individual participated in transition process communication. Four parallel scales measured the frequency with which the participant perceived his or her spouse to engage in transition processing communication. *Increasing interaction* assessed the participant’s (or spouse’s) attempts to spend quality time with a partner (e.g., “During the transition, I made it a point to do fun things with my spouse”). *Feeling connected* reflected the extent to which respondents (or spouses) tried to maintain a sense of closeness through relationship talk and shared feelings (e.g., “During the transition, I tried to be open with my spouse about how I felt”). *Feeling situated* captured efforts to acknowledge the ways in which circumstances were different as a result of the transition and identify positive change (e.g., “During the transition, I tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for my relationship”). These scales were adapted from the original Brisini et al. (2017) measure to reflect the importance of positive framing when making

sense of changes in one's circumstances. *Increasing confidence* measured the use of commitment indicators throughout the transition process (e.g., "During the transition, I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong through affection").

## **Results**

Before conducting tests of the hypotheses, I assessed the influence of demographic variables on the variables of interest. Results of the preliminary tests informed the substantive analyses by identifying confounds and covariates.

### **Preliminary Analyses**

I first examined the relationship between participant sex, ethnicity, age, years married, income, and time since the transition and the variables of interest. Independent samples t-tests identified significant differences between male and female respondents. In particular, female participants reported lower levels of marital satisfaction, their own attempts to increase interaction, the perception that a partner attempted to feel connected during the transition, and the perception that a partner attempted to promote feeling situated during the transition. A one-way ANOVA identified significant mean differences based on participant ethnicity, such that European Americans reported significantly higher levels of partner uncertainty and interference from a partner than participants of other ethnicities. Age was negatively correlated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner at the time of the survey, and interference from a partner at the time of the transition ( $r$ 's range from  $-.14$  to  $-.17$ ). Time since the transition was positively correlated with transition magnitude,  $r = .19, p < .01$ , and relational turbulence at the time of the survey,  $r = .14, p < .05$ , and it was negatively correlated with transition experience,  $r = -.16, p < .01$ . In sum, although most demographic variables had few associations with the dependent variables, time since the transition and participant sex showed

significant associations with perceptions of the valence of the transition and with transition processing communication. Therefore, time since the transition and participant sex were included as covariates in subsequent analyses.

Solomon and Brisini (2017) demonstrated that operationalizations of marital satisfaction and constructs associated with relational turbulence are both related and distinct. Thus, I assessed marital satisfaction as a potential covariate using bivariate correlations. Satisfaction was negatively correlated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence at the time of the survey and the time of the transition ( $r$ 's range from  $-.35$  to  $-.46$ ). It was also positively correlated with facilitation from a partner, the positivity of the transition experience and outcomes, and each of the measures of transition processing communication ( $r$ 's range from  $.25$  to  $.58$ ). Thus, marital satisfaction was covaried in all substantive analyses.

To gain preliminary insight into the tests of the hypotheses, I examined the bivariate correlations between each of the variables of interest. Bivariate correlations between the variables of interest are reported in Table 4.3. Self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence at the time of the survey were all positively correlated ( $r$ 's range from  $.41$  to  $.86$ ) and negatively correlated with facilitation from a partner ( $r$ 's range from  $-.14$  to  $-.49$ ). These relationships reflect those found in previous research utilizing the framework of relational turbulence theory (e.g., Theiss, Estlein, & Weber, 2013). With regard to measures of relational qualities at the time of the transition, self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence were each positively correlated with each other ( $r$ 's range from  $.25$  to  $.84$ ) and negatively correlated with facilitation from a partner ( $r$ 's range from  $-.25$  to  $-.49$ ). I also observed that measures of



relational qualities at the time of the survey shared strong correlations with measures of relational qualities at the time of the transition ( $r$ 's range from .15 to .81 for measures of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence;  $r$ 's range from -.15 to -.51 for measures of facilitation from a partner). The only exception was that facilitation from a partner at the time of the survey was not significantly related to self uncertainty at the time of the transition. Measures of transition processing communication were all positively and significantly correlated ( $r$ 's range from .49 to .88), as were measures of the valence of transition outcomes and transition experience,  $r = .59, p < .001$ . Transition magnitude was significantly related to neither the valence of the transition experience nor the valence of the transition outcome.

### **Substantive Analyses**

The first research question considered the types of transitions throughout the life of a child with ASD that constitute transitions within the marriage of the parents. Through open-ended responses, parents most frequently reported that the initial diagnosis created the most significant transition for their relationship, followed by transitions associated with starting school for the first time, the child's experience of puberty, and other school-related transitions, such as changing classrooms or teachers. Less commonly reported transitions included the transition to adulthood, starting medical intervention, geographic re-location, and transitions due to basic developmental stages, such as learning to walk. The miscellaneous category accounted for 9% of responses. Frequency of responses are reported in Table 4.1.

RQ2 explored patterns in the experiences of parents of children with ASD based on the type of transition they reported. Because so few participants described the transition to adulthood, medical interventions, geographic re-location, and re-occurring events as significant

transitions, these responses were included in the miscellaneous category for comparison tests. As a first step, I examined the association between transition type and participant sex, ethnicity, age, years married, and time since transition. Results identified no prominent patterns between demographic variables and type of transition.<sup>1</sup> I also examined the relationship between the type of transition reported and participant experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence, transition processing communication, and transition experiences using ANCOVAs that controlled for marital satisfaction, participant sex, and time since the transition (see Table 4.4). Results indicated significant associations between the type of transition and transition magnitude,  $F(8, 214) = 6.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the valence of the transition experience,  $F(8, 214) = 2.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ; effects on relational turbulence were marginally significant,  $F(8, 214) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .07$ . Transitions associated with the initial diagnosis, starting school, and the miscellaneous category reported the highest transition magnitude, while puberty reported the lowest magnitude. Starting school and transitions related to developmental changes were associated with the most positive transition experiences and outcomes, while initial diagnosis and other school related transitions were associated with the most negative transition experiences and outcomes. The initial diagnosis was associated with the highest levels of relational turbulence, followed by puberty, while transitions related to basic developmental stages were associated with the lowest levels of relational turbulence.

The first hypothesis predicted that parents of children with ASD would experience heightened relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence during a recalled transition than at the time of the survey. As predicted, paired samples  $t$ -tests indicated significantly higher levels of self uncertainty,  $t(259) = 4.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , partner uncertainty,  $t(259)$

= 2.47,  $p < .05$ , interference from a partner,  $t(259) = 2.31$ ,  $p < .05$ , and relational turbulence  $t(259) = 9.18$ ,  $p < .001$ , during the time of the transition. Facilitation from a partner at the time of the transition was marginally lower than reports at the time of the survey,  $t(259) = 1.31$ ,  $p = .09$ . Thus, H1 was supported, with the exception of relationship uncertainty, which was not significantly different between the two assessments.

H2 predicted that greater parenting stress associated with raising a child with ASD is positively associated with experiences of turmoil for parents. Six separate hierarchical linear regressions with sex and marital satisfaction entered as the first step and parenting stress entered in the second step tested the association between experiences of parenting stress and self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, and interference and facilitation from a partner at the time of the survey. Preliminary analyses indicated a significant relationship between time since the transition and relational turbulence. Thus, I included time since the transition as a covariate in the model containing relational turbulence. In the first step, sex of the participant significantly predicted self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, and interference from a partner, such that men experienced higher levels of each of the variables than women ( $\beta$  range from  $-.15$  to  $-.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Marital satisfaction was significantly and negatively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence ( $\beta$  range from  $-.40$  to  $-.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and positively associated with facilitation from a partner ( $\beta = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Time since transition did not significantly predict relational turbulence. In step two, parenting stress significantly and positively predicted self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and negatively predicted facilitation from a partner (see Table 4.5). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

The third hypothesis reflected the notion put forth by Brisini et al. (2017) that engaging in transition processing communication may lessen married partners' experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, while increasing perceptions of facilitation from a partner. To test this hypothesis, I used maximum likelihood structural equation modeling (Amos 7.0) and specified the following goodness of fit criteria:  $\chi^2/df < 3.00$ , CFI  $> .90$ , and RMSEA  $< .08$  (Kline, 1998). Transition processing communication was modeled as two second order factors (communication used by the participant and communication engaged by their spouse) with measures of increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence in each. Paths were specified from each of the two transition processing communication variables to measures of self and partner uncertainty, and interference and facilitation from a partner. Self and partner uncertainty predicted relationship uncertainty. I then included paths from relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and facilitation from a partner to relational turbulence (see Figure 4.1). I tested marital satisfaction by including it in the model with paths to each of the endogenous variables. Preliminary analyses indicated a significant correlation between time since transition and relational turbulence. Thus, I tested time since transition by including this path in the model. To account for potential differences based on sex of the participants, I first conducted a multi-group analysis. Results suggested that allowing path coefficients to vary based on participant sex did not significantly improve model fit and time since the transition did not significantly predict relational turbulence. Therefore, marital satisfaction was the only covariate used in the final model. This model fit the data,  $\chi^2/df < 2.01$ , CFI  $> .90$ , and RMSEA  $< .06$ . Transition processing communication (by the participant or a spouse) was not a significant predictor of self uncertainty or interference from a partner. To fine tune estimates of the path coefficients, I removed these paths and re-ran the model. Again,

the resulting model fit the data,  $\chi^2/df < 2.01$ , CFI  $> .90$ , and RMSEA  $< .06$ . Examination of the path coefficients indicates that participants' perception that a spouse engaged in transition processing communication negatively predicted reports of partner uncertainty and positively predicted reports of facilitation from a partner. Conversely, participants' reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication positively predicted partner uncertainty, as well as facilitation from a partner. Finally, self and partner uncertainty positively predicted relationship uncertainty; and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and facilitation from a partner each positively predicted relational turbulence (see Figure 4.1 for path coefficients).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and facilitation from a partner mediate the relationship between transition processing communication and relational turbulence. As a first step in examining H4, I tested the indirect effect for transition process communication on relationship uncertainty. Because the paths from self and partner use of transition process communication to self uncertainty were both non-significant, I considered partner uncertainty as the sole mediator. I used bootstrapping procedures with 2,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals to analyze the indirect effects. Partner uncertainty mediated the relationship between transition processing communication and relational uncertainty for both the individual's use of processing communication ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and perception of their partner's use of processing communication ( $\beta = -.40$ ,  $p < .01$ ). I used the same bootstrapping procedures to test for the indirect effects of transition processing communication on relational turbulence (H4). The overall indirect effect of one's own transition processing communication on reports of relational turbulence was not significant, but the overall

indirect effect of a partner's transition processing communication on experiences of turbulence was significant ( $\beta = -.29, p < .01$ ).

### **Discussion**

The goals of this study were to examine the landscape of transitions specific to parents of children with ASD and to document the communication that married partners might enact while adapting to the change. The study identified 9 categories of commonly reported transitions, with 6 of the transitions accounting for 63 percent of responses. Participants' transition experiences varied based on the type of transitions reported in terms of the magnitude of the transition, the valence of the transition experience, and degree of relational turbulence. Additionally, I identified significant direct and indirect effects for the use of transition processing communication on experiences of relational uncertainty, facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence.

### **Implications**

In examining the research questions, I considered the types of transitions commonly faced by parents of children with ASD and how married partners' experiences may differ based on the type of transition. The most commonly reported transition was the initial diagnosis, which also received the highest ratings of relational turbulence and transition magnitude, and the most negative ratings of transition experience. This finding supports previous research, which indicates that receiving the ASD diagnosis is particularly difficult. This transition is associated with high levels of care-giver and family burden (Stuart & McGrew, 2009), as well as feelings of grief, shock, anger, relief, and self-blame (Fleischmann, 2004; Hutton & Caron, 2005). Participants who recalled the initial diagnosis often remarked that the transition was associated with "more stress" or that it "gave us a lot more to worry about."

Starting school, the second most commonly reported transition, was high in magnitude but associated with a more positive transition experience and outcome. This finding is in keeping with previous research that suggests that the number of hours of respite care (childcare that gives the primary care-givers a break) provided for the family is associated with increased marital quality, more uplifting experiences throughout the day, and decreased personal stress (Harper, Dyches, Harper, Roper, & South, 2013). Open-ended responses from participants seemed to mirror this sentiment. For example, one respondent reported that starting their child in school for the first time “was helpful because we had the time to catch our breath.”

The results of RQ2 suggest that feelings of relational turbulence, as well as perceptions of transition magnitude and the positivity of the transition experience were significantly different across the six types of transitions assessed in this study. Although the transitions did not vary in terms of relational uncertainty, interdependence, and transition processing communication, all of these transitions constituted events that affected relationships and required parents to process them. Understanding variation in these experiences between people might shed light on why some couples suffer the stresses of parenting a child with ASD, while others thrive.

In support of H1, participants reported significantly higher levels of self and partner uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence during the transition when compared to experiences reported at the time of the survey. This result supports the assumption put forth by relational turbulence theory that married partners experience heightened feelings of turmoil during periods of change (Solomon et al., 2016). To further explore the marital experiences of parents of children with ASD, I compared reports of relational qualities associated with relational turbulence reported by the participants with those of a sample of married partners in the general population evaluated in Brisini et al. (2017). Paired samples t-tests indicated that

parents of children with ASD reported more relational uncertainty and interference from a partner at the time of the survey and during a major transition, compared to the general population of married persons sampled by Brisini et al. (2017). Facilitation from a partner was significantly higher in parents of children with ASD at the time of the transition, but not at the time of the survey, whereas relational turbulence was higher in parents of a child with ASD at the time of the survey, but not at the time of the transition. These findings underscore the increased stress that parents of children with ASD feel on a daily basis (Brobst et al., 2009; Dabrowska & Pisula 2010; Rao & Beidel, 2009).

Hypothesis two predicted that parenting stress related to raising a child with ASD would positively predict experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence and negatively predict facilitation from a partner. Results provide increased support for the notion that parents may experience negative relationship qualities as a result of the unique stressors involved in raising a child with ASD. This finding is particularly important to this population, given that parents of children with ASD report more parenting stress than parents of neuro-typical children and parents of children with other disabilities (Brobst et al., 2009; Dabrowska & Pisula 2010).

The third hypothesis predicted that enacting transition processing communication would negatively predict experiences of self and partner uncertainty and interference from a partner, and positively predict experiences of facilitation from a partner. Indirect effects were also identified. First, reports that one's partner engaged in transition processing communication negatively predicted experiences of partner uncertainty and positively predicted experiences of facilitation from a partner. One's own engagement in transition processing communication also positively predicted the perception that one's partner facilitated the attainment of goals. These



findings point to the potential for parents of children with ASD to mitigate some of the negative relational impacts of their child's transitions by engaging in transitions processing communication.

In contrast to my prediction, people's own use of transition processing communication was positively associated with partner uncertainty. Although transition processing communication was not significantly related to perceptions of interference from a partner, path coefficients trended in the same direction as those of partner uncertainty, such that one's own transition processing communication was positively associated with interference from a partner ( $\beta = .33$ ). A possible explanation may be that engaging in transition processing communication makes questions about a partner's involvement more salient. This connection aligns with previous research on mulling, which suggests that romantic partners who engage in prolonged thinking about conflicts or negative behaviors have more pronounced attribution biases (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). These results could also reflect a reverse causal effect, such that people who are high in partner uncertainty and interference from a partner use transition processing communication as relational maintenance. More generally, the results suggest that transition processing communication may not be entirely beneficial to the person who is engaging in it.

Previous research guided by relational turbulence theory has primarily focused on the outcomes of relational uncertainty, interdependence, and relational turbulence (e.g., Knobloch & Theiss, 2011; McLaren et al., 2012). In contrast, this study offers a test of the assumption set forth by the theory that communicative efforts can alleviate or promote relationship qualities that contribute to turbulence. Tests of indirect effects suggest that a partner's engagement in transition processing communication is negatively associated with experiences of relational turbulence, through its association with relational uncertainty and facilitation from a partner.

Notably, transition processing communication was not significantly associated with self uncertainty. Perhaps engaging in transition processing communication alleviates some questions about the person's own involvement in the relationship, while it also raises questions about commitment to the relationship. Previous research indicates that self uncertainty has unique associations with some cognitive and communicative phenomena, compared to partner and relationship uncertainty (Solomon et al., 2016). This investigation suggests that communication may also have distinctive effects on partner versus self uncertainty.

Finally, this study has several practical implications for marital and family counseling and practitioners working with parents of children with ASD. First, the study points to transitions throughout the life of the child with ASD as potential turning points for the parent's marriage. Specifically, the initial ASD diagnosis presents itself as a particularly difficult transition, with potential negative consequences for married partners. Second, the results of the current study indicate that married individuals may be able to improve their partner's feelings of relational uncertainty by engaging in explicit attempts to: (a) increase interaction by spending time together, (b) feel more connected by engaging relationship talk, (c) feel situated in their new circumstances by framing changes in a positive way, and (d) increase confidence in the relationship by providing verbal and nonverbal indicators of relational commitment.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain insight into the marital experiences of parents of children with ASD. I asked married partners to recall a transition throughout their child's life that impacted their marriage. Doing so allowed me to consider a more complete picture of participant perceptions of the ways in which raising a child with ASD can influence marital quality. In particular, I was able to understand which changes in the child's

life are most likely to cause feelings of turbulence for married couples. The use of recalled experiences is also a limitation to the study because retrospective accounts are biased by current relationship satisfaction and time since the transition. To account for these biases, I included marital satisfaction as a covariate in all substantive analyses. I also examined the relationship between the time that had elapsed since the transition reported and all of the variables of interest and found few significant relationships. Nonetheless, the potential for retrospective bias is an important qualification when considering the results of this study.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the methods used in an exploratory study examining the recalled experiences of parents of children with ASD during major transitions throughout the life of their child. The findings of this study provided initial evidence that parents' engagement in transition processing communication may serve to improve marital quality during transitions throughout the life of their child with ASD. The study also provided evidence that starting school for the first time is considered a transition of great magnitude for these families. Thus, the child's transition to school serves as the context for Study 2, which is described in the following chapter.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Chi-square tests indicated no significant differences associated with participant sex or ethnicity. ANOVAs indicated a significant effect of time since the transition,  $F(5, 215) = 3.46, p < .01$ , such that initial diagnosis occurred longer ago. Results were also significant for age,  $F(5,217) = 2.78, p < .05$ , such that respondents experiencing a transition related to the child's puberty were older than participants who reported a child starting school.

Table 4.1. *Content Analysis of Marital Transitions*

Code	Type of Transition	Description	Example	Frequency
1	Diagnosis	Responses that indicate the time when the participant first learned of their child's diagnosis.	"We were told by our doctor" "Diagnosis"	53
2	Starting School	Responses that indicate the first time the child went to school.	"Starting kindergarten" "Starting daycare" "Starting elementary school"	52
3	Other School Related Transitions	Responses that deal with transitions in school, not including starting school for the first time or leaving school.	"Starting middle school," "Changing teachers" "Switching schools"	25
4	Puberty	Responses that describe the transition to puberty, using a description of age, time period, or physical/behavior changes.	"Becoming an adolescent" "Teenage years" "Having a period"	26
5	Transition to Adulthood	Responses that describe the child finishing high school or leaving the family home.	"Leaving school" "Moving into a group home" "Graduating high school"	6

6	Basic developmental transitions	Responses that describe milestones throughout the life course of the child (other than puberty).	“Potty training” “Learning to walk”	13
7	Professional/Medical Intervention	Responses that indicate the child starting/receiving professional or medical services.	“Started counseling” “Getting hearing aids”	7
8	Geographic Re-location	Responses that describe the child or the family moving to a different home or region.	“We moved across the country” “Moving to a new house” “Relocating”	9
9	Re-occurring Transitions	These responses indicate that the participant faces a transition every day or that every day is uniquely stressful when raising a child with ASD.	“Any change in our schedule” “We have to take every day one step at a time” “Autism is always stressful”	8
10	Other	Responses that do not fit into the categories described above	“Divorce” “An affair” “We had more kids”	24
11	Indeterminable	Responses that seem to be describing characteristics of or feelings about a transition, but do not identify a transition in particular.	“It was hard” “Positive experience” “Hectic and chaotic”	35

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Table 4.2. *Descriptive Statistics for Scales*

	Time of Survey			Time of Transition		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Self Uncertainty	2.45	1.49	.92	2.75	1.66	.95
Partner Uncertainty	2.65	1.67	.95	2.83	1.75	.97
Relationship Uncertainty	2.88	1.53	.89	2.96	1.67	.94
Interference from a Partner	2.62	1.45	.93	2.75	1.54	.95
Facilitation from a Partner	4.18	1.31	.91	4.10	1.40	.93
Relational Turbulence	2.52	1.25	.90	3.21	1.50	.92
Marital Satisfaction	4.84	1.21	.96			
Transition Magnitude				4.79	1.08	.83
Transition Experience				3.86	1.52	.87
Transition Outcomes				4.62	1.39	.94
Increasing Interaction (self)				4.16	1.35	.93
Feeling Connected (self)				4.47	1.14	.87
Feeling Situated (self)				4.21	1.21	.80
Increasing Confidence (self)				4.43	1.26	.91
Increasing Interaction (partner)				4.04	1.51	.95
Feeling Connected (partner)				4.17	1.38	.92
Feeling Situated (partner)				4.00	1.42	.91
Increasing Confidence (partner)				4.22	1.46	.93

Table 4.3. *Correlations between Relationship Evaluations<sup>a</sup> and Perceptions of Transitions and Transition Process Variables*

	Self Uncertainty	Partner Uncertainty	Relationship Uncertainty	Interference from a Partner	Facilitation from a Partner	Relational Turbulence
Transition Magnitude	.20** (.23***)	.18** (.21**)	.23*** (.27***)	.17** (.19**)	.03 (.02)	.06 (.08)
Transition Experience	.05 (.07)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.01)	-.13* (-.02)	-.01 (.09)	.33*** (.24***)	-.49*** (-.44***)
Transition Outcomes	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.00)	-.13* (-.01)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.01)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (-.02)	.27*** (.15*)	-.50*** (-.31***)
Increased Interaction (self)	-.20** (-.00)	-.18** (.04)	-.25*** (-.05)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.06)	.59*** (.44***)	-.50*** (-.37***)
Feeling Connected (self)	-.21** (-.03)	-.19** (.01)	-.26*** (-.07)	-.18** (-.03)	.59*** (.45***)	-.42*** (-.27***)
Feeling Situated (self)	-.02 (.11)	.01 (.15*)	-.04 (.10)	.06 (.17**)	.40*** (.31***)	-.31*** (-.22***)
Increased Confidence (self)	-.29*** (-.12 <sup>†</sup> )	-.25*** (-.05)	-.31*** (-.12*)	-.20** (-.04)	.59*** (.44***)	-.46*** (-.33***)
Increased Interaction (spouse)	-.25** (-.01)	-.33** (-.11 <sup>†</sup> )	-.37*** (-.16*)	-.23*** (-.05)	.68*** (.52***)	-.52*** (-.36***)
Feeling Connected (spouse)	-.27*** (-.01)	-.38*** (-.15*)	-.40*** (-.16**)	-.25*** (-.05)	.65*** (.47***)	-.53*** (-.36***)



Feeling Situated (spouse)	-.17** (.06)	-.25*** (-.03)	-.28*** (-.06)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	.60*** (.44***)	-.46*** (-.31***)
Increased Confidence (spouse)	-.35*** (-.11 <sup>†</sup> )	-.43*** (-.21**)	-.45*** (-.22***)	-.31*** (-.12 <sup>†</sup> )	.66*** (.47***)	-.47*** (-.30***)

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*Note.*  $N = 259$ . Values in parentheses represent correlations computed controlling for marital satisfaction.

<sup>a</sup>These measures were reported evaluations of the relationship during the marital transition.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 4.4. *Relationship Qualities, Transition Processing Communication, and Evaluations of Transitions by Type of Transition*

	1(53)	2(52)	3(25)	4(26)	5(13)	6(54)	<i>F</i> (6,216)
Self Uncertainty	2.74 (1.54)	2.38 (1.43)	2.31 (1.56)	2.29 (1.65)	2.55 (1.75)	2.73 (1.73)	.98
Partner Uncertainty	2.94 (1.66)	2.53 (1.70)	2.20 (1.66)	2.61 (1.80)	2.50 (1.52)	2.85 (1.78)	.98
Relationship Uncertainty	3.01 (1.52)	2.77 (1.60)	2.37 (1.60)	2.58 (1.65)	2.92 (1.70)	2.92 (1.76)	1.48
Interference from a Partner	2.86 (1.42)	2.42 (1.40)	2.90 (1.48)	2.40 (1.53)	2.48 (1.27)	2.78 (1.52)	1.09
Facilitation from a Partner	3.78 (1.37)	4.30 (1.24)	3.89 (1.49)	3.93 (1.72)	3.92 (1.70)	4.17 (1.34)	1.02
Relational Turbulence	3.82 (1.32)	2.88 (1.37)	3.09 (1.50)	3.62 (1.48)	2.58 (1.74)	3.23 (1.61)	2.70*
Increasing Interaction (s)	3.79 (1.37)	4.26 (1.32)	4.19 (1.21)	3.98 (1.39)	3.98 (1.41)	4.09 (1.37)	.87
Feeling Connected (s)	4.29 (1.19)	4.57 (1.15)	4.40 (1.10)	4.48 (1.12)	4.23 (1.11)	4.54 (1.10)	.62
Feeling Situated (s)	4.16 (1.02)	4.24 (1.23)	3.83 (1.09)	4.01 (0.96)	3.85 (1.19)	4.35 (1.12)	1.22

	1(53)	2(52)	3(25)	4(26)	5(13)	6(54)	<i>F</i> (6,216)
Increasing Confidence (s)	4.21 (1.29)	4.51 (1.31)	4.36 (1.25)	4.31 (1.13)	4.10 (1.56)	4.60 (1.20)	1.01
Increasing Interaction (p)	3.67 (1.58)	4.29 (1.38)	4.13 (1.56)	3.84 (.148)	3.73 (1.53)	3.94 (1.56)	1.09
Feeling Connected (p)	3.97 (1.39)	4.27 (1.29)	4.41 (1.39)	3.58 (1.31)	4.19 (1.25)	4.09 (1.39)	.89
Feeling Situated (p)	3.78 (1.34)	4.07 (1.40)	3.99 (1.51)	3.35 (1.39)	3.87 (1.36)	4.03 (1.47)	.86
Increasing Confidence (p)	4.05 (1.44)	4.31 (1.36)	4.35 (1.56)	3.81 (1.47)	4.04 (1.46)	4.20 (1.63)	.50
Transition Magnitude	5.29 (0.85)	4.67 (0.83)	4.38 (1.09)	4.04 (1.17)	4.33 (1.39)	5.06 (1.07)	7.93***
Transition Experience	3.19 (1.32)	4.26 (1.25)	3.58 (1.59)	3.60 (1.46)	4.46 (1.77)	3.77 (1.70)	3.13**
Transition Outcome	4.35 (1.38)	4.80 (1.30)	4.22 (1.70)	4.75 (1.34)	5.23 (1.15)	4.47 (1.54)	1.41

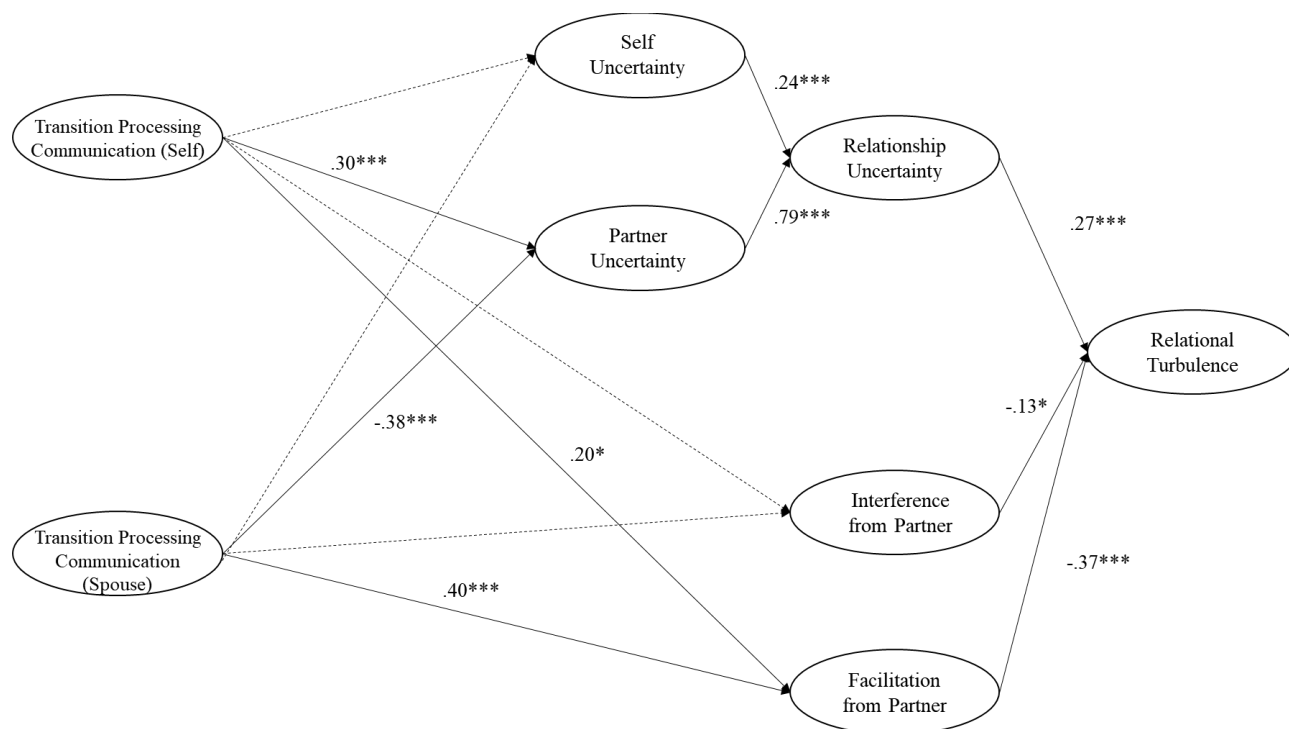
*Note.* Values in italics in the column heading are the number of participants who reported each type of transition; cell entries are category means; SDs are in parentheses. 1 = initial diagnosis, 2 = starting school, 3 = other school related transition, 4 = puberty, 5 = basic developmental transitions, 6 = less commonly reported transitions.

Table 4.5. *Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for H2*

	B	SE(B)	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	F
Self Uncertainty					
Step 1				.17***	29.88***
Step 2	.50	.07	.35***	.12***	39.61***
Partner Uncertainty					
Step 1				.18***	33.04***
Step 2	.52	.08	.32***	.11***	39.58***
Relationship Uncertainty					
Step 1				.21***	37.95***
Step 2	.50	.07	.34***	.11***	45.90***
Interference from a Partner					
Step 1				.17***	30.89***
Step 2	.48	.07	.34***	.11***	38.99***
Facilitation from a Partner					
Step 1				.40***	96.67***
Step 2	.11	.06	.09*	.01*	66.49***
Relational Turbulence					
Step 1				.41***	68.05***
Step 2	.22	.05	.19***	.04***	58.76***

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Figure 4.1. *Structural Model for Hypothesis 2 after Removing Non-Significant Paths*



*Note.* Model presents standardized regression weights. Marital satisfaction was included as an exogenous variable with paths to all other variables; those path coefficients were all significant and varied from -.07 to -.46.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

## CHAPTER 5

Study 2 expands on the knowledge gained from Study 1 by incorporating a longitudinal design with diary surveys. Specifically, Study 2 aims to examine Hypotheses 5 and 6, which predicted that participants who engage in transition processing communication or whose partners engaged in transition processing communication report decreases in experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and increases in facilitation from a partner. Per Research Question 3, Study 2 also analyzes the changes that occur in married partners' relationship qualities and engagement in transition processing communication throughout their child's first transition to school. This chapter describes the participants and procedures involved in conducting Study 2 and describes the data analysis plan for the study.

### Methods

#### Participants

Subjects for Study 2 were 53 heterosexual dyads, parents of children with ASD whose child was starting pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade for the first time in the Fall of 2017. Participants identified as European American (84, 81%), African American (8, 8%), Latinx (9, 9%), and other (3, 3%). Ages ranged from 25 to 51 ( $M = 37.31$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ), and partners had been married for an average of 8 years (Range: 1 - 18). Ten participants (9%) had been married previously. Age of the child starting school ranged from 3 to 7 years ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). The majority of participants described their child's ASD diagnosis as mild to moderate (76%), while 23% describe their child's diagnosis as moderate to severe.

Subjects were recruited with the assistance of the Interactive Autism Network (IAN) Research Database at the Kennedy Krieger Institute, Baltimore. The IAN connects researchers to families of individuals who have been diagnosed with ASD by a medical professional based

on criteria set forth by the researcher. Families who met the research criteria were sent an email from the IAN containing study information and a link to the screening survey (see Appendix 2). Additional subjects were recruited via postings in national ASD support groups, online forums, and social media groups. Postings consisted of basic information about the study, along with a link to a screening survey. Finally, active participants were given the opportunity to invite other parents of children with ASD to participate in the study. Parents who qualified for the study indicated on the pre-screen survey that they were at least 18 years of age; able to read and write English; had a child diagnosed with ASD that was starting pre-school, kindergarten, elementary school, or day care for the first time; had access to a computer or smart phone; and were able to commit to diary surveys over the course of 42 days. A total of 467 individuals completed the pre-screen survey and 118 people (59 couples) met the criteria to complete the study. An additional 101 individuals whose spouse was unable to participate completed the study for use in other projects. Dyads in which one or both spouses did not complete at least 4 diary entries were eliminated from the study (4 dyads). Same-sex couples were invited to participate; however, only two same-sex dyads completed the surveys. To avoid issues with indistinguishability in the APIM analyses, these couples were not included in the analysis. Therefore, the final sample for Study 2 included 53 couples.

### **Procedures**

The study consisted of three parts: the pre-test, 14 daily diaries, and a post-test. Each part of the study was conducted using Qualtrics online survey software. Participants were compensated for their participation in the study with Amazon gift cards worth up to \$50 per person (\$100 per couple). Subjects received \$10 for completing each of the pre and post-tests. Incentives for the diary surveys were awarded on a sliding scale with the first completed survey

worth 50 cents and the payment increasing 25 cents for each diary completed (i.e., the second diary was worth 75 cents, the third worth \$1.00, and so on), for a total of \$29.75 (rounded to \$30).

**Pre-test assessment.** One week prior to their child's first day of school, participants received the pre-test surveys via email, which included informed consent documents and demographic variables. The survey measured self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Participants also assessed the extent to which they and their partner currently engaged in transition processing communication, in general. Finally, parents reported on their experiences enrolling their child in school over the summer using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

**Diary surveys.** Over a 42-day period of time, participants completed diary entries every three days using a Qualtrics cell-phone specific version of the survey and text message reminders. At 8 pm, participants received a text message containing a direct link to the brief survey and were asked to complete the survey before going to bed that night. If the participant did not complete the survey, they received a text message reminder at 8:30 am the following morning. Two-thirds of the couples ( $N = 39$ ) were randomly assigned to receive diaries that included shortened versions of the self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence and transition processing scales. To account for the possible impact of responding to items about transition processing communication on individual behavior, one-third of participants ( $N = 20$ ) received surveys that did not include those items. All participants also responded to open-ended items asking them to describe the high and low points of their day, as well as the ways in which their experience the day of the survey was different than a typical day.



**Post-test assessment.** At the end of the 42-day period, participants received an email containing the post-test measures. They again reported on marital quality using the same scales from the pre-test surveys to assess relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence, as well as general engagement in transition processing communication.

## Measures

All measures used in this study have been validated in previous research, as well as in Study 1. See Tables 5.1 and 5.2 for descriptive statistics for husbands and wives.

**Pre-test/post-test measures.** The pre-test and post-test surveys consisted of measures assessing each partner's self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, relational turbulence, and marital satisfaction. Surveys also included measures of increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence, as well as a measure of parenting stress. The pre-test and post-test assessments were used to assess participants' global evaluations of the variables of interest. All measures utilized in the pre- and post-test assessments for Study 2 were identical to measures used in Study 1.

**Daily diary measures.** Three items from each of the relational uncertainty scales, two items from measures of interference and facilitation from a partner, all four items assessing relational turbulence, and three items from each of the transitions processing communication scales were used to measure daily activity. To reduce the size of the original scales, I examined the factor loadings from the confirmatory factor analysis of variables assessed in Study 1. Items that had the highest factor loadings and face validity were used for daily assessments in this study, and items were adapted to reflect daily communication. For example, "I try to be open with my spouse about how I feel" was modified to say "Over the past few days, I was open with

my spouse about how I felt." The order of the questions were randomized daily. To decrease participant burden, questions were presented in a matrix style that shows four to eight items at a time. Items used in the daily diary surveys are listed in Table 5.3.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Hypotheses four and five predict that husbands' and wives' use of transition processing communication affect their own, as well as their spouse's scores on relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Actor partner interdependence modeling (APIM) techniques were used to test these hypotheses. APIM is a multilevel approach to dyadic data that is designed to analyze mixed independent variables, constructs that vary both within and between the dyad. As a multilevel approach, APIM assumes non-independence between the spouses. The APIM examines how an actor's scores on the independent variable relates to the actor's scores and the partner's scores on the dependent variable on the same day or over-time, as well as how the partner's scores on the independent variable impact the actor's scores and the partner's scores on the dependent variable. The analysis also tests the correlations between the actor's scores and partner's scores on the independent variable and the correlation between the error terms for their scores on the dependent variable. Correlating actor and partner scores on predictor variables ensures that any relationships between one spouse's predictor and an outcome variable is calculated by controlling for the other spouse's scores on the predictor variable. The correlation between the residuals accounts for non-independence between the spouses that is not part of the predictor variables. Two types of APIM were used to analyze data from Study 2. The stacked APIM, compares husbands' and wives' scores on the independent and dependent variables on the same day (time  $t$ ) computed across the 14 days. In the over-time APIM, spouse's scores at time  $t - 1$

are used to predict outcomes at time  $t$  computed across all diaries (see Figure 5.1 for a general model of the APIM analysis).

I analyzed the associations between husbands' and wives' use of transition processing communication and variables associated with relational turbulence in three different ways. First, I assessed the extent to which the use of transition processing communication predicted experiences of turbulence on any given day using the stacked APIM. Second, I examined how transition processing communication predicts experiences of turbulence from one diary to the next using the over-time APIM. Finally, I tested the associations between linear trends in spouses' use of transition processing communication over the course of the study and changes in global assessments of variables associated with relational turbulence from pre-test to post-test, again using the APIM.

For each of the analyses, I examined the role of husbands' and wives' reported transition processing communication, as well as the role of participants' perceptions of their husband's or wife's transition processing communication, using structural equation modeling. Given my sample size and to avoid issues with multi-collinearity, I conducted separate analyses between each of the independent and dependent variables, which resulted in 48 structural equation models for each of the three analyses. For each of the models, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis, specified the appropriate model, and then conducted a test of distinguishability between husbands' and wives' path coefficients using MPlus statistical software. Chapter 6 reports the fit statistics for the structural equation models and path coefficients and summarizes the results of the models.

To examine Research Question 3, I conducted separate dyadic growth curve models for each of the variables of interest using multi-level modeling techniques and Mplus statistical

software. For each of the models, time was regressed onto the variable of interest and separate slopes and intercepts were estimated for husbands and wives. Marital satisfaction was included as a covariate. Coefficients and errors for the models are reported and results are summarized in Chapter 6.

### **Measurement Models**

As a preliminary step, I conducted a separate confirmatory factor analysis for each structural equation model assessing associations between diary measures. Measurement models contained one transition processing communication and one construct within the framework of relational turbulence theory (e.g., increasing interaction and self uncertainty). Each item was assigned to its respective latent construct and latent constructs were allowed to covary. For measurement models assessing items reported in the diary surveys, multi-level confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with the dyad as the cluster. I used the following criteria to assess model fit: CFI > .90, RMSEA, <.08, and SRMR < .08 (for both between and within portions of the model).

The majority of the measurement models met the fit criteria with no adjustments; however, in some circumstances, model fit was improved by correlating the error terms between items within the same measure or between the same item assessed for husbands and wives based on the modification indices to improve model fit. Out of 48 analyses, all measurement models meet the criteria for adequate model fit after adjustments; however, two models had non-positive definite psi matrices during confirmatory factor analyses. These models are indicated in Table 5.4. Due to a small sample size, confirmatory factor analyses of pre/post-test APIM were underpowered; however, the scales used in these analyses have been confirmed in several previous studies and in Study 1 of this dissertation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the procedures and data analysis for Study 2, as well as the measurement models for each analysis. Chapter 6 summarizes the results of preliminary and substantive analyses and presents a discussion of the findings.

Table 5.1. *Descriptive Statistics for Variables across the 14 Diary Surveys*

Variables	Husbands			Wives		
	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$
Self Uncertainty	1.76	0.86	.92	1.85	1.16	.94
Partner Uncertainty	1.83	0.89	.92	1.79	1.03	.93
Relationship Uncertainty	2.08	0.96	.82	2.01	1.08	.87
Interference from a Partner	1.96	0.85	.90	2.04	1.11	.88
Facilitation from a Partner	3.66	1.09	.92	3.15	1.28	.93
Relational Turbulence	2.51	0.85	.94	2.54	1.08	.95
Increasing Interaction(s)	3.16	1.07	.93	2.60	1.01	.93
Feeling Connected(s)	3.34	1.19	.92	3.20	1.14	.88
Feeling Situated(s)	2.92	1.14	.88	2.72	0.99	.81
Increasing Confidence(s)	3.39	1.10	.79	2.77	1.01	.78
Increasing Interaction(p)	3.08	1.19	.95	2.54	1.18	.96
Feeling Connected(p)	3.39	1.20	.92	2.72	1.31	.93
Feeling Situated(p)	2.89	1.20	.90	2.37	1.05	.88
Increasing Confidence(p)	3.18	1.15	.78	2.71	1.06	.76

*Note.* Cell entries are aggregated across all diary surveys.  $N_{\text{husbands}} = 616$  data points from 53 husbands and  $N_{\text{wives}} = 696$  data points from 53 wives.

Table 5.2. *Descriptive Statistics for Variables Assessed at Pre- and Post-Test*

Variables	Husbands						Wives					
	Pre-Test			Post-Test			Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Self Uncertainty	2.07	1.33	.92	1.81	1.05	.92	2.31	1.45	.93	2.21	1.37	.95
Partner Uncertainty	2.10	1.38	.92	1.84	1.16	.96	2.28	1.52	.92	2.21	1.45	.93
Relationship Uncertainty	2.64	1.31	.85	2.51	1.24	.88	2.87	1.39	.90	2.48	1.40	.91
Interference from a Partner	2.41	1.17	.88	2.35	1.01	.86	2.35	1.29	.89	2.48	1.12	.89
Facilitation from a Partner	3.85	1.19	.86	3.78	1.40	.94	3.29	1.20	.87	3.45	1.39	.92
Relational Turbulence	2.92	1.17	.89	2.65	1.16	.93	2.81	1.41	.92	2.66	1.22	.94
Increasing Interaction(s)	3.31	1.32	.89	3.49	1.21	.86	3.36	1.17	.84	3.38	1.36	.91
Feeling Connected(s)	3.68	1.27	.92	3.59	1.19	.85	4.12	1.13	.79	3.70	1.29	.87
Feeling Situated(s)	3.43	1.21	.83	3.20	1.11	.80	3.33	1.30	.83	3.27	1.27	.85
Increasing Confidence(s)	3.89	1.29	.87	3.81	1.05	.75	3.58	1.21	.74	3.43	1.27	.82
Increasing Interaction(p)	3.38	1.27	.91	3.43	1.32	.93	2.85	1.42	.93	2.95	1.57	.96
Feeling Connected(p)	3.61	1.30	.88	3.67	1.37	.91	3.11	1.44	.90	2.96	1.47	.89

Feeling Situated(p)	3.40	1.26	.89	3.17	1.39	.92	2.58	1.40	.91	2.66	1.50	.91
Increasing Confidence(p)	3.49	1.32	.84	3.52	1.29	.82	3.39	1.55	.85	3.23	1.53	.88

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*Note.* Pre-test  $N = 53$ ; Post-test  $N_{\text{wives}} = 52$ ,  $N_{\text{husbands}} = 47$ . (s) = self, (p) = partner



Table 5.3. *Items in Diary Surveys*

Self	In the past few days, I've been unsure whether or not I want my marriage to last.
Uncertainty	In the past few days, I've been unsure how important my marriage is to me.
	In the past few days, I've wondered how much I like my spouse as a person.
Partner	In the past few days, I've been unsure whether or not my spouse wants our marriage
Uncertainty	to last.
	In the past few days, I've been unsure how important our marriage is to my spouse.
	In the past few days, I've wondered how much my spouse likes me as a person.
Relationship	In the past few days, I've been unsure whether or not my spouse loves me as much
Uncertainty	as I love him / her.
	In the past few days, I've been unsure how I should or should not behave around my spouse.
	In the past few days, I've questioned whether or not my marriage is a romantic one.
Interference	In the past few days, my spouse interferes with the plans I make.
from a	In the past few days, my spouse disrupts my daily routine.
Partner	
Facilitation	In the past few days, my spouse helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for
from a	myself.
Partner	In the past few days, my spouse helps me to use my time well.

---

Increasing	In the past few days, I tried to spend extra time with my spouse
Interaction	In the past few days, I tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
	In the past few days, I made time in my schedule to be alone with my spouse.

---

Feeling	In the past few days, I tried to share my feelings with my spouse.
Connected	In the past few days, I tried to be open with my spouse about how I feel.
	In the past few days, I put forth a strong effort to maintain my emotional bond with my spouse.

---

Feeling	In the past few days, I tried to make sense of how my child affects my relationship
Situated	with my spouse.
	In the past few days, I tried to reflect on the positive consequences that result for my relationship.
	In the past few days, I tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship.

---

Increasing	In the past few days, I showed my spouse that our relationship is strong through
Confidence	affection.
	In the past few days, I showed my spouse that our relationship is strong by offering them support.
	In the past few days, I reassured my spouse that I'm not going anywhere.

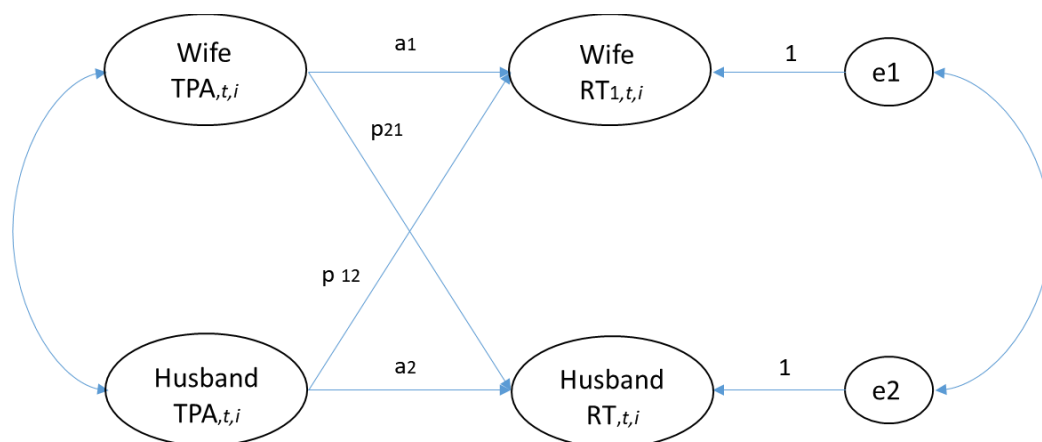
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*Note.* Partner versions of the transition processing communication variables were identical to those listed, with “my spouse” substituted for “I”

Table 5.4. *Model Fit for Diary CFA*

IV	DV	Fit Indices for Models with Self TPA				Fit Indices for Models with Partner TPA			
		RMSEA	CFI	SRMR (within)	SRMR (between)	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR (within)	SRMR (between)
Increasing Interaction	SU	.02	1.00	.03	.04	.03	.99	.02	.03
	PU	.00	1.00	.01	.03	.00	1.00	.01	.02
	RU	.04	.98	.02	.03	.00	1.00	.02	.07
	IP	.02	1.00	.01	.03	.02	1.00	.03	.01
	FP	.03	1.00	.01	.01	.01	1.00	.01	.00
	RT	.05	.98	.03	.03	.05	.97	.03	.03
Feeling Connected	SU	.03	.99	.07	.08	.03	.99	.04	.05
	PU	.02	1.00	.05	.05	.03	.99	.05	.04
	RU	.04	.99	.05	.08	.03	.99	.05	.07
	IP <sup>3</sup>	.04	.99	.04	.07	.03	.99	.01	.05
	FP	.06	.98	.05	.05	.05	.98	.05	.04
	RT	.05	.97	.06	.05	.06	.97	.05	.04
Feeling Situated	SU	.01	1.00	.02	.08	.01	1.00	.02	.05
	PU	.02	1.00	.02	.08	.01	1.00	.02	.06
	RU	.01	1.00	.02	.09	.01	1.00	.01	.07
	IP	.08	.92	.03	.11	.01	1.00	.02	.08
	FP	.02	1.00	.03	.04	.01	1.00	.02	.03
	RT	.05	.97	.03	.10	.06	.96	.04	.07
Increasing Confidence	SU	.03	.99	.04	.04	.03	.99	.06	.03
	PU	.02	1.00	.04	.05	.03	.99	.04	.03
	RU	.03	.98	.04	.09	.03	.98	.04	.08
	IP <sup>3</sup>	.03	.99	.04	.10	.05	.97	.05	.08
	FP	.00	1.00	.02	.04	.03	.99	.03	.06
	RT	.05	.97	.03	.08	.04	.97	.03	.07

*Note.* SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

Figure 5.1. *The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model*

*Note.* In the stacked APIM,  $t$  indicates a comparison of husband and wife scores on the independent and dependent variables on the same day computed across the 14 days. In the over-time APIM, spouses' scores at time  $t - 1$  are used to predict outcomes at time  $t$ . In all APIM,  $i$  indicates the partners' membership in a particular dyad.  $a_1$  estimates the effect of the wife's score on the independent variable on her own scores on the dependent variable;  $a_2$  estimates the effect of the husband's score on the independent variable on his own score on the dependent variable;  $p_{21}$  estimates the effect of the wife's score on the independent variable on the husband's score on the dependent variable;  $p_{12}$  estimates the effect of the husband's score on the independent variable on the wife's score on the dependent variable.  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  estimate the residual variance for the husband and wife's scores.

## CHAPTER SIX

This chapter describes the results of the preliminary and substantive analyses of data collected in Study 2. First, preliminary analyses are described, followed by examinations of same-day associations and over-time analyses of diary measures. Next, I describe results of dyadic growth curve analyses of each of the variables of interest. I then examine the associations between the linear trends for husbands and wives on each of the categories of transition processing communication and changes in reports of relationship qualities from pre-test to post-test. Finally, the implications of Study 2 are discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study.

### Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses compared scores on the variables of interest measured at pre-test with demographic variables, such as age, sex, income, and ethnicity of the respondent, as well as years married and the age of the child with ASD, to identify potential covariates. At the time of the pre-test, significant sex differences were identified for facilitation from a partner,  $t(102) = -2.40, p < .05$  (Males:  $M = 3.63, SD = 1.21$ ; Females:  $M = 3.27, SD = 1.29$ ), one's own attempts to feel connected with a spouse,  $t(102) = 1.88, p < .05$ , (Males:  $M = 3.68, SD = 1.13$ ; Females:  $M = 4.13, SD = 1.27$ ), and the perception that a spouse made attempts to increase interaction,  $t(102) = -1.96, p < .05$ , (Males:  $M = 3.37, SD = 1.27$ ; Females:  $M = 2.85, SD = 1.42$ ), and feel connected,  $t(205) = -1.85, p < .05$ , (Males:  $M = 3.61, SD = 1.30$ ; Females:  $M = 3.11, SD = 1.44$ ). A one-way analysis of variance indicated no significant differences in the variables of interest based on participant ethnicity.

Bivariate correlations tested the associations between age, years married, total household income, age of the child with ASD, religiosity, and marital satisfaction, and the independent and

dependent variables as measured at pre-test. Age was significantly related to participants' reports of self uncertainty,  $r = -.23, p < .05$ , partner uncertainty,  $r = -.21, p < .05$ , interference from a partner,  $r = -.23, p < .05$ , and facilitation from a partner  $r = .20, p < .05$ . Years married was negatively associated with one's own attempts to feel situated,  $r = -.20, p < .05$ , and a partner's attempts to feel situated,  $r = -.25, p < .05$ , and increase confidence,  $r = -.20, p < .05$ . Total household income was negatively associated with partner uncertainty,  $r = -.21, p < .05$ , and relationship uncertainty,  $r = -.29, p < .05$ . The age of the child with ASD was not significantly related to any of the variables of interest. Religiosity was positively and significantly correlated with participants' own attempts to increase interaction,  $r = .30, p < .01$ , feel connected,  $r = .31, p < .01$ , feel situated,  $r = .22, p < .01$ , and increase confidence,  $r = .28, p < .01$ , as well as a partner's attempts to increase interaction,  $r = .28, p < .01$ , and increase confidence,  $r = .21, p < .05$ . Finally, marital satisfaction was negatively associated with self,  $r = -.74, p < .001$ , partner,  $r = -.67, p < .001$ , and relationship uncertainty,  $r = -.71, p < .001$ , as well as interference from a partner,  $r = -.54, p < .001$ , and relational turbulence,  $r = -.77, p < .001$ . Satisfaction was also positively correlated with facilitation from a partner,  $r = .59, p < .001$ , and each of the eight measures of transition processing communication ( $r$  range:  $.34 - .66, p < .001$ ). Preliminary analyses revealed relatively few associations between the demographic variables and the variables of interest; however, marital satisfaction was strongly correlated with both the independent and dependent variables. Thus, marital satisfaction was covaried in all substantive analyses.

As a second step in the preliminary analysis, I examined the correlations between the variables of interest on the pre-test (see Table 6.1), diary surveys (see Table 6.2), and post-test (see Table 6.3). Across the three analyses, the patterns of correlations were similar. For both

husbands and wives, correlations between relational turbulence variables were significant and in the expected direction, as were associations between husbands' and wives' scores on partner transition processing communication and relationship variables. Husbands' and wives' reports of their own use of transition processing communication demonstrated few significant correlations with their own reports of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Additionally, participants' reports of their own use of transition processing communication were also positively and significantly correlated with their perception of their spouse's use of transition processing communication.

As an initial test of the effect of reporting transition processing communication in diaries, I compared the post-test scores of participants who completed diary measures of both qualities of their relationship and transition processing communication (experimental group) to those who only completed measures of relationship qualities (control group). Independent samples t-tests indicated no significant differences for husbands on any of the variables of interest, with the exception of facilitation from a partner  $t(46) = -2.38, p < .05$ . In particular, husbands in the control group ( $M = 4.40, SD = 1.30$ ) reported higher levels of facilitation from a partner at post-test than those in the experimental group ( $M = 3.44, SD = 1.36$ ). Significant differences between control and experimental groups were identified for each of the measures of wives' own transition processing communication, such that wives in the experimental group reported fewer attempts to increase interaction,  $t(50) = -2.30, p < .05$ , ( $M_E = 3.05, SD_E = 1.19, M_C = 3.91, SD_C = 1.48$ ), feel connected,  $t(50) = -1.58, p = .06$ , ( $M_E = 3.48, SD_E = 1.26, M_C = 4.05, SD_C = 1.29$ ), feel situated  $t(50) = -1.63, p = .06$ , ( $M_E = 3.03, SD_E = 1.28, M_C = 3.66, SD_C = 1.50$ ), and increase confidence in the relationships,  $t(50) = -2.38, p < .05$ , ( $M_E = 1.12, SD_E = 1.30, M_C = 3.94, SD_C =$



1.06). No significant differences between wives' scores on the measures of relationship qualities or the perception of a partner's transition processing communication were identified.

As a final step, I assessed the non-independence of observations between husbands and wives to determine if the dyads should be modeled using multi-level techniques (Cook & Kenny, 2005). In other words, I tested whether the spouses' scores are linked, such that knowing one person's score provides information about the other person's score on pre-test, diary, and post-test surveys. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is the common method used to test for non-independence in distinguishable dyads. The correlation between the husband's score and the wife's score for each dyad can range from -1 to +1; a score close to 0 would suggest that the two dyad members are independent. Results from the test for non-independence are reported along the diagonal in Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3. For the majority of variables, husbands' and wives' scores were significantly and positively correlated with one another, indicating non-independence. Thus, multi-level data analysis techniques are necessary. Interestingly, the correlations between husbands' and wives' scores on the relational uncertainty and interference from a partner variables were relatively small and, in some cases, not significant.

### **Within Diary Associations**

To test the associations between transition processing communication and relational qualities on any given day, I constructed separate stacked actor partner interdependence models with self and partner transition processing communication predicting husbands' and wives' own and their spouse's experience of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Following the paths indicated in Figure 5.1, the models were specified using maximum likelihood structural equation modeling (MPlus 7.3) and the following goodness of fit criteria:  $\chi^2/df < 3.00$ , CFI  $> .90$ , and RMSEA  $< .08$  (Kline,

1998). To account for recurring item-specific error within longitudinal data, individual items were loaded on to latent variables. Marital satisfaction was included in the models with paths to the endogenous variables.

In each of the models testing within day associations, the covariances between husbands' and wives' scores on daily use of transition processing communication were strong, positive, and significant. The associations between husbands' and wives' scores on variables associated with relational turbulence were small or non-significant for all models, except for relational turbulence. Reports of relational turbulence for husbands and wives were positively and significantly associated

**Self-reported transition processing communication.** H5a predicted that an individual's own use of transition processing communication on any given day would predict their own and their spouses' reports on variables measuring relationship qualities assessed on the same day. To control for participants' previous scores on the outcome variables, a lagged composite score was computed separately for husbands and wives for each of the dependent variables and included as a predictor of the same variable (e.g., husbands' scores on self uncertainty at time  $t$  were predicted by husbands' scores on self uncertainty at time  $t - 1$ ). Fit statistics for each of the models are reported in Table 6.4 and path coefficients are reported in Tables 6.5. An example of typical associations between the variables is depicted in Figure 6.1.

*Actor effects.* Actor effects (paths a1 and a2 in Figure 5.1) evaluate the extent to which participants' reports of their own transition processing communication affect their reports of their own relationship qualities on any given day. Results of the stacked APIM provided support for H5a, such that actor effects were significant for both spouses' attempts to engage in transition processing communication across each of the dependent variables in the majority of analyses.

As expected, wives' attempts to increase interaction throughout the day were negatively associated with their experiences of interference from a partner and relational turbulence and positively associated with reports of facilitation from a partner. Wives' attempts to feel connected negatively predicted their own reports of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, and positively predicted facilitation from a partner. Wives' reports of feeling situated were significantly associated with their own experience of each of the relational turbulence variables as predicted by H5a, as were their reports of increasing confidence, with the exception of self uncertainty.

Husbands' attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence were each positively associated with their own perception of facilitation from a partner. As expected, their attempts to feel connected throughout the day were negatively associated with self and relationship uncertainty. Attempts to feel situated were negatively associated with their own reports of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence. Finally, increasing confidence was negatively associated with relationship uncertainty.

*Partner effects.* Partner effects (paths p21 and p12 in Figure 5.1) evaluate the extent to which participants' reports of their own transition processing communication affect their partner's reports of their relationship qualities. As predicted by H5a, husbands' self-reported engagement in increased interaction throughout the day was negatively associated with their wife's partner uncertainty and positively associated with their wife's reports of facilitation from a partner. Husbands' attempts to feel connected were also positively associated with their wife's reports of facilitation from a partner. In contrast with my hypothesis, husbands' reported attempts to feel situated throughout the transition to school were not significantly related to any

of their wife's evaluations of relationship qualities. Interestingly, associations between husbands' attempts to increase confidence in the relationship and relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence were small, but positive and significant, which is in contrast with H5a.

Wives' self-reported attempts to increase interaction during the transition to school did not significantly predict any of their husband's scores on the endogenous variables. When wives reported that they attempted to feel connected throughout the day, husbands reported increased facilitation from a partner, as expected. As predicted by H5a, wives' attempts to feel situated throughout the day were significantly and negatively associated with their husband's reports of self and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Finally, wives' reports of increasing confidence in the relationship were not significantly associated with any of the dependent variables. Although husbands reported fewer significant effects and in some cases, results for husbands contradicted my hypotheses, results for wives largely support H5a. Therefore, H5a received partial support.

**Perceptions of partner transition processing communication.** H6a predicted that participants' perception that their spouse engaged in transition processing communication on a given day would predict their own experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence on the same day. To test this hypotheses, I conducted 24 actor-only APIM following the same procedures and criteria as those described for H5a. The model testing H6a mirrored that depicted in Figure 5.1, with partner paths ( $p_{21}$  and  $p_{12}$ ) removed from the model.<sup>1</sup> Again, marital satisfaction and lagged scores on the dependent variable were included in the model as covariates. Fit statistics for each of the models are

reported in Table 6.4 and path coefficients are reported in Table 6.6. An example of typical associations between perceptions of partner transition processing communication and daily reports of relationship qualities is depicted in Figure 6.2.

*Actor effects.* Wives' perceptions that their husband engaged in the four forms transition processing communication were significantly associated with all of the outcome variables in the predicted direction. Husbands' perceptions that their wife's attempted to increase interaction were negatively associated with interference from a partner and relational turbulence and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Husbands' perceptions of their wife's engagement in feeling connected were negatively associated with relationship uncertainty and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Perceptions of wives' attempts to feel situated were also positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Finally, husbands' perceptions that their wife attempted to increase confidence in their relationship during the school transition was negatively associated with interference from a partner and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Thus, H5a was largely supported.

### **Over-Time Diary Associations**

As a second test of H5, I analyzed the longitudinal relationship between self and partner transition processing communication and relational turbulence variables by conducting over-time APIM analyses. Following the model depicted in Figure 5.1, the over-time APIM uses scores on the independent variable on diary surveys completed at time  $t-1$  to predict scores on the dependent variable at time  $t$ . Again, I specified the following criteria for goodness of fit:  $\chi^2/df < 3.00$ , CFI  $> .90$ , and RMSEA  $< .08$  (Kline, 1998) and employed maximum likelihood structural equation modeling (MPlus 7.3) to analyze the data. Each APIM analysis included one

category of transition processing communication as the independent variable and one relationship quality as the dependent variable. Marital satisfaction was included in the model with paths to husbands' and wives' scores on the outcome variable.

Covariances in models assessing associations between transition processing communication and relational qualities over time mirrored those identified in analyses of same day associations. Spouses' reports of their partner's transition processing communication were positively and significantly associated. Spouses' scores on variables within the framework of relational turbulence theory were small or non-significant, with the exception of relational turbulence, which demonstrated a positive association.

**Self-reported transition processing communication.** Hypothesis 5b predicted that husbands' and wives' self-reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication on one diary would negatively predict experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence and positively predict facilitation from a partner on the next diary (3 days later). To test this hypotheses, I conducted 24 over-time APIM analyses with participants' self-reported transition processing communication as the independent variable. Fit statistics are presented in Table 6.7 and path coefficients are presented in Table 6.8. An example of typical associations between the independent and dependent variables from one diary to the next is depicted in Figure 6.3.

*Actor effects.* As expected, wives' own engagement in increasing interaction was positively and significantly associated with their reports of facilitation from a partner. Wives' attempts to feel connected were also positively associated with their reports of interference and facilitation from a partner three days later. For wives, feeling situated was negatively associated

with self and partner uncertainty and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Finally, increasing confidence was positively associated with facilitation from a partner.

In contrast to H5b, husbands' engagement in increasing interaction was positively and significantly associated with reports of facilitation from a partner and relational turbulence on the subsequent diary survey. Attempts to feel connected were positively associated with interference and facilitation from a partner, as well as relational turbulence three days later. Husbands' attempts to feel situated were positively associated with interference and facilitation from a partner and negatively associated with relational turbulence on the next diary survey. Finally, husbands' engagement in increasing confidence was positively associated with facilitation from a partner and relational turbulence for husbands.

*Partner effects.* Husbands' reports of his own transition processing communication were significantly associated with their wife's reports of relationship qualities in few instances. As anticipated by H5b, husbands' reports of increasing interaction were negatively associated with their wife's self uncertainty and positively related to their wife's facilitation from a partner. Husbands' attempts to feel connected were negatively associated their wife's reports of self uncertainty, relational uncertainty, and interference from a partner. Finally, husbands' attempts to feel situated and increase confidence were not significantly associated with their wife's scores on any of the dependent variables.

As predicted, wives' scores on increasing interaction were positively associated with their husband's reports of facilitation from a partner and negatively associated with their husband's reported relational turbulence. Wives' attempts to feel connected and feel situated were both negatively associated with their husband's reports of interference from a partner and relational turbulence and positively associated with husbands' reports of facilitation from a partner.

Finally, wives' attempts to increase confidence in the relationship were positively associated with facilitation from a partner and negatively associated with relational turbulence. Although significant effects were limited to only a few dependent variables, the associations that were significant were typically in the hypothesized direction. Thus, H5b received partial support.

**Perceptions of partner transition processing communication.** H6b predicted a negative association between participants' perceptions of their spouse's engagement in transition processing communication on diary surveys on any given day and their experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence on the follow diary. I conducted 24 actor-only over time APIMs with husbands' and wives' perceptions of their spouse's transition processing communication at time  $t-1$  predicting their own scores on relational turbulence variables at time  $t$ . Fit statistics and path coefficients are presented in Tables 6.7 and 6.9. An example of associations between participants' perception of their spouses' engagement in transition processing communication and reports of relationship qualities on the next diary entry are depicted in Figure 6.4.

*Actor effects.* As predicted, wives' perception that their husband engaged in increasing interaction was negatively associated with wives' experiences of self uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively associated with their reports of facilitation from a partner on the subsequent diary. Wives' perception of their husband's attempts to feel connected and feel situated were negatively associated with their own experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, and positively associated with their experiences of facilitation from a partner. Finally, perceptions of their husband's attempts to increase confidence was negatively associated with wives' self and partner uncertainty, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner three days later, as expected.



As predicted, husbands' perceptions that their wife participated in any of the forms of transition processing communication on a given day positively predicted husbands' perception of facilitation from partner on the following diary. Husbands' reports of their wife's attempts to increase interaction also negatively predicted husbands' reports of relational uncertainty. In contrast to H6b, husbands' reports of their wife's attempts to feel situated were positively associated with interference from a partner. Finally, husbands' perceptions of their spouses' attempts to increase confidence in the relationship were negatively associated with relationship uncertainty, as expected. Thus, H6b was largely supported for wives and received partial support for husbands.

### **Growth Analyses**

Per RQ3, I examined changes in participants' experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence (RQ3a), as well as changes in attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence over the course of the study (RQ3b). Specifically, I constructed separate dyadic growth models for each of the variables of interest using multi-level modeling techniques and Mplus statistical software. I treated individuals as nested within dyads and observations as crossed between dyads, per Kenny et al. (2006). To represent change in each of the variables across the 14 diaries, I used full maximum likelihood estimation to fit a 2-level model with the variable of interest at Level 1 and covariances at level 2<sup>2</sup>. Separate slopes and intercepts were estimated for husbands and wives for the regression of time onto each of the endogenous variables and time was centered around the start of the study (Diary 1). I then compared this model to a model with between-person and between-dyad variables (marital satisfaction and group membership-experimental or control) added as covariates at level 2. Group membership

was not significantly related to the slopes or intercepts of any of the tested models. Thus, the analyses reported reflect models that do not include group membership as a covariate. Across all of the analyses, models that included marital satisfaction provided a better fit for the data based on Loglikelihood and Akaike (AIC) fit statistics.

**Relationship qualities.** Coefficients for the analyses of trends in relationship qualities are reported in Table 6.10. Linear trends for each of the relationship qualities are depicted for husbands and wives in Figures 6.4 through 6.9. Husbands' and wives' initial scores on each of the relationship qualities were all positive and significantly different from zero. On average, husbands' and wives' scores on partner and relationship uncertainty, and relational turbulence increased over the course of the study, as did husbands' scores on self uncertainty and wives' scores on interference from a partner. Wives' scores on measures of facilitation from a partner decreased over the course of the study. Random effects indicate little variance between dyads in terms of the rate of change for the relationship variables.

**Self-reported transition processing communication.** Results of the growth analysis for participants' reports of their own attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence in the relationship indicate that scores for husbands' transition processing communication did not demonstrate significant linear change throughout the study. Wives' reports of their own attempts to increase confidence decreased linearly; however, there was little variance between dyads in the slopes over time. Husbands' and wives' starting level of each of the transition processing communication, represented by the intercept, were significant and positive, with significant variation between couples' scores in all analyses. Marital satisfaction positively predicted husbands' starting values for feeling situated, but was otherwise unrelated to the slopes and intercepts of any of the transition processing communication. Thus,

husbands' and wives' scores started positive for reports of their own transition processing communication with little change throughout the course of the study. Coefficients are reported in Table 6.11.

**Perceptions of partner transition processing communication.** Starting values for husbands' and wives' perceptions of their partner's transition processing communication were positive and significant, with significant variance between dyads. Growth models also indicated significant negative slopes for wives' perceptions of their husband's attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, and increase confidence in the relationship. Husbands' perceptions of their wife's engagement in increasing interaction decreased linearly over the course of the study, while the other three transition processing communication did not demonstrate a significant change. Slopes did not vary significantly between couples for husbands' or wives' scores. Coefficients are reported in Table 6.12.

### **Associations between Over-Time Transition Processing Communication and Changes in Relationship Qualities**

Thus far, analyses for Study 2 have assessed the daily associations between the variables of interest, as well as associations between variables from one diary to the next. Additionally, I assessed the linear trends in each of the variables of interest over the course of the study. The final analysis examines the associations between linear trends in participants' daily reports of engagement in transition processing communication and changes in their general assessments of relationship qualities at the beginning and end of the study. As a first step, I computed the individual slopes for each participant reflecting trends in their own engagement in increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence, as well as their perceptions of their partner's engagement in transition processing communication across the 14

diaries. I then computed simple change scores for evaluations of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence by subtracting the scores at pre-test from the post-test scores on each variable. Finally, I constructed 24 separate actor-partner interdependence models (APIM) to examine associations between husbands' and wives' scores on their self-reported transition processing communication and their own and their spouse's scores on the dependent variables. I also conducted 24 actor-only APIM to assess the relationship between husbands' and wives' perceptions of their spouse's engagement in processing communication and their own self-reported scores on the relationship variables.

Covariances between variables representing linear trends for husbands' and wives' use of each of the transition processing communication were negligible across each of the analyses for H5c and H6c. Few significant associations between changes in husbands' and wives' reports of relationship qualities in the models manifested; however, changes from pre-test to post-test on spouses' evaluations of interference from a partner were positively and significantly related across each of the analyses. Husbands' and wives' reports of relational turbulence were negatively correlated.

**Self-reported transition processing communication.** Hypothesis 5c predicted that increases in husbands' and wives' self-reports of their transition processing communication would correspond with decreases in their own and their spouse's general perceptions of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence over the study period, and positively predict their experiences of facilitation from a partner. Thus, a full APIM tested the actor and partner associations between individual's over-time slopes for self-reported transition processing communication and changes in reports of relational turbulence

from pre-test to post-test. Power to detect small associations between the variables was limited in this analysis; however, several significant associations were identified for both husbands and wives. Path coefficients and covariances for H5c are reported in Table 6.13. An example of associations between linear trends in self-reports on the independent variables across diaries and changes in the dependent variables from pre-test to post-test is depicted in Figure 6.11.

*Actor effects.* Results of the APIM analyses for H5c were similar to the results of the tests of daily and over-time associations using diary studies. As predicted, increases in wives' attempts to increase interaction with their spouse were significantly and negatively associated with their own reports of self uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and interference from a partner, and were positively associated with their scores on facilitation from a partner. Increases in wives' attempts to feel connected were negatively associated with changes in their own reports of interference from a partner and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Increases in their attempts to feel situated also corresponded with decreases in their own experiences of interference from a partner and increases in facilitation from a partner. Finally, linear trends in wives' attempts to increase confidence in their relationship were negatively associated with changes in relational uncertainty and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner.

In contrast with H5c, change in husbands' self-reports of increasing interaction and feeling connected over the course of the 14 diaries were not significantly associated with changes in the relationship variables from pre-test to post-test. Increases in husbands' reports of feeling situated corresponded with decreases in their reports of self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relational turbulence, and positively predicted changes in facilitation from a partner. Finally,

escalations in husbands' attempts to increase confidence in the relationship corresponded with increased facilitation from a partner.

*Partner effects.* Associations between husbands' linear trends in self-reported transition processing communication and changes in their wife's reports of relationship qualities from pre-test to post-test were in contrast with H5c. Increases in husbands' reports of their attempts to increase interaction corresponded with increases in their wife's reports of self uncertainty. Increases in husbands' attempts to feel connected were positively associated with changes in their wife's general assessment of self uncertainty and relational turbulence. Increases in husbands' attempts to feel situated over the course of the study coincided with increases in their wife's reports of interference from a partner. Finally, trends in husbands' attempts to increase confidence in the relationship were significantly and positively associated with their wife's change scores on self uncertainty and relational turbulence. In sum, increases in husbands' reported transition processing communication had no effect or made relationship experiences worse for wives.

Few significant partner effects were identified for husbands' pre- to post-test changes in relationship evaluations. Increases in wives' attempts to increase interaction were positively associated with changes in their husband's reports of relationship uncertainty. Increases in wives' engagement in feeling situated corresponded with increases in their husband's partner uncertainty and decreases in their husband's relational turbulence. Patterns of associations for actor effects largely supported my hypothesis; however, significant partner effects were generally in contrast with my predictions. Thus, H5c received limited support.

**Perceptions of partner transition processing communication.** Hypothesis 6c predicted that over-time increases in married partners' perceptions of their spouse's engagement

in transition processing communication would correspond with decreases in their own experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence from pre-test to post-test. To test this hypothesis, an actor-only APIM<sup>3</sup> was conducted with linear trends in husbands' and wives' reports of their spouse's engagement in transition processing communication across the diary studies predicting increases in their own general evaluations of relationship qualities from pre-test to post-test. Path coefficients and covariances for H6c are reported in Table 6.14. An example of typical associations between increases in perceptions of their spouse's engagement in transition processing communication throughout the study and changes in their reports of relational turbulence variables from pre-test to post-test is depicted in Figure 6.12.

*Actor effects.* With the exception of wives' reports of partner uncertainty, results of H6c largely aligned with my predictions for wives. Increases in wives' perception that their husband attempted to increase interaction throughout the study were negatively associated with their own reports of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively associated with wives' general reports of partner uncertainty and facilitation from a partner from pre-test to post-test. Increases in perceptions of their husband's engagement in feeling connected corresponded with decreases in wives' reports of interference from a partner and increases in wives' experiences facilitation from a partner. Increases in wives' perception that their husband attempted to help them feel situated were negatively associated with their own reports of interference from a partner and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. As expected, changes in the perception that their husband attempted to increase confidence in the relationship were negatively associated with wives' relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively associated with

wives' reports of facilitation from a partner. In contrast with H6c, increases in wives' perception that their husband engaged in each of the four categories of transition processing communication were associated with increases in wives' own partner uncertainty.

Changes in husbands' perception that their wife engaged in transition processing communication demonstrated few significant associations with their own reports on the relationship variables; however, those significant associations aligned with H6c. Increases in husbands' perceptions of their wife's increasing interaction were negatively associated with husbands' reports of self uncertainty from pre-test to post-test. Increases in the perception that their wife attempted to feel connected and feel situated were positively associated with husbands' experiences of facilitation from a partner. Finally, increases in husbands' perception that their wife engaged in behavior that would increase confidence in the relationship were negatively associated with husbands' self and partner uncertainty and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. Results for associations between wives' perceptions of their husband's engagement in transition processing communication significantly predicted their reports on the relationship variables in ways predicted by H6c, with the exception of partner uncertainty. Although husbands demonstrated few significant associations, those that were apparent supported H6c; therefore, H6c received moderate support.

### **Discussion**

The goal of Study 2 was to examine the relationship between married partners' use of transition processing communication and their experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence during the transition to school for their child with ASD. To meet this aim, Chapter 5 described a longitudinal diary study in which parents of children with ASD reported their experiences of six



relationship qualities, as well as their own and their partner's use of transition processing communication (communication and cognitions used to navigate changes in and around their relationship) throughout the first 42 days of their child's transition to school for the first time. In Chapter 6, hypotheses suggested that parents' use of transition processing communication predict their own and their spouse's relational turbulence on the same day and over-time. Additionally, a research question examined the rate of change that parents' experienced in their perceptions of relationship qualities and in their use of transition processing communication.

Results of the analyses described in this chapter identify significant effects for the use of transition processing communication on husbands' and wives' experiences of daily relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence, particularly for wives. In general, spouses' perceptions of their partners' engagement in transition processing communication maintained significant associations with the dependent variables, while husbands' and wives' reports of their own transition processing communication demonstrated few significant associations with their partner's reports of the six relationship qualities. In some cases, a spouse's reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication over the previous three days were positively associated with relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, particularly among men. Additionally, growth curve analyses provided evidence that wives' and husbands' experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence generally increase over their child's transition to school for the first time. In contrast, perceptions of a spouse's engagement in transition processing communication decreased or remained stable throughout the transition on average. Finally, examination of the relationship between linear trends in transition processing communication throughout the study and changes in general evaluations of relationship qualities from pre-test to

post-test indicated that increases in one's own engagement in transition processing communication may have positive effects for global relationship evaluations over longer periods of time, particularly for women. In general, increases in participants' own engagement, as well as increases in the perception of a spouse's engagement, in transition processing communication corresponded with improved relationship qualities, especially for wives.

### **Implications**

Study 2 expands on Study 1 to test the assumption set forth by relational turbulence theory that spousal communication can improve relationship qualities that contribute to turbulence. The first hypothesis (H5a) examined the association between relationship qualities and spouses' reports of their own transition processing communication on any given day, while the second hypothesis (H6a) studied the associations between husbands' and wives' perceptions of their partner's processing communication and experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. These hypotheses were generally supported; however, few partner effects were found for spouses' reports of their own use of transition processing communication. In other words, spouses' claims that they attempted to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence in the relationship showed only small associations with their partner's relationship experiences at any given time. Instead, husbands' and wives' perceptions of their partner's engagement in transition processing communication have stronger and more frequent associations with their own experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence on any given day, particularly for women.

Hypotheses 5a and 6a examined associations between the variables of interest on the same diary, which is essentially a cross-sectional analyses. Therefore, results should be

interpreted as correlational, rather than causal. To further examine the causal link between marital partners' communicative behavior and their relationship experiences, Hypotheses 5b and 6b, studied the same associations over-time by assessing the association between the variables from one diary to the next (three days later). Results from these analyses, followed the same general pattern as those from H5a and H6a, though slightly attenuated. For wives, their own use of transition processing communication significantly predicted their relationship experiences, while husbands' use of transition processing communication demonstrated few associations. Again, wives' perceptions of their husband's use of transition processing communication demonstrated stronger and more frequent associations with wives' reports of the six relationship qualities.

Results for husbands on H5b and H6b demonstrated interesting effects. In some cases use of transition processing communication was positively associated with interference from a partner. In other words, a husband's attempts to feel connected and feel situated one day was associated with the increased perception that his wife interfered with his goals over the following three days. This was also true of husbands' perception that their wife attempted to feel situated. These associations were relatively small, but are particularly interesting, given that facilitation from a partner was also positively associated with husbands' transition processing communication. This may reflect a general increase in influence between partners as a result of increased relationship talk (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004).

Across each of the diary analyses (H5a, H5b, H6a, H6b), husbands' and wives' use of transition processing communication were significantly and positively related. In contrast, covariances between each of the relationship qualities are small or non-significant across each of the analyses, with the exception of relational turbulence. Husbands' and wives' reports of

relational turbulence were positively related on any given day and from one diary to the next. This finding supports the assumptions of relational turbulence theory, which position relational turbulence as a “global and persistent evaluation of the relationship” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 18) and thus, a relationship quality that is broader than any particular relationship experience or day.

Research Question 3 examined the trajectory of parents’ relationship experiences and communication over the course of their child’s transition to school. Results of the growth analyses point to a decrease in marital quality throughout the transition, particularly for wives. Husbands demonstrated an increase in experiences of relational uncertainty and relational turbulence. Interestingly, the use of transition processing communication remained relatively stable for husbands throughout the transition on average; however, husbands perceived their wife’s attempts to increase interaction to decrease throughout the study. Wives decreased their reported attempts to increase confidence in the relationship and also perceived their husbands to engage less in increasing interaction, feeling connected, and increasing confidence over time. Given the potential for transition processing communication to attenuate experiences of relational turbulence, these findings may be particularly troublesome for the on-going marital quality of parents of children with ASD.

Results of the APIM assessing daily and over-time associations between transition processing communication indicated that participant perceptions of their spouse’s engagement in transition processing communication was a stronger predictor of evaluations of relationship qualities than their partner’s actual reports of engagement. Analyses of the associations between linear trends and more global evaluations of the relationship found similar results; however, examination of partner effects contrasted with my hypotheses for husbands and wives. H5c and

H6c examined the associations between trends in married partners' transition processing communication throughout the study and changes in their global evaluations of turbulence from pre-test to post-test. These analyses lacked the power to detect small effect sizes, so results were less robust; however, several significant associations were apparent. Linear trends for husbands' and wives' own engagement in transition processing communication negatively predicted changes in their general evaluations of their relationship from pre-test to post-test. In other words, increases in one's own engagement in daily transition processing communication throughout the study was associated with decreases in reports of relational turbulence variables from before and after the study. In contrast, increases in husbands' and wives' reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication showed few significant associations with their spouse's reports on the relationship variables. Associations that were significant were sometimes in the opposition direction. Thus, husbands' and wives' general relationship evaluations seem to improve when they engage in transition processing communication or when they perceive their spouse to engage in these behaviors, but remain unchanged or worsen with increases in their spouse's own reports of engagement. Such findings are in keeping with the results from Study 1 and demonstrate the potential impact of spouses' perception on their experiences of relationship transitions.

Increases in wives' perceptions of their husband's engagement in transition processing communication throughout the study were also positively associated with increases in reports of partner uncertainty. These findings may be the result, not of the engagement in transition processing per se, but of the participants' recognition that their spouse is engaging in more relational maintenance. Given that men tend to engage in less relational maintenance than women (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2012), an unexpected increase in relationship-focused

communication may call into question their partner's evaluations of the relationship. This interpretation is supported by qualitative responses to questions asking partners how their participation in the study impacted their marriage. While some partners indicated that their transition experience made them more aware of their partner's efforts (e.g., "Made me more aware of my support from my husband"), others suggested that they became more aware of deficits in their relational maintenance behaviors (e.g., "It has made me more aware of how much we don't share or prioritize each other"). Others suggested that participating in the study lead them to engage in more relationship talk than they otherwise would (e.g., "It made us talk about things we usually don't").

Across all of the analyses in Study 2, husbands and wives have demonstrated unique effects. In general, wives seemed to experience a stronger relationship between their own and their partner's engagement in transition processing communication and the six relationship qualities. In several cases, husbands' associations between the variables of interest demonstrated the opposite association than those predicted for daily assessments, particularly for transition processing communication that involve increased conversation with a spouse. In contrast, increased engagement in transition processing communication throughout the study was more strongly associated with improvements in general assessments of marital quality for wives than husbands.

As a final note, this study has several implications for married partners, counselors, and relationship interventions. First, the study calls attention to the potential for transitions in the life of a child with ASD to negatively impact the parents' relationship. Second, the study demonstrates the potential for particular communication behaviors and cognitions to affect marital quality during important life transitions. Third, it identified spouses' attempts to increase

interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence in their relationship as a possible means of improving marital quality in daily life, particularly for wives. Additionally, the study points to spouses' perceptions of their partner's communication behavior as a stronger predictor of marital quality than spouses' actual attempts to improve the relationship in daily interactions. Fourth, a comparison between the control and experimental groups in the study indicate that asking participants whether or not they engaged in transition processing communication as part of diary surveys did not significantly affect the participants' actual engagement in those communication. These findings suggest that interventions may need to provide explicit instruction for how to utilize relationship-focused communication to improve outcomes during transitions. Finally, across each of the hypotheses in Study 2, husbands' and wives' demonstrated significant findings that contrasted my hypotheses. Although few in number, these results suggests that increased engagement in transition processing communication, while generally positive, may negatively impact one's perception of relationship qualities, if recognition of increased relational maintenance causes partners to question the status of their relationship. Thus, while perceptions of relationship qualities seem to generally improve with engagement in transition processing communication, increases in relationship-focused communication have the potential for negative consequences in some instances.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Study 2 demonstrates several methodological strengths. This project used a longitudinal, pre- and post-test design with daily diaries to gain insight into the experiences of parents of children with ASD during the transition to school for the first time. Participants completed 14 diary studies over a 42-day period. This design allowed me to consider the long and short term associations between parent communication and relationship qualities. By having participants

complete diary surveys at the end of each the day, I reduced the risk of retrospective bias typical in self-report studies. Additionally, the study employed dyadic data analysis, which included the perspective of both marital partners and allowed for the comparison of responses across spouses. Finally, the study engaged the Interactive Autism Network to access a relatively understudied population in relationship research.

The strengths of this study are qualified by their methodological weakness. First, by examining an understudied population, the study was left vulnerable to issues of sample size and quality. Indeed, the small sample size of 53 couples decreased the power to detect small effects, particularly in pre- and post-test analyses. Additionally, non-random sampling techniques were required to achieve a sufficient sample of parents of children with ASD whose children were starting school for the first time. Therefore, the results of the study may not be generalizable to a wider population. Finally, Study 2 was conducted using online, self-report measures, which are associated with a number of self-report biases, particularly for measures of communication behaviors. Future studies would benefit from the application of observation techniques to examine married partners' engagement in transition processing during interactions.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 6 presented a longitudinal, diary study examining the experiences of parents of children with ASD during their son or daughter's transition to school for the first time. Findings of the study indicate that parents' use of transition processing communication throughout the transition are related to their experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence and that those experiences change over the course of the transition. Chapter 7 provides a summary and discussion of the overarching implications of the dissertation project.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I compared the model fit of full APIM and actor-only APIM. The models were not significantly different or the actor-only model was a significantly better fit.

<sup>2</sup>As a first step, I fit separate individual growth curve model for husbands and wives, before conducting the dyadic models.

<sup>3</sup>I compared the model fit of the full APIM and the actor-only APIM. In most cases, the actor-only model maintained a significantly better fit.

<sup>4</sup>The psi matrix for this model was non-positive definite.

Table 6.1. *Bivariate Correlations for Pre-Test Variables*

	SU	PU	RU	IP	FP	RT	IIs	FCs	FSs	ICs	Iip	FCp	FSp	ICs
SU	<b>-.07</b>	.62***	.65***	.72***	-.42**	.54***	.14	.19 <sup>†</sup>	.27*	.03	-.36**	-.49***	-.43***	-.39**
PU	.61***	<b>.23<sup>†</sup></b>	.71***	.47***	-.32*	.47***	.09	.13	.17	.14	-.38**	-.51***	-.48***	-.44***
RU	.55***	.77***	<b>.44**</b>	.45***	-.34*	.69***	-.03	.10	.14	.03	-.53***	-.57***	-.58***	-.55***
IP	.58***	.36***	.46***	<b>.18</b>	-.53***	.51***	.06	.04	.13	-.05	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	-.38**	-.33*	-.25*
FP	-.47***	-.39**	-.47***	-.63***	<b>.26***</b>	-.27*	-.23 <sup>†</sup>	-.16	-.03	.07	.38**	.46***	.48***	.45***
RT	.69***	.67***	.73***	.60***	-.66***	<b>.51***</b>	.01	.10	.12	.04	-.60***	-.61***	-.62***	-.54***
IIs	-.01	.13	.12	.11	.07	-.05	<b>-.09</b>	.64***	.51***	.53***	-.04	-.25***	-.24*	-.15
FCs	-.26*	-.35**	-.23*	.08	.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.30*	.53***	<b>-.22<sup>†</sup></b>	.73***	.76***	-.17	-.36***	-.31*	-.25*
FSs	-.12	-.05	-.05	.13	.10	-.07	.50***	.66***	<b>-.20<sup>†</sup></b>	.67***	-.08	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.16	-.19 <sup>†</sup>
ICs	-.36**	-.18	-.06	-.07	.16	-.30	.38**	.66***	.58***	<b>-.09</b>	.04	-.11	-.06	-.09
Iip	-.41**	-.32*	-.45***	-.23*	.42***	-.43***	.50***	.51***	.41**	.35**	<b>.38**</b>	.83	.78***	.81***
FCp	-.49***	-.42**	-.27*	-.27*	.39**	-.47***	.41**	.63***	.35**	.46***	.75***	<b>.27*</b>	.86***	.80***
FSp	-.35**	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	-.17	-.17	.35**	-.35**	.40**	.51***	.74***	.56***	.63***	.65***	<b>.44**</b>	.77***
ICp	-.52***	-.36**	-.16	-.17	.36**	-.45***	.31*	.57***	.45***	.66***	.65***	.71***	.65***	<b>.28*</b>

*Note.*  $N = 53$ . Wives' scores are below the diagonal. Husbands' scores are above the diagonal. Correlations between wives' and husbands' scores on are the diagonal. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.2. *Bivariate Correlations for Diary Variables*

	SU	PU	RU	IP	FP	RT	IIs	FCs	FSs	ICs	Iip	FCp	FSp	ICs
SU	<b>.06*</b>	.90***	.82***	.70***	-.09*	.43***	-.16***	-.18***	-.03	-.18***	-.17***	-.22***	-.05	-.21***
PU	.88***	<b>.17***</b>	.84***	.67***	-.09*	.46***	-.15***	-.18**	-.01	-.21***	-.18***	-.24***	-.06***	-.25***
RU	.84***	.90***	<b>.15***</b>	.63***	-.18**	.49***	-.26***	-.26***	-.09*	-.30***	-.26***	-.32***	-.13**	-.34***
IP	.42***	.32***	.36***	<b>.08**</b>	-.06	.48***	-.11***	-.11*	.04	-.08***	-.16***	-.15**	-.03	-.12**
FP	-.38***	-.34***	-.34***	-.37***	<b>.21***</b>	-.12*	.48***	.53***	.48***	.51***	.45***	.53***	.54***	.51***
RT	-.34***	.31***	.31***	.51***	-.31***	<b>.36***</b>	-.21***	-.21**	-.01	-.21***	-.24***	-.23***	-.04	-.24
IIs	-.25***	-.20***	-.22***	-.20***	.43***	-.30***	<b>.48***</b>	.80***	.70***	.75***	.84***	.76***	.70***	.73***
FCs	-.26***	-.24***	-.23***	-.08*	.42***	-.17***	.69***	<b>.42***</b>	.75***	.83***	.75***	.83***	.72***	.76***
FSs	-.23***	-.18***	-.18***	-.10*	.37***	-.14**	.66***	.75***	<b>.41***</b>	.76***	.65***	.66***	.89***	.74***
ICs	-.38***	-.30***	-.30***	-.25***	.41***	-.29***	.69***	.74***	.74***	<b>.44***</b>	.68***	.76***	.71***	.84***
Iip	-.36***	-.33***	-.32***	-.28***	.54**	-.40***	.81***	.66***	.63***	.69***	<b>.56***</b>	.79***	.73***	.78***
FCp	-.36***	-.34***	-.32***	-.25***	.52***	-.35***	.70***	.79***	.66***	.77***	.79***	<b>.54***</b>	.73***	.81***
FSp	-.34***	-.30***	-.30***	-.23***	.46***	-.39***	.70***	.70***	.84***	.77***	.79***	.84***	<b>.41***</b>	.78***
ICp	-.40***	-.36***	-.35***	-.26***	.52***	-.33***	.67***	.67***	.70***	.82***	.78***	.82***	.79***	<b>.52***</b>

*Note.*  $N_{\text{wives}} = 818$ ,  $N_{\text{husbands}} = 744$ . These analysis control for dependence in the data between dyads by conducting separate analyses for husbands and wives; however, the bivariate correlations ignore the dependence in the data between diary entries within the individual. Wives' scores are below the diagonal. Husbands' scores are above the diagonal. Correlations between wives' and husbands' scores are on the diagonal.  $N_{\text{wives}} = 818$ ,  $N_{\text{husbands}} = 744$ . SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.3. *Bivariate Correlations for Post-Test Variables*

	SU	PU	RU	IP	FP	RT	IIs	FCs	FSs	ICs	IIp	FCp	FSp	ICs
SU	<b>.06</b>	.74***	.80***	.52***	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	.52***	-.19 <sup>†</sup>	-.17	-.12	-.33*	-.32*	-.33*	-.25*	-.37***
PU	.84***	<b>.16</b>	.74***	.61***	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	.57***	-.13	-.17	-.03	-.33*	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.30*	-.07	-.29***
RU	.86***	.86***	<b>.22</b>	.71***	-.39**	.67***	-.28*	-.27*	-.12	-.33*	-.38**	-.31*	-.18	-.43***
IP	.40***	.51***	.48***	<b>.18</b>	-.33*	.61***	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.29*	-.12	-.14	-.16	-.15	-.04	-.23 <sup>†</sup>
FP	-.30**	-.45***	-.42***	-.55***	<b>.30*</b>	-.29*	.32*	.45***	.33**	.45***	.41**	.45***	.40***	.48***
RT	.49***	.48***	.51***	.45***	-.48**	<b>.48***</b>	-.34*	-.36**	-.18	-.30*	-.29*	-.22 <sup>†</sup>	-.12	-.30*
IIs	-.14	-.12	-.12	-.09	.41**	-.32*	<b>.40**</b>	-.79***	-.56***	.71***	.72***	.55***	.59***	.66***
FCs	-.35**	-.25*	-.25*	-.06	.41**	-.28*	.81***	<b>.31*</b>	-.67***	.75***	.55***	.60***	.56***	.65***
FSs	-.22 <sup>†</sup>	-.13	-.16	.01	.35*	-.24*	.73***	.81***	<b>.26*</b>	.67***	.38**	.39**	.63***	.50***
ICs	-.38**	-.27*	-.29*	-.12	.38**	-.29*	.69***	.79***	.74***	<b>.37**</b>	.63***	.70***	.66***	.80***
IIp	-.33**	-.34**	-.40**	-.18 <sup>†</sup>	.51***	-.42**	.67***	.60***	.53***	.63***	<b>.37**</b>	.76***	.69***	.78***
FCp	-.37**	-.37**	-.40**	-.25*	.56***	-.34*	.56***	.60***	.62***	.65***	.82***	<b>.29*</b>	.75***	.85***
FSp	-.37**	-.29*	-.31*	-.15	.50***	-.36**	.60***	.64***	.79***	.76***	.69***	.80***	<b>.28*</b>	.77***
ICp	-.47***	-.47***	-.48***	-.29*	.53***	-.37**	.59***	.66***	.66***	.81***	.74***	.80***	.78***	<b>.48***</b>

Note.  $N_{\text{wives}} = 52$ ,  $N_{\text{husbands}} = 47$ . Wives' scores are below the diagonal. Husbands' scores are above the diagonal. Correlations between wives' and husbands' scores are on the diagonal. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.4. *Model Fit for Stacked APIM Diary Analyses*

IV	DV	Fit Indices for Models with Self TPA			Fit Indices for Models with Partner TPA		
		RMSEA	CFI	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	$\chi^2/df$
Increasing Interaction	SU	.06	.98	1.95	.05	.98	1.89
	PU	.05	.98	1.89	.07	.97	2.54
	RU	.08	.95	2.88	.07	.95	2.73
	IP	.05	.99	1.62	.05	.99	1.65
	FP	.07	.97	2.75	.04	.99	1.58
	RT	.06	.97	2.07	.07	.97	2.33
Feeling Connected	SU	.07	.96	2.68	.07	.97	2.47
	PU	.08	.95	2.90	.07	.96	2.51
	RU	.08	.91	2.97	.08	.95	2.91
	IP	.07	.95	2.71	.07	.96	2.51
	FP	.06	.97	2.66	.06	.98	2.49
	RT	.07	.96	2.50	.07	.97	2.57
Feeling Situated	SU	.06	.97	2.00	.06	.97	2.22
	PU	.07	.96	2.33	.07	.96	2.58
	RU	.08	.92	3.19	.08	.93	2.92
	IP <sup>3</sup>	.06	.97	1.93	.07	.96	2.36
	FP	.05	.98	1.88	.05	.98	1.91
	RT	.06	.96	2.19	.07	.95	2.56
Increasing Confidence	SU	.07	.95	2.65	.07	.95	2.73
	PU	.08	.95	2.83	.08	.94	2.91
	RU	.09	.90	3.70	.07	.94	3.10
	IP	.08	.94	2.76	.06	.95	2.62
	FP	.07	.96	2.88	.07	.95	2.98
	RT	.07	.94	2.73	.08	.94	2.85

*Note.* SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

Table 6.5. Path Coefficients for APIM Assessing Daily Reports of Self TPCs

IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Wife Partner Effects	Husband Partner Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	-.04	.01	<b>-.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>.98***</b>	.04
	PU	-.01	.00	<b>-.09*</b>	.00	<b>.97***</b>	.01
	RU	-.05	.00	-.05	-.01	<b>.98***</b>	.04
	IP	<b>-.10*</b>	-.01	.01	.02	<b>.98***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.27***</b>	<b>.30***</b>	<b>.15*</b>	-.01	<b>.98***</b>	.00
	RT	<b>-.14**</b>	-.05	.02	-.03	<b>.98***</b>	<b>.20***</b>
Feeling Connected	SU	<b>-.08*</b>	.01	.00	-.02	<b>1.17***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.01	-.01	.02	<b>1.14***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.12*</b>	<b>-.07<sup>†</sup></b>	.02	-.01	<b>1.00***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	-.04	-.02	-.01	.00	<b>1.14***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.51***</b>	<b>.23***</b>	<b>.13*</b>	<b>.13<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>1.08***</b>	.06
	RT	-.03	<b>-.07<sup>†</sup></b>	-.06	.00	<b>1.17***</b>	<b>.20***</b>
Feeling Situated	SU	<b>-.17**</b>	<b>.07*</b>	-.01	<b>-.09*</b>	<b>.59***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.11<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.07	-.06	<b>.59***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.14**</b>	<b>.08*</b>	-.01	<b>-.09<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.59***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	<b>-.11<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.14**</b>	-.03	<b>-.17**</b>	<b>.58***</b>	.04
	FP	<b>.33***</b>	<b>.30***</b>	.07	<b>.14<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.62***</b>	.06
	RT	<b>-.23**</b>	<b>.12*</b>	.05	<b>-.23**</b>	<b>.58***</b>	<b>.19***</b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	-.04	-.01	<b>-.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>1.02***</b>	.03
	PU	<b>-.15**</b>	.01	-.03	-.02	<b>1.04***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.23***</b>	<b>-.09*</b>	<b>.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>1.15***</b>	.03
	IP	<b>-.28***</b>	-.06	<b>.11*</b>	.01	<b>1.04***</b>	.04
	FP	<b>.37***</b>	<b>.34***</b>	.01	.03	<b>1.13***</b>	.04
	RT	<b>-.28***</b>	-.05	<b>.10<sup>†</sup></b>	-.06	<b>1.10***</b>	<b>.19***</b>

*Note.* Each row reports results from a distinct model with one transition processing communication as the independent variable and one construct from relational turbulence theory as the dependent variable, as noted in columns one and two. Cell entries are path coefficients. Kenny et al. (2006), suggest that researchers should report the unstandardized regression coefficients for the APIM because standardizing regression coefficient prohibits comparing the paths between husbands and wives. Therefore, all coefficients are unstandardized. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.6. *Path Coefficients for APIM Assessing Daily Reports of Partner TPCs*

IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	<b>-.14***</b>	-.01	<b>1.47***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.12***</b>	-.01	<b>1.47***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.10***</b>	-.03	<b>1.47***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	<b>-.13***</b>	<b>-.04*</b>	<b>1.47***</b>	.04
	FP	<b>.39***</b>	<b>.23***</b>	<b>1.39***</b>	.04
	RT	<b>-.17***</b>	<b>-.07*</b>	<b>1.47***</b>	<b>.19***</b>
Feeling Connected	SU	<b>-.12***</b>	-.02	<b>1.47***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.12***</b>	-.01	<b>1.46***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.10***</b>	<b>-.07**</b>	<b>1.42***</b>	.03
	IP	<b>-.10***</b>	-.04	<b>1.46***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.46***</b>	<b>.29***</b>	<b>1.18***</b>	.06
	RT	<b>-.13***</b>	<b>-.06*</b>	<b>1.46***</b>	<b>.20***</b>
Feeling Situated	SU	<b>-.19***</b>	.02	<b>.67***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.17***</b>	.01	<b>.68***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.16***</b>	.01	<b>.68***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	<b>-.18***</b>	.03	<b>.67***</b>	.04
	FP	<b>.49***</b>	<b>.43***</b>	<b>.70***</b>	.02
	RT	<b>-.20***</b>	.00	<b>.67***</b>	<b>.20***</b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	<b>-.21***</b>	-.04	<b>1.33***</b>	<b>.03<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.17***</b>	-.02	<b>1.32***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.15***</b>	<b>-.12***</b>	<b>1.52***</b>	<b>.07*</b>
	IP	<b>-.16***</b>	<b>-.09**</b>	<b>1.32***</b>	<b>.06<sup>†</sup></b>
	FP	<b>.59***</b>	<b>.40***</b>	<b>1.07***</b>	.06
	RT	<b>-.18***</b>	<b>-.11**</b>	<b>1.33***</b>	<b>.19***</b>

*Note.* Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner

Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation

from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling

Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.7. Model Fit for Over-Time APIM Diary Analyses

IV	DV	Fit Indices for Models with Self			Fit Indices for Models with Partner		
		RMSEA	CFI	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	$\chi^2/df$
Increasing Interaction	SU	.06	.98	2.06	.06	.98	2.09
	PU	.06	.97	2.18	.07	.97	2.53
	RU	.08	.94	2.91	.08	.95	2.95
	IP	.05	.98	1.77	.05	.98	1.73
	FP	.04	.99	1.74	.05	.98	2.18
	RT	.06	.97	2.20	.06	.97	2.20
Feeling Connected	SU	.08	.96	2.84	.07	.97	2.46
	PU	.08	.96	2.81	.07	.96	2.66
	RU	.08	.94	2.98	.08	.95	2.96
	IP	.08	.95	2.78	.07	.97	2.33
	FP	.06	.97	2.75	.06	.97	2.67
	RT	.07	.95	2.67	.07	.96	2.55
Feeling Situated	SU	.06	.97	2.01	.07	.96	2.41
	PU	.07	.96	2.47	.07	.95	2.74
	RU	.08	.92	2.98	.08	.93	2.96
	IP	.06	.97	1.99	.07	.96	2.38
	FP	.04	.98	1.78	.05	.98	2.14
	RT	.06	.96	2.33	.07	.96	2.43
Increasing Confidence	SU	.08	.94	2.81	.08	.95	2.82
	PU	.08	.94	2.97	.08	.94	2.95
	RU <sup>1</sup>	.08	.92	3.62	.07	.93	3.19
	IP	.07	.95	2.59	.08	.93	2.93
	FP	.07	.95	2.92	.07	.95	2.88
	RT	.08	.94	2.74	.07	.94	2.61

Note. Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner

Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation

from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling

Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>1</sup> indicates models that did not meet the criteria for model fit.



Table 6.8. Path Coefficients for Over-Time APIM of Diary Surveys Assessing Self TPC

IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Wife Partner Effects	Husband Partner Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	-.01	.03	<b>-.07<sup>†</sup></b>	-.04	<b>.94***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	-.05	.04	.00	-.02	<b>.94***</b>	.01
	RU	-.02	.04	-.03	.00	<b>.94***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	-.02	.02	-.05	.02	<b>.94***</b>	<b>.05<sup>†</sup></b>
	FP	<b>.16**</b>	<b>.17**</b>	<b>.10<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.08<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.97***</b>	.08
	RT	.00	<b>.06<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>-.07<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.94***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Feeling Connected	SU	-.01	.01	<b>-.04<sup>†</sup></b>	-.04	<b>1.04***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	.04	.01	-.04	-.02	<b>1.04***</b>	.01
	RU	.08	.03	<b>-.09*</b>	-.03	<b>.93***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	<b>.12**</b>	<b>.09*</b>	<b>-.12*</b>	<b>-.07*</b>	<b>.99***</b>	<b>.06<sup>†</sup></b>
	FP	<b>.27**</b>	<b>.10<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>.28***</b>	<b>1.02***</b>	.04
	RT	.01	<b>.08*</b>	-.04	<b>-.12**</b>	<b>1.04***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Feeling Situated	SU	<b>-.12*</b>	.02	-.06	.00	<b>.60***</b>	.04
	PU	<b>-.13*</b>	.01	.01	.04	<b>.60***</b>	.01
	RU	-.06s	.06	-.01	-.02	<b>.60***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	-.02	<b>.13**</b>	-.06	<b>-.09<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.59***</b>	<b>.05<sup>†</sup></b>
	FP	<b>.30***</b>	<b>.25**</b>	.04	<b>.25**</b>	<b>.64***</b>	.04
	RT	-.04	<b>-.12*</b>	-.01	<b>-.11<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.60***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	-.06	.02	-.02	-.05	<b>1.07***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	-.03	.03	-.01	-.06	<b>1.08***</b>	.01
	RU	.03	.04	.00	-.05	<b>1.16***</b>	<b>.10**</b>
	IP	-.05	-.01	.02	.02	<b>1.08***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.21***</b>	<b>.29***</b>	-.01	<b>.12<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>1.11***</b>	.08
	RT	.03	<b>.13*</b>	-.03	<b>-.18**</b>	<b>1.09***</b>	<b>.21***</b>

Note. Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner

Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation

from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling

Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.9. Path Coefficients for Over-Time APIM of Diary Surveys Assessing Partner TPC

IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	<b>-.06*</b>	-.01	<b>1.39***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	-.04	.00	<b>1.39***</b>	.01
	RU	-.03	<b>-.04<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>1.39***</b>	.03
	IP	<b>-.05<sup>†</sup></b>	.04	<b>1.39***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.17**</b>	<b>.16**</b>	<b>1.38***</b>	.10
	RT	<b>-.05<sup>†</sup></b>	.01	<b>1.39***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Feeling Connected	SU	<b>-.07*</b>	-.02	<b>1.37***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.05<sup>†</sup></b>	-.02	<b>1.37***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.04<sup>†</sup></b>	-.03	<b>1.32***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	-.02	.00	<b>1.37***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.19**</b>	<b>.23***</b>	<b>1.20***</b>	.09
	RT	-.04	.00	<b>1.37***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Feeling Situated	SU	<b>-.09*</b>	.01	<b>.67***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	PU	<b>-.10*</b>	.00	<b>.66***</b>	.01
	RU	<b>-.07*</b>	-.02	<b>.66***</b>	<b>.04<sup>†</sup></b>
	IP	-.04	<b>.08*</b>	<b>.67**</b>	<b>.05<sup>†</sup></b>
	FP	<b>.22**</b>	<b>.30***</b>	<b>.73***</b>	<b>.09<sup>†</sup></b>
	RT	-.06	.04	<b>.67***</b>	<b>.21***</b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	<b>-.11**</b>	-.02	<b>1.35***</b>	.03
	PU	<b>-.07*</b>	-.03	<b>1.35***</b>	.01
	RU	-.03	<b>-.08**</b>	<b>1.51***</b>	<b>.09**</b>
	IP	-.04	.02	<b>1.36***</b>	.05
	FP	<b>.22**</b>	<b>.26***</b>	<b>1.18***</b>	.10
	RT	-.04	.00	<b>1.35***</b>	<b>.21***</b>

Note. Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner

Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation

from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling

Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6.10. *Growth Curve Analyses of Relationship Qualities*

Model Parameters	Self Uncertainty		Partner Uncertainty		Relationship Uncertainty		Interference from a Partner		Facilitation from a Partner		Relational Turbulence	
	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error
<b>Fixed Effects</b>												
<i>Model for initial scores</i>												
Wives' Intercept	<b>5.97***</b>	1.02	<b>.37**</b>	.13	<b>.64***</b>	.15	<b>1.33***</b>	.25	<b>3.67***</b>	.28	<b>1.59***</b>	.26
Husbands' Intercept	<b>1.57***</b>	.24	<b>1.48***</b>	.19	<b>1.69***</b>	.17	<b>1.86***</b>	.26	<b>3.87***</b>	.27	<b>1.99***</b>	.19
Wife MS	-.02	.79	-.09	.12	-.09	.14	<b>-.36*</b>	.17	<b>.36*</b>	.19	<b>-.38*</b>	.17
Husband MS	<b>-.52**</b>	.18	<b>-.47**</b>	.14	<b>-.58***</b>	.16	<b>-.46**</b>	.17	<b>.39<sup>†</sup></b>	.24	<b>-.40**</b>	.16
<i>Model for slope</i>												
Wives' Linear Trend	.27	.32	<b>.80***</b>	.14	<b>.77***</b>	.10	<b>.44***</b>	.11	<b>-.32***</b>	.09	<b>.68***</b>	.12
Husbands' Linear Trend	<b>.11*</b>	.06	<b>.19*</b>	.08	<b>.24**</b>	.08	.02	.09	-.13	.11	<b>.28**</b>	.09
Wife MS	.10	.17	.02	.12	.02	.12	.07	.06	-.05	.06	<b>.14*</b>	.06
Husband MS	.08	.06	.06	.10	.07	.10	.08	.07	<b>-.13<sup>†</sup></b>	.10	<b>.13*</b>	.07
<b>Random Effects</b>												
Wives' initial score	.08	1.91	.08	.13	<b>.16<sup>†</sup></b>	.12	<b>.47*</b>	.23	<b>1.36*</b>	.67	<b>1.22*</b>	.56
Husbands' initial score	<b>.36<sup>†</sup></b>	.23	.22	.33	.26	.25	<b>.63*</b>	.37	<b>1.29*</b>	.70	.39	.33
Wives' growth rate	.02	.27	.16	.10	<b>.09<sup>†</sup></b>	.05	.02	.04	.02	.05	.15	.13
Husbands' growth rate	.01	.03	.03	.05	.04	.06	.01	.04	.02	.07	.04	.06
<b>Covariances</b>												
H & W initial scores	.14	.85	-.03	.10	.01	.10	.09	.28	.15	.43	.19	.33
H & W growth rate	-.01	.10	.01	.05	.02	.10	.00	.03	-.02	.05	.04	.07

Note. Number of observations = 671; Cell entries represent unstandardized path coefficients.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.11. *Growth Curve Analyses of Self Transition Processing Communication*

Model Parameters	Increasing Interaction		Feeling Connected		Feeling Situated		Increasing Confidence	
	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error
<b>Fixed Effects</b>								
<i>Model for initial scores</i>								
Wives' Intercept	<b>2.91***</b>	.77	<b>3.42***</b>	.40	<b>2.78***</b>	.43	<b>3.22***</b>	.34
Husbands' Intercept	<b>3.30***</b>	.80	<b>3.36***</b>	.60	<b>3.00***</b>	.53	<b>3.54***</b>	.36
Wife MS	.03	.36	.17	.35	.08	.36	.11	.26
Husband MS	.24	.63	.72	.77	.29	.56	.39	.35
<i>Model for slope</i>								
Wives' Linear Trend	-.20	.25	-.11	.15	-.02	.22	<b>-.29<sup>†</sup></b>	.22
Husbands' Linear Trend	-.14	.31	-.13	.18	-.10	.19	-.15	.17
Wife MS	.01	.12	-.02	.15	.03	.09	-.02	.14
Husband MS	-.07	.35	-.21	.26	-.03	.28	-.11	.23
<b>Random Effects</b>								
Wives' initial score	<b>1.73*</b>	1.12	<b>1.86<sup>†</sup></b>	1.15	1.19	.98	1.33	1.20
Husbands' initial score	<b>1.55</b>	1.79	1.78	1.51	<b>1.59<sup>†</sup></b>	1.12	1.22	1.10
Wives' growth rate	.07	.14	.17	.17	.05	.12	.07	.09
Husbands' growth rate	.01	.11	.03	.14	.02	.12	.01	.05
<b>Covariances</b>								
H & W initial scores	1.31	1.23	.17	.35	.70	.93	.75	.92
H & W growth rate	.02	.13	.72	.77	.01	.11	.00	.09

Note. Number of observations = 410; Cell entries represent unstandardized path coefficients.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.12. *Growth Curve Analyses of Partner Transition Processing Communication*

Model Parameters	Increasing Interaction		Feeling Connected		Feeling Situated		Increasing Confidence	
	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error	Coefficient	error
<b>Fixed Effects</b>								
<i>Model for initial scores</i>								
Wives' Intercept	<b>2.94***</b>	.66	<b>3.04***</b>	.61	<b>2.66***</b>	.58	<b>3.11***</b>	.40
Husbands' Intercept	<b>3.44***</b>	.73	<b>3.46***</b>	.50	<b>3.01***</b>	.57	<b>3.47***</b>	.44
Wife MS	.21	.39	.26	.30	.24	.42	.15	.34
Husband MS	.46	.52	<b>.53*</b>	.31	<b>.50<sup>†</sup></b>	.36	.44	.42
<i>Model for slope</i>								
Wives' Linear Trend	<b>-.23<sup>†</sup></b>	.17	<b>-.24<sup>†</sup></b>	.17	-.19	.19	<b>-.25<sup>†</sup></b>	.19
Husbands' Linear Trend	<b>-.27<sup>†</sup></b>	.17	-.12	.28	-.13	.22	-.22	.21
Wife MS	.00	.14	-.04	.10	-.01	.12	-.01	.14
Husband MS	-.18	.30	-.16	.14	-.16	.17	-.13	.19
<b>Random Effects</b>								
Wives' initial score	<b>2.15<sup>†</sup></b>	1.29	<b>2.08<sup>†</sup></b>	1.55	<b>1.79<sup>†</sup></b>	1.27	<b>1.48<sup>†</sup></b>	1.03
Husbands' initial score	<b>1.70</b>	2.07	<b>1.89*</b>	1.15	1.75	1.38	1.35	1.45
Wives' growth rate	.08	.14	.05	.13	.06	.12	.04	.07
Husbands' growth rate	.01	.12	.11	.17	.02	.09	.02	.12
<b>Covariances</b>								
H & W initial scores	1.34	1.49	1.19	.98	.88	1.14	.94	1.15
H & W growth rate	.01	.10	.02	.07	.00	.08	.02	.05

Note. Number of observations = 410, Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficients.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6.13. *Path Coefficients for APIM Assessing Associations between Linear Trends in Self-Reported Transition Processing Communication across Diaries and Changes in Relational Turbulence Variables from Pre-Test to Post-Test*

IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Wife Partner Effects	Husband Partner Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	<b>-5.04<sup>†</sup></b>	-0.56	<b>9.59*</b>	-1.87	.00	-.15
	PU	.31	-1.95	1.74	1.96	.00	-.02
	RU	<b>-4.36*</b>	-3.68	1.03	<b>3.43<sup>†</sup></b>	.00	-.02
	IP	<b>-6.21*</b>	3.35	4.00	-1.20	.00	<b>.53**</b>
	FP	<b>3.52<sup>†</sup></b>	2.89	1.28	1.51	.00	.07
	RT	-2.74	0.81	5.01	-2.38	.00	-.24
Feeling Connected	SU	-0.44	-3.27	<b>6.19<sup>†</sup></b>	-1.42	.00	-.05
	PU	0.42	-3.58	-0.13	0.87	.00	-.02
	RU	-2.74	-2.61	0.90	2.02	.00	-.06
	IP	<b>-3.68<sup>†</sup></b>	0.79	3.12	-0.41	.00	<b>.53**</b>
	FP	<b>3.42<sup>†</sup></b>	3.63	-0.74	0.07	.00	.14
	RT	<b>-9.30*</b>	-0.54	<b>10.75*</b>	-0.47	.00	-.23
Feeling Situated	SU	-3.71	<b>-5.56<sup>†</sup></b>	5.15	2.53	.01	-.08
	PU	1.96	<b>-6.01*</b>	0.15	<b>4.72*</b>	.01	-.02
	RU	-0.09	0.65	-1.69	0.73	.01	-.07
	IP	<b>-7.46**</b>	-1.18	<b>5.65<sup>†</sup></b>	2.54	.01	<b>.62**</b>
	FP	<b>7.49**</b>	<b>5.03*</b>	-3.98	0.82	.01	.09
	RT	-3.41	<b>3.46<sup>†</sup></b>	2.99	<b>-3.58*</b>	.01	<b>-.27<sup>†</sup></b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	-4.24	-3.93	<b>9.23*</b>	0.73	.00	-.08
	PU	1.32	-3.72	1.35	1.20	.00	.00
	RU	<b>-5.45*</b>	-2.10	3.51	1.48	.00	-.06
	IP	-2.74	2.07	2.04	0.01	.00	<b>.54**</b>
	FP	<b>7.94**</b>	<b>5.30<sup>†</sup></b>	-3.20	-0.96	.00	.18
	RT	<b>-9.30*</b>	-0.54	<b>10.75*</b>	-0.47	.00	-.23

*Note.* Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner

Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

Table 6.14. *Path Coefficients for APIM Assessing Associations between Linear Trends of Partner Transition Processing Communication Across Diaries and Changes in Relational Turbulence Variables from Pre-Test to Post-Test*

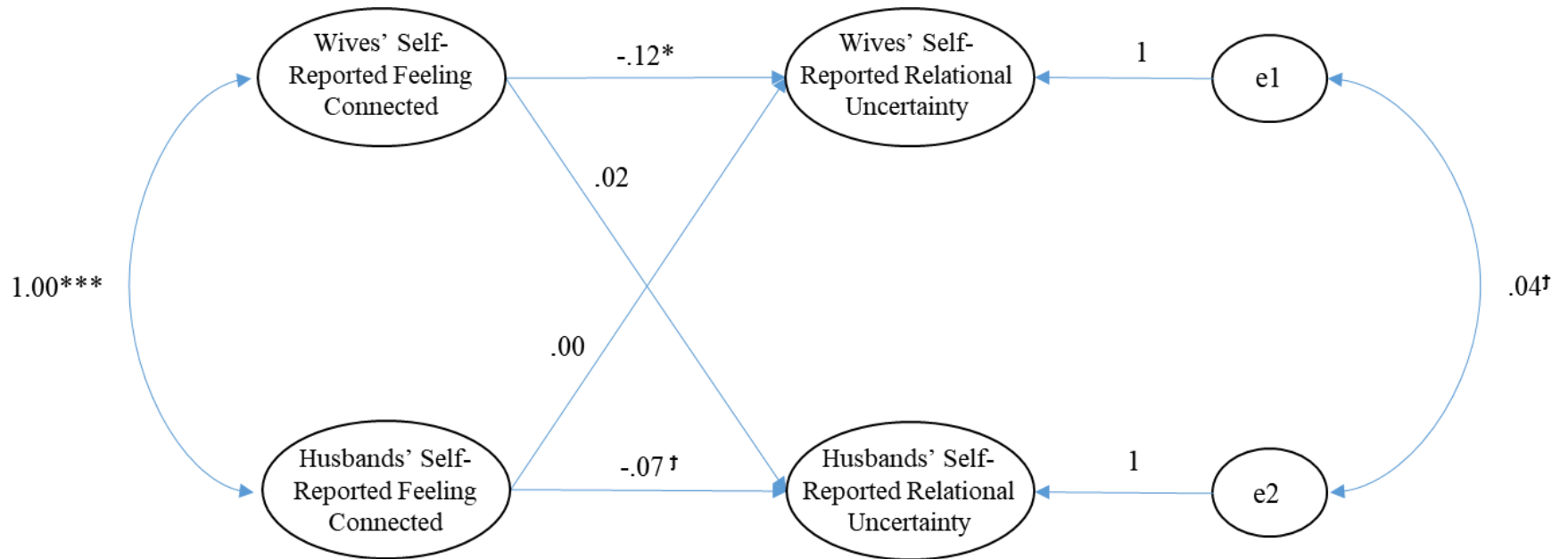
IV	DV	Wife Actor Effects	Husband Actor Effects	Covariance between Husband and Wives' IV	Covariance between Husband and Wives' DV
Increasing Interaction	SU	1.41	<b>-3.82<sup>†</sup></b>	.00	-.15
	PU	<b>2.65<sup>†</sup></b>	-1.85	.00	-.02
	RU	<b>-4.43<sup>†</sup></b>	-0.49	.00	-.09
	IP	<b>-6.30*</b>	-1.78	.00	<b>.58**</b>
	FP	<b>6.45*</b>	2.65	.00	.10
	RT <sup>a</sup>	<b>-8.77<sup>†</sup></b>	1.51	.00	<b>-.27<sup>†</sup></b>
Feeling Connected	SU	3.27	-3.00	.00	-.10
	PU	<b>4.07<sup>†</sup></b>	-0.39	.00	-.02
	RU	-4.44	0.87	.00	-.07
	IP	<b>-10.61**</b>	-0.33	.00	<b>.62**</b>
	FP	<b>10.65**</b>	<b>5.45*</b>	.00	.10
	RT <sup>a</sup>	-6.87	2.75	.00	<b>-.30<sup>†</sup></b>
Feeling Situated	SU	-1.59	0.22	.00	-.16
	PU	<b>2.45<sup>†</sup></b>	0.82	.00	-.03
	RU	-2.28	1.49	.00	-.08
	IP <sup>a</sup>	<b>-10.31**</b>	3.69	.00	<b>.56**</b>
	FP	<b>6.03**</b>	<b>7.28***</b>	.00	.12
	RT <sup>a</sup>	<b>-9.03*</b>	1.28	.00	<b>-.28<sup>†</sup></b>
Increasing Confidence	SU	5.19	<b>-4.46<sup>†</sup></b>	.00	-.05
	PU	<b>4.05*</b>	<b>-4.81*</b>	.00	.00
	RU	<b>-6.23*</b>	0.01	.00	-.09
	IP <sup>a</sup>	<b>-8.98<sup>†</sup></b>	2.14	.00	<b>.56**</b>
	FP	<b>9.32**</b>	<b>3.78<sup>†</sup></b>	.00	.12
	RT <sup>a</sup>	<b>-9.44<sup>†</sup></b>	1.30	.00	<b>-.25<sup>†</sup></b>

*Note.* Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients. SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, IP = Interference from a Partner, FP = Facilitation from a Partner, RT = Relational Turbulence, II = Increasing Interaction, FC = Feeling Connected, FS = Feeling Situated, IC = Increasing Confidence, s = self, p = partner.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$

<sup>a</sup>For these variables, the full APIM was a better fitting model than the actor-only APIM. Thus, the coefficients are reported from the full APIM.

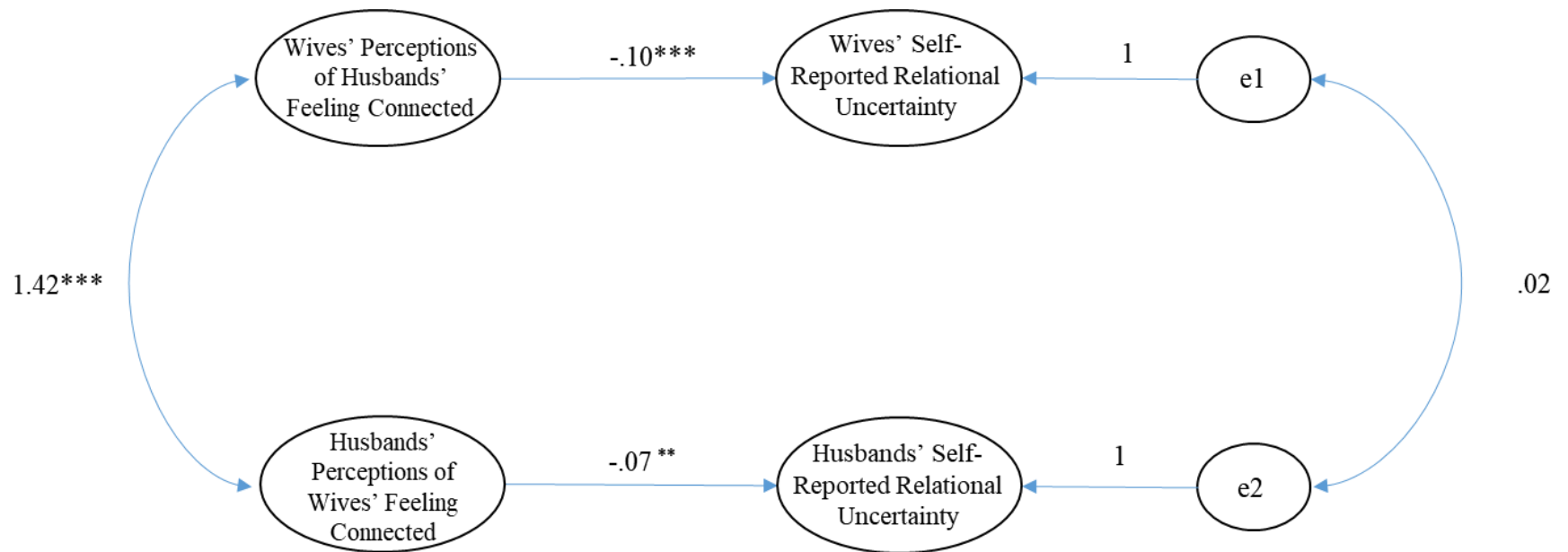
Figure 6.1 *Model of Daily Associations between Relational Uncertainty and Self-Reports of Feeling Connected*



*Note.* Husbands' and wives' relational uncertainty at  $t-1$ , as well as husbands' and wives' relational satisfaction at pre-test are covaried in these analyses.

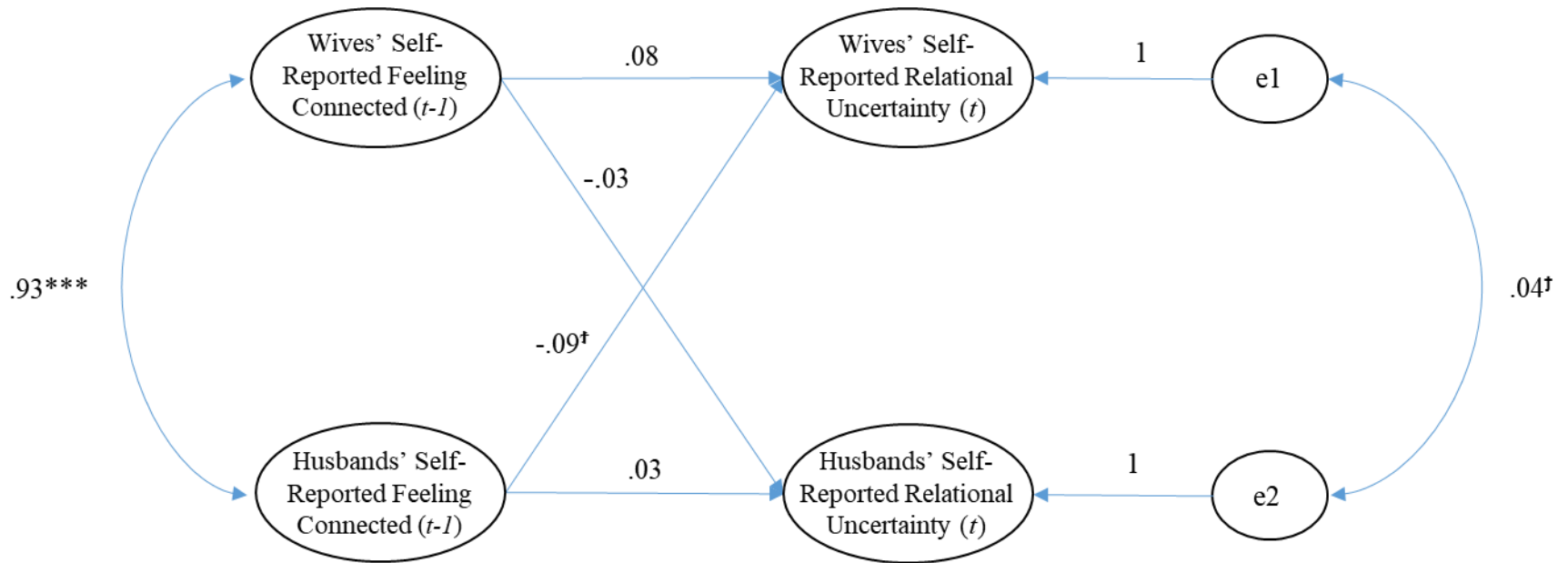


Figure 6.2 Model of Daily Associations between Relational Uncertainty and Perceptions of a Partners' Attempts to Feel Connected



*Note.* Husbands' and wives' relational uncertainty at  $t-1$ , as well as husbands' and wives' relational satisfaction at pre-test are covaried in these analyses.

Figure 6.3 Model of Over-Time Associations between Relational Uncertainty and Self-Reports of Feeling Connected



Note. Husbands' and wives' relational satisfaction at pre-test are covaried in these analyses.

Figure 6.4 Model of Over-Time Associations between Relational Uncertainty and Perceptions of a Partners' Attempts to Feel Connected



Note. Husbands' and wives' relational satisfaction at pre-test are covaried in these analyses.

Figure 6.5 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Self Uncertainty*

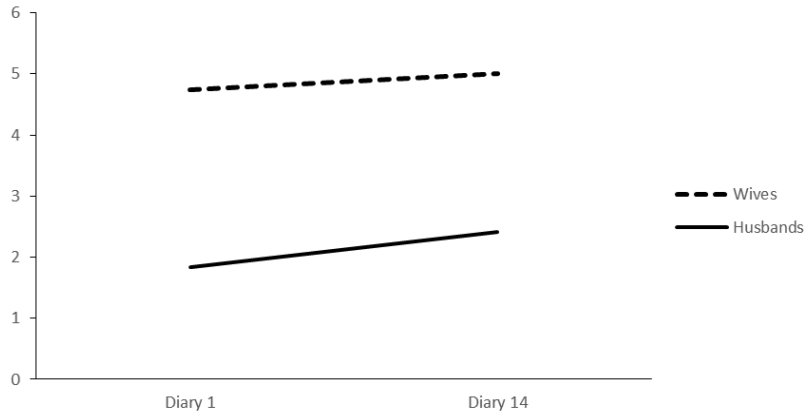


Figure 6.6 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Partner Uncertainty*

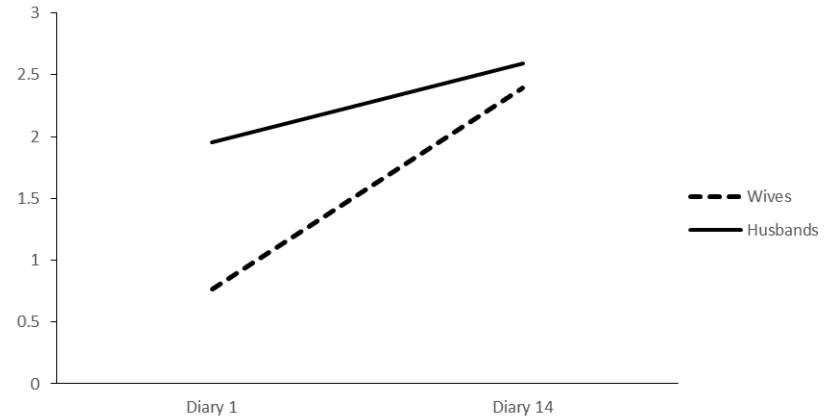


Figure 6.7 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Relationship Uncertainty*

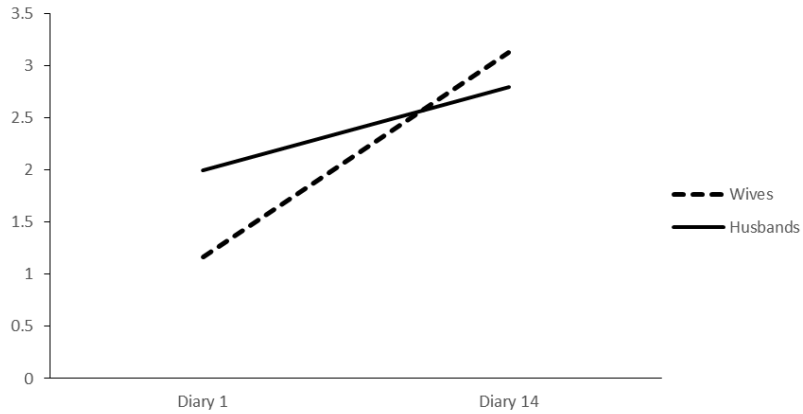


Figure 6.8 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Interference from a Partner*

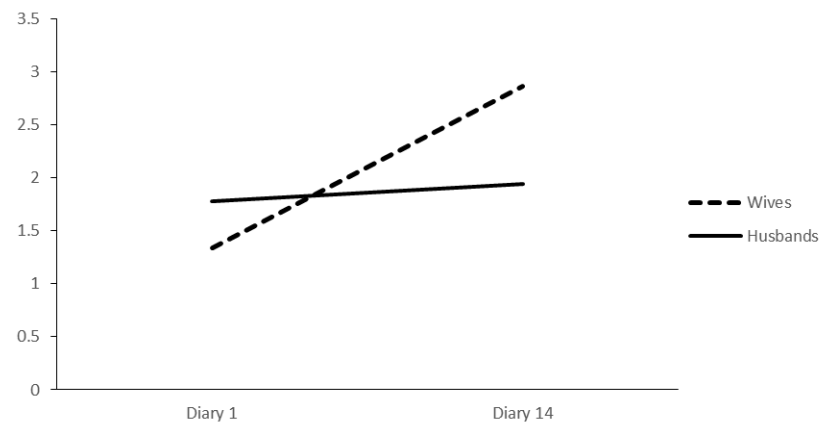


Figure 6.9 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Facilitation from a Partner*

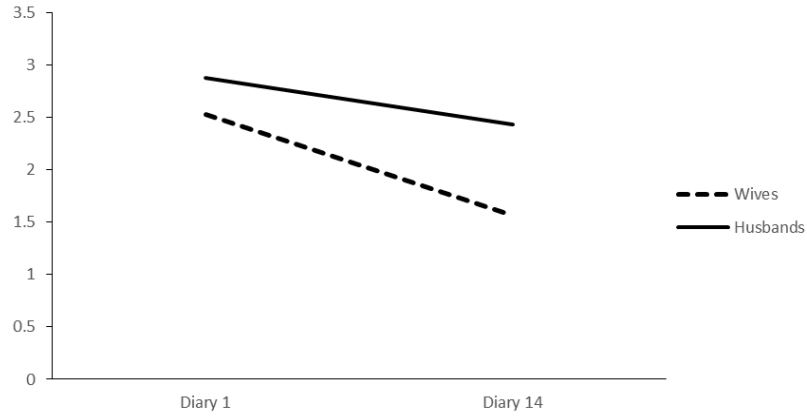


Figure 6.10 *Husbands' and Wives' Standardized Linear Trends for Relational Turbulence*

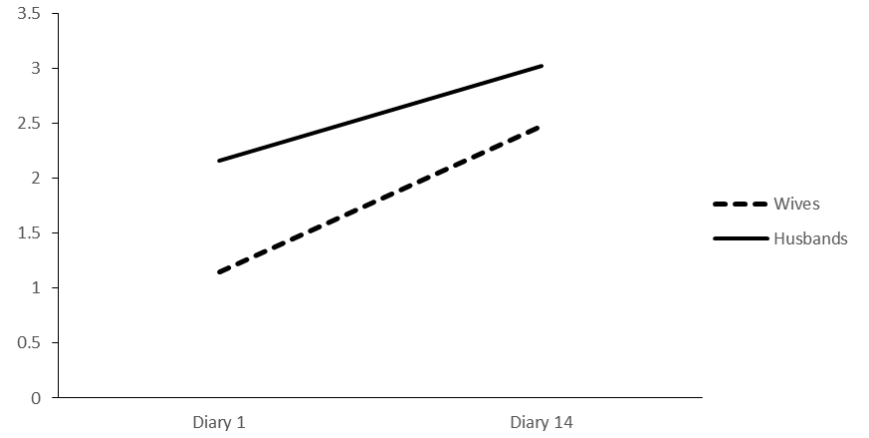


Figure 6.11 *Model of Associations between Linear Trends in Self-Reported Attempts to Increase Interaction across Diaries and Changes in Relational Uncertainty from Pre-Test to Post-Test*

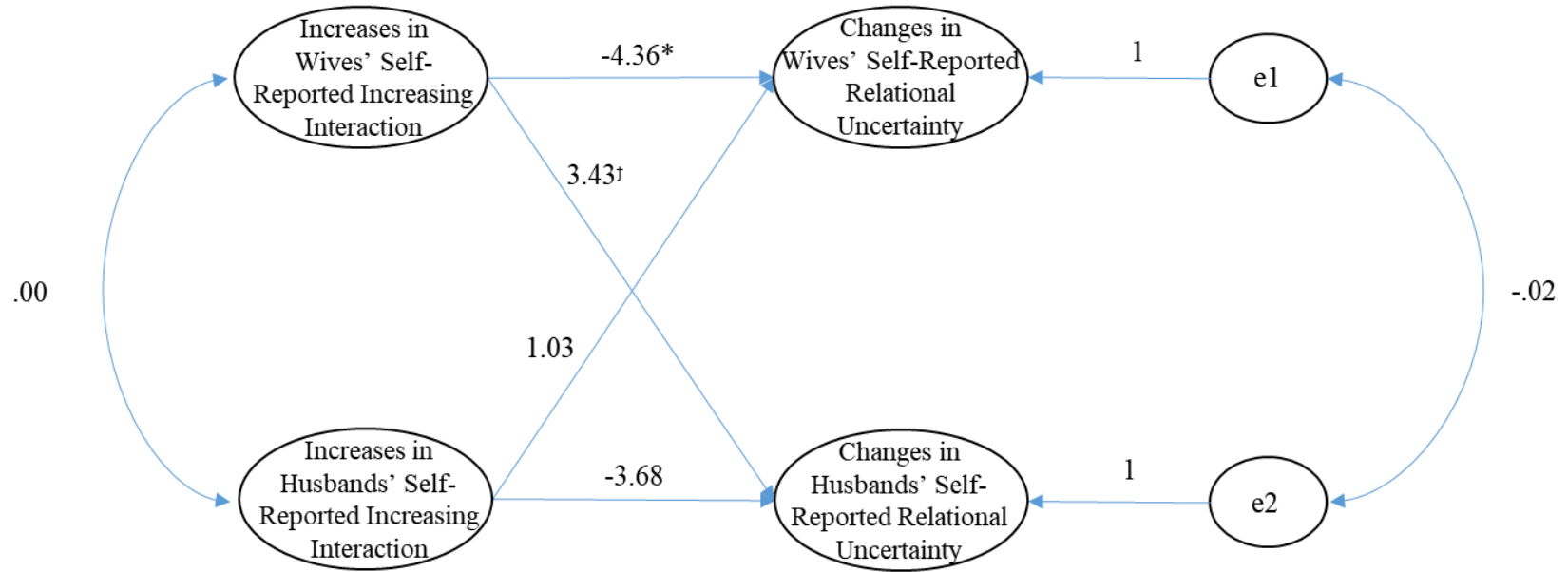
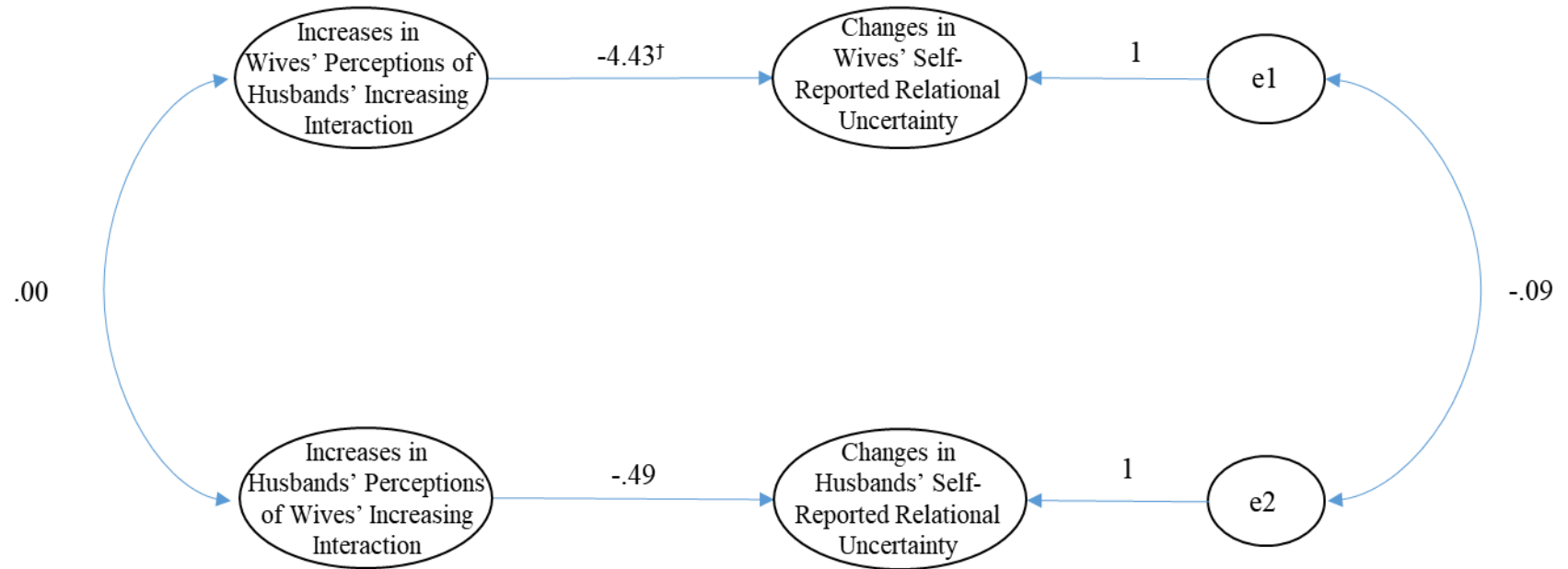


Figure 6.12 *Model of Associations between Linear Trends in Perceptions of a Partners' Attempts to Feel Connected across Diaries and Changes in Self Uncertainty from Pre-Test to Post-Test*



## CHAPTER 7

Within marriages, partners experience a multitude of transitions, such as the birth of a child, job loss, or changes in health status, over the course of their life together. These life transitions, whether they occur within or around a romantic partnership, constitute a transition for the relationship itself (e.g., Hanisch, 1999; Kirchoff et al., 2012). Changes in behaviors, routines, and communication patterns may interfere with partners' expectations and assumptions for the relationship and change the nature of their interdependence (Solomon & Theiss, 2011), which in turn, leads to relational turbulence (Solomon et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have examined the potential for experiences of relational uncertainty, changes in interdependence, and relational turbulence to negatively impact marital communication (e.g., Knobloch & Theiss, 2012; Theiss et al., 2013); however, little research has focused on the means by which married partners can decrease these outcomes. Thus, the general goal of this dissertation was to examine the association between married partners' engagement in relationship-focused communication and experiences of relational turbulence during marital transitions.

As a context for this dissertation, I examined parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The parents of children with ASD face several relationship difficulties when compared to parents of neuro-typical children, including increased stress, decreased relationship satisfaction and higher divorce rates (Brobst, Clopton, & Hendrick, 2009; Hartley et al., 2010). Having a child with ASD creates a number of transitions for parents throughout the lifespan of the child (e.g., the initial diagnosis, starting school, the transition to adulthood). These transitions create potential for parents' relationships to change when short-term stressors have long-term consequences (Solomon et al., 2016). What remains unclear, however, is how parents



of children with ASD might reduce relationship strain and establish new, positive routines during marital transitions associated with raising a child with ASD. Thus, the specific aim of this dissertation was to identify the types of communication behaviors that parents of children with ASD can utilize to improve marital quality during transitions.

To achieve this goal, I engaged two theories. First, relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) is a framework for explaining how heightened relational uncertainty and changes in interdependence caused by transitions in and around the relationship lead to feelings of turmoil for romantic partners. Second, the experiencing life transitions model (Meleis, 2010) was originally developed to explain how individuals successfully navigate difficult health changes, but has recently been applied to married partners' experiences of relationship transitions (Brisini et al., 2017). Applications of the experiencing life transition model to romantic relationships explain that spouses can successfully navigate difficult transitions by increasing interaction with each other, feeling connected through relationship talk, making explicit attempts to feel situated within the new environment, and increasing confidence in the relationship through verbal and non-verbal reassurances and affection. These four categories of communication and cognitions are referred to as transition processing communication.

Based on the assumptions of relational turbulence theory and the experiencing life transitions model, I developed six hypotheses and three research questions exploring the experiences of parents of children with ASD, as well as the relationship between transition processing communication and experiences of turbulence during transitions in their child's life. Specifically, I explored the types of transitions that parents of children with ASD reported as having the greatest impact on their relationship (RQ1), as well as the differences in relational experiences across the different types of transitions (RQ2). I predicted that parents of children

with ASD report greater relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and less facilitation from a partner during a recalled transition when compared to the time of the survey (H1). I also suggested that higher levels of parenting stress would be positively associated with relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and negatively associated with facilitation from a partner (H2). Further, I posited that married partners' reports of transition processing communication would be negatively associated with experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner (H3) and that relational uncertainty and changes in interdependence would mediate the relationship between transition processing communication and relational turbulence (H4). These hypotheses were examined in Study 1.

Study 2 examined the prediction that husbands' and wives' use of transition processing communication are negatively associated with changes in their own and their partner's daily reports of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively predict experiences of facilitation from a partner on the same day (H5a) and over time (H5b and H5c). Similarly, I predicted that married partners' perception of their spouse's engagement in transition processing communication predicts changes in wives' and husbands' experiences of the six relationship qualities on the same day (H6a) and over time (H6b and H6c). Finally, I explored the ways in which married partners experiences of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence, as well as their engagement in transition processing communication, change over the course of a child's transition to school (RQ3).

## Summary of Methods and Findings

To assess the associations between married partners' engagement in transition processing communication and experiences of turbulence, I conducted two studies focusing on parents of children with ASD. In Study 1, I examined the types of transitions throughout the life of a child with ASD that most impact the parents' relationship and evaluated the associations between communication behaviors and marital quality across the reported transitions. In Study 2, I focused on parents of children with ASD whose child was starting school for the first time and explored the relationship between transition processing communication and relationship variables over time. In the following sections, I review the methods and results of those studies.

### Study 1

Study 1 surveyed the landscape of transitions specific to parents of children with ASD, examined how aspects of relational turbulence vary based on the type of transition experienced, and explored the transition processing communication couples use to navigate marital transitions in this context using an online questionnaire. Parents also reported their level of parenting stress associated with raising their child with ASD. Then, participants detailed an important transition throughout the life span of their child with ASD using open-ended questions. Finally, they completed scales assessing qualities of the relationship during the transition and transition processing communication used to navigate the experience.

Participants reported experiencing significantly higher levels of turbulence during the described transition than experienced at the time of the survey (per H1). Parenting stress significantly predicted self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence (H2). Results also demonstrated significant differences in experiences of relational turbulence based on the type of transition described (RQ2). In

particular, the initial diagnosis received the highest ratings for transition magnitude and relational turbulence, and it was considered the most negative transition experience compared to other common transitions. Starting school for the first time was associated with the most positive transition experience ratings. In support of H3 and H4, structural equation modeling indicated that engagement in transition processing communication predicts relational uncertainty and facilitation from a partner, which predicts relational turbulence.

## **Study 2**

Study 2 expands on the results from Study 1 by incorporating a longitudinal, pre- and post-test design with diary surveys. Specifically, the goal of Study 2 was to examine how married partners' transition processing communication affects their own and their spouse's experiences of relational uncertainty, changes in interdependence, and relational turbulence. Fifty-three couples, parents whose child with ASD started school for the first time this year, completed a pre-test, 14 dairies, and a post-test. Participants completed diary entries every three days over a 42-day period of time, beginning on the child's first day of school. Before going to bed, participants responded to measures of variables associated with relational turbulence, as well as their own and their partner's engagement in transition processing communication.

Findings for Study 2 suggest that married partners' engagement in transition processing communication (and perception of their spouse's communication) significantly affect their own and their spouse's daily experiences of relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence. Notably, for daily experiences, spouses' perception of their partner's attempts to increase interaction, feel connected, feel situated, and increase confidence in the relationship maintained stronger and more frequent associations with the six relationship qualities than did their partner's own reports of their transition processing communication. Thus,

H6a and H6b were largely supported, while H5a and H5b received partial support. In response to RQ3a, participants' reports of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner and relational turbulence increased over the 42-days of the study. Facilitation from a partner decreased throughout the study, as did participants' perceptions of their spouse's engagement in transition processing communication. Partners' reports of their own engagement in transition processing communication decreased or remained stable (RQ3b). Finally, increases in husbands' and wives' transition processing communication (H5c), as well as perception of their spouse's increases in these behaviors (H6c), throughout the course of the study was negatively associated with changes in their own reports of relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence, and positively associated with facilitation from a partner. In contrast, increases in one's partner's engagement in transition processing communication had few effects on reports of relationship qualities from pre-test to post-test.

### **Implications**

The two studies described in this dissertation provide insight into the ways in which parents of children with ASD impact their experiences of relational turbulence through communication. The use of dyadic data analysis sheds light on how spouses affect each other's transition experiences. Additionally, the dissertation provides the first longitudinal examination of transition experiences for parents of children with ASD using relational turbulence theory and examined how qualities of relationships change throughout the course of the child's transition to school. Looking to the future, the results of this dissertation lay the groundwork and provide content for potential intervention materials for parents of children with ASD. Results from the project have theoretical implications for communication and nursing scholars and practical implications for families of children with ASD, mental health providers, and future interventions.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This dissertation advances theory across two disciplines by engaging research from the fields of communication studies and nursing. By incorporating the experiencing life transitions model (Meleis, 2010) into the study of communication, the dissertation provides a test of the supposition of relational turbulence theory that married partners have the potential to alleviate or heighten turbulent experiences through communication. In keeping with the theory, the studies identify increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated and increasing confidence as means by which partners affect marital quality during difficult transitions. In particular, wives' relationship experiences are strongly related to their own use of transition processing communication, as well as their perception of their spouse's engagement.

The project also expands the boundary conditions of the experiencing life transitions model by engaging aspects of the framework to study marital transitions. Although the model was designed to monitor successful life transitions for individuals, the dissertation provides evidence that process indicators identified by the model (increasing interaction, feeling connected, feeling situated, and increasing confidence) also point to successful relationship transitions among married partners with ASD. In addition, Study 1 re-conceptualized feeling situated as described by Meleis et al. (2000) to incorporate aspects of cognitive reappraisals.

In its initial conceptualization, feeling situated consisted of any cognition or communication that considered how things were different after an event, when compared to how things were before the event; however, Brisini et al. (2017) found that married partners were not benefitted by simply considering changes. Thus, in this project, we re-considered feeling situated to include re-framing changes in a positive way, often through narratives. After operationalizing the category of transition processing communication in this way, feeling

situated was negatively associated with aspects of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence. Thus, nursing scholars who engage the experiencing life transition model in the future may benefit from focusing specifically on the ways in which individuals positively re-frame changes in their circumstances.

In addition to the unique advances made by incorporating the experiencing life transitions model, the dissertation has a number of implications for relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016). The theory suggests that transitions coincide with increased experiences of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence. The dissertation tests and supports this proposition in Study 1 and provides evidence in Study 2 that these qualities of relationships may increase over the course of the transition. Furthermore, while most previous research focuses on transitions internal to the couple (e.g., job loss, changes in health status, infertility), this dissertation identifies transitions throughout the lives of married partners' children as potential sources of relationship turmoil. In doing so, the studies provide support for a family systems approach to the consideration of relationship experiences for married partners. Thus, scholars examining transitions from a relational turbulence perspective may benefit from a consideration of how other members of the family unit impact their marriage experience.

The studies in this dissertation point to parents of children with ASD as a unique population that is potentially vulnerable to the negative impacts of relational turbulence due to increased parental stress and the magnitude of transition experiences associated with their child. In particular, parents of children with ASD may experience chronic transitions due to the nature of their child's disability. For example, in Study 1, rather than reporting a single, important transition involving their child, a number of participants indicated that life with a child with ASD is constantly in transition. For example, one parent said that "any change in our schedule"

constitutes a transition. Several parents shared the sentiments expressed by one participant that “we have to take every day one step at a time” and that “Autism is always stressful.” Thus, transition experiences for parents of children with ASD may differ from those of couples in other contexts due to the on-going nature of their parenting stress.

Interpersonal communication textbooks often caution that communication is not a panacea to counter people’s tendencies to assume that communication is always beneficial to relationships (e.g., Wood, 2015). This dissertation provides evidence to suggest that even well-intentioned, relationship-focused communication can have negative consequences for relationships. Although the outcomes of participating in transition processing communication were generally positive, some negative consequences were revealed, particularly when considering long-term effects (i.e. linear trends and pre- to post-test changes). Indeed, analyses of participants’ experiences on any given day or from one diary to the next point to transition processing communication as means of improving evaluations of the relationship. Trends over the 42-day study also suggest that pro-longed engagement in relationship-focused communication may improve more general evaluations of relationship quality; however, associations between evaluations of a partner’s communication and partner uncertainty suggest that increases in one’s perception of a partner’s engagement in transition processing communication may cause romantic partners to question aspects of their marriage when considered more broadly. Researchers should take these findings into consideration when conceptualizing relational turbulence and relational maintenance for both specific contexts and more global considerations of the marriage. Further longitudinal analyses of relational turbulence and transition processing variables are necessary to assess the differences between daily and global experiences of these phenomena.



Finally, use of dyadic data analysis in Study 2 revealed unique effects for husbands and wives that may not be apparent in individual data. First, the study suggests that husbands and wives may experience relational uncertainty, interference and facilitation from a partner, and relational turbulence in unique ways. In particular, Study 2 indicated that wives' seem to be more affected by daily communicative attempts to improve marital quality during transitions. Second, husbands' perceptions of their wife's use of transition processing communication throughout the transition generally remained stable over time, even though their experiences of turmoil showed small increases. In contrast, wives' perceptions of their husband's transition processing communication decreased over the transition to school. Thus, the results of this project challenge scholars studying relational turbulence theory to take dyadic processes more seriously.

In sum, this dissertation contributes to the fields of communication studies and nursing by drawing on and contributing to relational turbulence theory and the experiencing life transitions model. The studies demonstrate that transitions throughout the life of a child influence the marital quality of the parents and identify raising a child with ASD as a unique relationship context for current and future research. In addition, the studies provide evidence that transition processing communication is associated with improvement in relationship qualities during major life transitions, but relationship-focused communication is also associated with increased partner uncertainty and interference when aspects of the marriage are made salient through increased relationship talk. Finally, this project suggests that dyadic data may be necessary to unpack the differences between husbands' and wives' relationship experiences.

## **Practical Implications**

Engaging research from the fields of communication studies and nursing also has practical implications for scholars, counselors, and married partners. This study sits at the intersection of theoretical and applied communication scholarship by engaging theory from two disciplines to explore communication with practical outcomes for parents. Through theory-driven inquiry, the framework of relational turbulence identifies marital transitions as recognizable and finite time frames in which to intervene for couples at-risk for future dissatisfaction. Relational turbulence theory also points to two concrete relationship experiences on which to focus to improve marriages during transitions—relational uncertainty and changes in interdependence. The inclusion of the experiencing life transitions model from the field of nursing expands on communication research by incorporating practical and concrete methods of intervening in relationships during difficult life transition previously identified in qualitative research.

The research described in this dissertation also has several implications for parents of children with ASD, in particular. First, the studies point to transitions in the life of one's children as potential areas of marital distress and, therefore, a potential target of marital intervention. Transitions in the life of a child with ASD were identified as turning points that may strengthen or decrease relational quality. In particular, the studies identify the initial ASD diagnosis and the child's transition to school for the first time as important milestones for these parents. Thus, in addition to a focus on the child's successful transition, parents' of children with ASD should also focus on changes in their relationship during these life experiences.

Previous research on the marriages of parents of children with ASD has suggested that these families engage in extensive marital therapies to help overcome the negative impact of

increased stress and parental burden on their relationship (e.g., Ramisch, 2012). In contrast, this dissertation provides concrete communication in which married partners' can engage to decrease relationship turmoil during transitions throughout their child's life. By identifying four forms of transition processing communication that have the potential to decrease negative relationship experiences, the studies shed light on explicit ways in which parents can improve their relationship without having to engage in extensive marital counseling. The emphasis on specific communication behaviors is particularly relevant to this population because they experience increased time and financial constraints compared to parents of neuro-typical children. This study indicates that, at least in the short-term, use of transition processing communication in interventions may alleviate much of the time and cost of participating in traditional therapies, while providing partners with simple, concrete ways to improve their relationship by decreasing relational uncertainty and improving interdependence.

Despite the increases in relational quality associated with engagement in transition processing communication in day to day assessments, more research is required to fully understand the long-term associations between relationship-focused communication and relational turbulence. Without instruction, increases in perceptions of a partner's engagement in transition processing communication may cause them to question the status of their relationship, as is evident in Study 2; however, interventions that target parents of children with ASD during transitions may see positive outcomes when partners receive explicit instruction to engage in these behaviors at the onset of the transition. In addition, results from Study 1 and Study 2 both suggest that individual's perceptions of their own communication and their perceptions of their partner's communication have a greater influence on their experiences of relational turbulence than their partner's actual reports of their communication. With this in mind, counselors and

interventionists may best serve parents of children with ASD that are experiencing a transition by helping them to recognize and pay attention to the communicative efforts that they and their spouse put forth during difficult changes. Thus, counselors should consider providing explicit instruction to engage in transition processing communication and to attend to the individual's own and their spouse's attempts to engage in these behaviors.

Interventionists considering ways to help parents of children with ASD navigate transitions throughout their child's life should also keep in mind that these couples may be continuously experiencing aspects of turbulence, even before a difficult transition, due to chronic stress. In both studies, parents reported experiencing some level of relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence during periods of time that were not directly associated with a transition (i.e., at the time of the survey in Study 1 and at pre-test in Study 2). These results are mirrored in several parents' qualitative response to a question asking them how the transition to school impacted their marriage. For example, one participant indicated that the school transition simply added to other relationship stressors: "It's more a matter of adding to all of the other stresses in our lives and it compounds on top of each other, which as a whole impacts our relationship." Thus, a successful intervention may be one in which married partners' levels of marital qualities remain stable or avoid an upward trend in relational uncertainty, interference from a partner, and relational turbulence.

Despite the on-going stressors of raising a child with ASD, transitions throughout their lifespan may also serve the function of strengthening bonds and reinvigorating relationships for their parents (Mailick Seltzer et al., 2001). In particular, several parents reported positive outcomes for their relationship as the result of their child's transitions to school for the first time. These feelings are reflected in the qualitative responses from Study 2. For example, several

participants indicated that going through the transition allowed them to see their spouse in a new light (e.g., “My wife was responsible for finding and pushing for the placement where our boys are thriving, so it has really inspired me and made me love her even more”; “[The transition to school] actually made me see him as more responsible, as he gets my son to and from school every day.”). Others reported positive outcomes as a result of increased time throughout the day (e.g., “School has made it a bit easier to get things done”; “My husband has started to take my son to school, which gives me more time in the morning and makes me less anxious, which helps our relationship.”). Finally, some parents reported that navigating the transition successfully increased their relational closeness (e.g., “Brought us closer, we are both so happy with his transition and progress.”). Thus, counselors working with families of children with ASD may benefit from considering the positive impacts of navigating important life transitions.

Finally, qualitative post-test responses suggest that many of the participants in the study felt better about their relationship and more aware of their marital communication after participating in the study. For example, several participants indicated that completing the surveys gave them the opportunity to reflect more on their marriage (e.g., “I think we've been called upon to reflect more individually about our marriage, and that's good”; “Good chance to reflect on how I can help make our relationship better”). Several participants also indicated that completing the surveys raised awareness of their own communication with their spouse and how they might improve. For example, one participant commented, “participation in this study brought attention to patterns that may help to keep us stable.” Similarly, another parent said, “[Participating in the study] helped me to think about my day to day relationship with my spouse. The survey has asked me to think about my relationship in a way that I previously just ignored.” Other participants suggested that completing the diary surveys helped them to

consider their spouse's perspective. For example, one participant commented, "[Participating in the study] did make me aware that maybe I am not as supportive as I thought, and I need to work on that. I have never reassured him that I am not going anywhere, when that is how I feel." A second participant indicated that the study impacted their marriage by "making me realize how I can be a positive influence in my marriage from my partner's point of view." Finally, some participants indicated that participating in the survey helped them to find the language necessary to communicate with their partner (e.g., "Answering the survey questions has made me more aware of what is going on in my marriage. It has put feelings into words."). Thus, although associations between relationship-focused communication and experiences of relational turbulence were not always significant or associated in ways predicted by this dissertation, many participants seemed to have benefited from the opportunity to reflect on their marriage and their communication with their spouse.

In sum, parents of children with ASD, marital counselors, and intervention researchers should consider both the positive and negative impacts of transitions during the life of a child with ASD on the parents' relationship quality. Parents may also benefit from engaging in transition processing communication to attenuate aspects of relational turbulence during these transition, especially when explicitly directed to do so. In addition to engagement in relationship-focused communication, spouses may also benefit from attending to their own and their partner's current attempts to engage in relational maintenance.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The contributions of this dissertation to the larger body of research are qualified by the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the projects. Both studies examined a relatively unexplored area of research by focusing on transitions experienced by parents of children with

ASD as a context for relationship change. Study 1 used both qualitative and quantitative data to examine a variety of transitions throughout the lives of children with ASD. In particular, having married partners describe their own experiences allowed me to paint a more complete picture of how raising a child with ASD can affect romantic relationships. Study 2 used a dyadic, longitudinal design with 14-diaries to examine change in parents' experiences of their child's transition to school for the first time. By incorporating both spouses and longitudinal data collection, the study produced a more holistic view of parents' relational communication and marital quality throughout the transition. Additionally, participants completed daily diaries via text message surveys sent each night before bed that were then completed in the individual's home at the completion of his or her day. In doing so, the study reduced common problems with retrospective bias and ecological validity.

The strengths of these studies are contextualized by their limitations. In particular, both studies rely on self-report data. Although self-report scales may be suitable for evaluating individual perceptions of relationships, they may be less effective in assessing individual behavior. To avoid this potential pitfall, items assessing transition processing communication focused on individual intentions, rather than actual behaviors. Nonetheless, this remains an important qualifier when considering the results of these studies. Future research should utilize interaction and observational designs to examine how actual communication behavior impacts relationship experiences during transitions.

A second potential limitation to these studies lies in the sampling procedures. Participants for Study 1 were recruited using a Qualtrics medical panel, which allows access to a diverse, nation-wide sample of parents of children with ASD (as diagnosed by a medical professional); however, this is not a random sample. In Study 2, participants were primarily

recruited using the Interactive Autism Network, in which participants voluntarily sign up to be contacted about research relevant to raising a child with ASD. Thus, both studies are qualified by a potential participation bias.

Finally, several potential covariates should be considered in future research. For example, Study 2 did not collect data on individual child behaviors or parenting stress in the diary surveys. In Study 1, parenting stress significantly predicted spouses' experiences of relational turmoil during recalled transitions throughout the child's life. Daily fluctuations in parenting stress may also impact short-term relational qualities, as well as the use of transition processing communication. For a more complete picture, future longitudinal research should take daily child behavior and parenting stress into consideration.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation examined the experiences of relational turbulence within the marriages of parents of children with ASD during major transitions throughout the life of their child. To do so, I explored how specific communication behaviors and cognitions effect marital quality throughout a variety of recalled transitions in Study 1 and during the child's transition to school for the first time in Study 2. Results provide a foundation for understanding the role of relational communication during changes in and around marriages and contribute to the understanding of relational turbulence theory as it applies to married partners.



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21. My spouse interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
22. My spouse disrupts my daily routine.
23. My spouse interferes with how much time I devote to my work.

#### **Facilitation from a Partner Scale**

24. My spouse helps me in my efforts to make plans.
25. My spouse helps me to do the things I need to do each day.
26. My spouse helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
27. My spouse helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.
28. My spouse helps me to use my time well.

#### **C. Relational Turbulence Scale** McLaren et al., 2011

*Indicate where your relationship with your partner falls along these dimensions:*

29. Chaotic	2	3	4	5	Stable
30. Calm	2	3	4	5	Turbulent
31. Tumultuous	2	3	4	5	Running Smoothly
32. Peaceful	2	3	4	5	Stressful

#### **D. Relational Satisfaction Scale** Norton, 1973

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

33. We have a good marriage.
34. My relationship with my partner is very stable.
35. Our marriage is strong.
36. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.
37. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

#### **E. Relational Transitions Prompt**

Open-ended questions:

38. How has having a child with autism affected your day to day activities?
39. How has having a child with autism affected your relationship with your spouse? (positively and negatively, large and small)

*A relational transition is a period of change in your relationship that occurs as a result of a life event marked by shifts in how people think about their relationship and behave toward each other. These transitions can be positive or negative, large or small. Raising a child with autism, one might feel like the family is constantly in transition. We would like to know what transitional event in the life of your child with autism had the greatest impact on your marriage or created a relational transition (for example, the initial ASD diagnosis, your child's transition to puberty or adulthood, starting or finishing school, etc.)*

40. In your marriage, have you experienced a transition related to your child with autism? Yes, No

41. In the space below, please briefly identify and describe the transition you have experienced related to your child with autism that you consider to be the most important to your relationship.
- 

42. Did the event occur within the last year?

If YES, how many months ago did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, how many years ago did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_

43. During the transition, what types of activities or behaviors did/do you engage in to maintain a positive relationship with your spouse? (For example, did you make a conscious effort to communicate with, spend time with, or engage in certain behaviors for your spouse?)
44. During the transition, what types of activities or behaviors did/does your spouse engage in to maintain a positive relationship with you? (For example, did your spouse make a conscious effort to communicate with, spend time with, engage in certain behaviors for you?)

#### F. Transition Magnitude Scale

MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2004

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		

45. This was a major event in our lives.
46. This event was a significant one.
47. This event had an impact on our lives.
48. This event was an important one.

#### G. Transition Valence Scale

*Overall, the transition experience was:*

49. Negative	2	3	4	5	Positive
50. Pleasant	2	3	4	5	Unpleasant

#### H. Transition Outcome Valence Scale

*Overall, the outcome of this transition was:*

51. Negative	2	3	4	5	Positive
52. Constructive	2	3	4	5	Destructive

#### I. Transition Relational Uncertainty scales

*Please consider your relationship with your spouse and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		

#### Self Uncertainty:

*During the transition...*

- 53. Sometimes I wondered whether or not I wanted my marriage to work out in the long run.
- 54. Sometimes I was unsure whether or not I wanted my marriage to last.
- 55. Sometimes I wondered how much I liked my spouse as a person.
- 56. Sometimes I was unsure how important my marriage was to me.
- 57. Sometimes I questioned if I was sexually or romantically attracted to my spouse.
- 58. Sometimes I wondered how strongly I was committed to my spouse.

### **Partner Uncertainty Scale**

- 59. Sometimes I wondered whether or not my spouse wanted our marriage to work out in the long run.
- 60. Sometimes I was unsure whether or not my spouse wanted our marriage to last.
- 61. Sometimes I wondered how much my spouse liked me as a person.
- 62. Sometimes I was unsure how important our marriage was to my spouse.
- 63. Sometimes I questioned if my spouse was sexually or romantically attracted to me.
- 64. Sometimes I wondered how strongly my spouse was committed to me.

### **Relationship Uncertainty Scale**

- 65. Sometimes I was unsure whether or not me and my spouse felt the same way about each other.
- 66. Sometimes I wondered whether or not my spouse and I would stay together.
- 67. Sometimes I questioned whether or not my marriage was a romantic one.
- 68. Sometimes I was unsure of the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in our relationship.
- 69. Sometimes I wondered whether or not my spouse loved me as much as I love him / her.
- 70. Sometimes I questioned how I should or should not behave around my spouse.

### **J. Transition Influence Scales**

Solomon & Knobloch, 2001

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

- |                   |   |   |   |   |                |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6              |
| Strongly Disagree |   |   |   |   | Strongly Agree |

*During the transition...*

### **Interference from a Partner Scale**

- 71. My spouse interfered with the plans I made.
- 72. My spouse made it harder for me to schedule my activities.
- 73. My spouse interfered with whether I achieved the everyday goals I set for myself.
- 74. My spouse disrupted my daily routine.
- 75. My spouse interfered with how much time I devoted to my work.

### **Facilitation from a Partner Scale**

- 76. My spouse helped me in my efforts to make plans.
- 77. My spouse helped me to do the things I needed to do each day.
- 78. My spouse helped me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.

79. My spouse helped me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.

80. My spouse helped me to use my time well.

**K. Relational Turbulence Scales** McLaren, Solomon, & Priem, 2012

*Indicate where your relationship with your partner fell along these dimensions during the transition:*

*During the transition, my relationship felt...*

81. Chaotic	2	3	4	5	Stable
82. Calm	2	3	4	5	Turbulent
83. Tumultuous	2	3	4	5	Running Smoothly
84. Peaceful	2	3	4	5	Stressful

**L. Process Indicators Scale**

*Please indicate how often you engaged in the following behaviors during the transition.*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not very often			Very Often		

**Self Transition Processing Activity**

*During the transition, I...*

85. I tried to spend extra time with my spouse
86. I tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
87. I made time in my schedule to be alone with my spouse.
88. I made it a point to do fun things with my spouse.
89. I tried to share my feelings with my spouse.
90. I tried to be open with my spouse about how I felt.
91. I made it a point to focus on our bond as a couple.
92. I put forth effort to maintain my emotional bond with my spouse.
93. I tried to communicate about how things were different now in our relationship.
94. I tried to make sense of how the event affected my relationship with my spouse.
95. I tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for my relationship.
96. I tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
97. I reminded my spouse that our relationship was strong.
98. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong through affection.
99. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong by offering them support.
100. I reassured my spouse that I wasn't going anywhere.

**Partner Transition Processing Activity**

101. my spouse tried to spend extra time with me.





## Appendix B

**Study 2 Recruitment Email**

IAN Subject Recruitment ID#: SR1268

Study Title: Parental Relationships and School Transition (SR1268)

Email Subject Line: Back-to-School Online Study for Parents of Young Children with ASD

Link: <Link>

Dear @@RecipientFirstName @@RecipientLastName,

When you joined the Interactive Autism Network (IAN) Research Project, we promised to inform you about research projects that might be of interest to you. Here is an invitation from a team of researchers at The Penn State University, who are conducting an online study on the **experiences of parents of young children with ASD at the start of the school year**. Such transitions not only lead to stress for the child, they also lead to stress in the relationship between parents. This survey may help autism researchers learn about how to improve communication between parents of children with ASD in ways that strengthen their relationship.

**Who qualifies?**

- Married parents of a child with ASD aged 7 years or younger who is entering daycare, pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade this academic year. ***You may participate if you anticipate that both you and your spouse will be able to do so. It is important that both parents participate so that we can understand how spouse's thoughts and behaviors impact each other.***
- If only one parent is able to complete the study and the other is unable to do so, you can still participate, but please let us know in the pre-screen survey.
- Parents should reside in the United States.
- Parents should have daily access to a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

**What is involved?**

Eligible parents are asked to complete a series of surveys about their child's school transition, communication between the parents, and the parents' feelings about their relationship during the transition. Surveys are as follows:

- Demographics and Baseline Information at the start of the study (about 20-30 minutes)
- 14 Mini Surveys over the course of 40 days during the study (each about 3 minutes long)
- Concluding Survey at the end of the study (about 20 minutes).

The study would coincide with your child's first month of school this upcoming academic year.

The surveys are confidential and anonymized, and can be completed on a smartphone, tablet, or computer at the parents' convenience.

**Thank you!** Parents who complete all of the surveys will earn \$100 (\$50 per person) for their participation.

**Questions?** Please contact the Principal Investigator, Kellie Brisini, at [kmb597@psu.edu](mailto:kmb597@psu.edu)

**This is an IAN 1-Click study! Please click on the appropriate link below to indicate whether or not you are interested in the study.** Once you have clicked on either the "Interested" or "Not Interested/Don't Qualify" link below, IAN will no longer send you notifications about this study.

**Interested?** Please click on this link if you would like to participate in this study. The link will take you to a short screening survey to see if you qualify: [https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cC8BYKGoGU8DpCR](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cC8BYKGoGU8DpCR)

**Not Interested/Don't Qualify?** @@NotInterestedLink

IAN Subject Recruitment ID: SR1268. You do not have to participate in this study and your non-participation will neither affect the care you receive from any health provider nor your standing as a participant in IAN Research. IAN Research is serving as a resource linking the autism community and researchers. This study is not endorsed by or performed under the auspices of the IAN Research project at Kennedy Krieger Institute. Please email [ResearchTeam@IANproject.org](mailto:ResearchTeam@IANproject.org) if you are no longer interested in receiving information about subject recruitment opportunities from IAN, or if you have any questions or concerns that you would like to share.

## Appendix C

**Pre-Screen Questionnaire**

(administered online via Qualtrics)

1. Are you currently 18 years of age or older? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_no
2. Are you currently married? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
3. Do you have a child who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder by a medical professional? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
4. Do you have daily access to a computer, tablet or smart phone? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_no
5. This study asks you to complete one 30 minutes survey at the beginning of the study, one 30 minute survey at the end of the study period, and one brief survey (approximately 3-5 minutes) before you go to bed on 14 separate days (every 3 days). Are you willing and able to participate in these activities? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
6. Do you have a spouse who is also willing and able to participate in the study? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_no
7. What is the date of your child's first day of school? \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_ \$10,000-20,000    \_\_\_30,001-40,000        \_\_\_\$50,001-75,000        \_\_\_over \$100,000

11. How old is your child?

## B. Summer Activity

*We would like to know about your of experience enrolling your child with autism in school for the first time. Please consider the process of enrolling the child, meeting with future teachers and para-educators, seeking accommodations, making arrangements, and any other interactions you had with your child's school when answering the following questions.*

The process of enrolling my child with autism in school so far has been:

1. Not at all stressful	2	3	4	5	Very Stressful
2. Not at all frustrating	2	3	4	5	Very Frustrating
3. Easy	2	3	4	5	Difficult
4. Simple	2	3	4	5	Complicated
5. Brief	2	3	4	5	Time Consuming
6. Quick	2	3	4	5	Slow Going

*Please indicate the extent to which you felt each of the following emotions throughout the process of enrolling your child with autism in school:*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A lot
7. Angry						
8. Mad						
9. Annoyed						
10. Sad						
11. Depressed						
12. Sorrowful						
13. Afraid						
14. Scared						
15. Fearful						
16. Confused						
17. Uncertain						
18. Perplexed						
19. Content						
20. Satisfied						
21. Pleased						
22. Hopeful						
23. Optimistic						
24. Encouraged						

**C. Relational Uncertainty Measure**

Solomon &amp; Knobloch, 2001

*Please consider your relationship with your spouse and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	

**Self Uncertainty:**

- 25. Sometimes I wonder whether or not I want my marriage to work out in the long run.
- 26. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not I want my marriage to last.
- 27. Sometimes I wonder how much I like my spouse as a person.
- 28. Sometimes I am unsure how important my marriage is to me.
- 29. Sometimes I question if I am sexually or romantically attracted to my spouse.
- 30. Sometimes I wonder how strongly I am committed to my spouse.

**Partner Uncertainty Scale**

- 31. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse wants our marriage to work out in the long run.
- 32. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not my spouse wants our marriage to last.
- 33. Sometimes I wonder how much my spouse likes me as a person.
- 34. Sometimes I am unsure how important our marriage is to my spouse.
- 35. Sometimes I question if my spouse is sexually or romantically attracted to me.
- 36. Sometimes I wonder how strongly my spouse is committed to me.

**Relationship Uncertainty Scale**

- 37. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not me and my spouse feel the same way about each other.
- 38. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse and I will stay together.
- 39. Sometimes I question whether or not my marriage is a romantic one.
- 40. Sometimes I am unsure of the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in our relationship.
- 41. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse loves me as much as I love him / her.
- 42. Sometimes I question how I should or should not behave around my spouse.

**D. Influence Scales**

Solomon &amp; Knobloch, 2001

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	

**Interference from a Partner Scale**

- 43. My spouse interferes with the plans I make.
- 44. My spouse makes it harder for me to schedule my activities.
- 45. My spouse interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
- 46. My spouse disrupts my daily routine.
- 47. My spouse interferes with how much time I devote to my work.

**Facilitation from a Partner Scale**

48. My spouse helps me in my efforts to make plans.  
 49. My spouse helps me to do the things I need to do each day.  
 50. My spouse helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.  
 51. My spouse helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.  
 52. My spouse helps me to use my time well.

**E. Relational Turbulence Scale** McLaren et al., 2011

*Indicate where your relationship with your partner falls along these dimensions:*

53. Chaotic	2	3	4	5	Stable
54. Calm	2	3	4	5	Turbulent
55. Tumultuous	2	3	4	5	Running Smoothly
56. Peaceful	2	3	4	5	Stressful

**F. Relational Satisfaction Scale** Norton, 1973

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

57. We have a good marriage.  
 58. My relationship with my partner is very stable.  
 59. Our marriage is strong.  
 60. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.  
 61. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

**G. Transition Magnitude Scale** MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2004

*Considering your child's transition to school, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

62. This was a major event in our lives.  
 63. This event was a significant one.  
 64. This event had an impact on our lives.  
 65. This event was an important one.

**H. Transition Valence Scale**

*Overall, the transition to school experience was:*

66. Negative	2	3	4	5	Positive
67. Pleasant	2	3	4	5	Unpleasant

**I. Transition Outcome Valence Scale**



*Overall, the outcome of this transition was:*

68. Negative	2	3	4	5	Positive
69. Constructive	2	3	4	5	Destructive

## **J. Process Indicators Scale**

*Please indicate how often you engaged in the following behaviors during your child's transition to school.*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not very often			Very Often		

### **Self Transition Processing Activity**

*During the transition, ...*

70. I tried to spend extra time with my spouse
71. I tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
72. I made time in my schedule to be alone with my spouse.
73. I made it a point to do fun things with my spouse.
74. I tried to share my feelings with my spouse.
75. I tried to be open with my spouse about how I felt.
76. I made it a point to focus on our bond as a couple.
77. I put forth effort to maintain my emotional bond with my spouse.
78. I tried to communicate about how things were different now in our relationship.
79. I tried to make sense of how the event affected my relationship with my spouse.
80. I tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for my relationship.
81. I tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
82. I reminded my spouse that our relationship was strong.
83. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong through affection.
84. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong by offering them support.
85. I reassured my spouse that I wasn't going anywhere.

### **Partner Transition Processing Activity**

86. my spouse tried to spend extra time with me.
87. my spouse tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
88. my spouse made time in his/her schedule to be alone with me.
89. my spouse made it a point to do fun things with me.
90. my spouse tried to share his/her feelings with me.
91. my spouse tried to be open with me about how he/she felt.
92. my spouse made it a point to focus on our bond as a couple.
93. my spouse put forth effort to maintain his/her emotional bond with me.

94. my spouse tried to communicate about how things were different now in our relationship.
95. my spouse tried to make sense of how the event affected his/her relationship with me.
96. my spouse tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for our relationship.
97. my spouse tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
98. my spouse reminded me that our relationship was strong
99. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong through affection.
100. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong by offering me support.
101. my spouse reassured me that he/she wasn't going anywhere.

Now, we would like to know a bit more about your family. Please describe an especially positive experience you have had recently with your family.

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What advice would you give to other parents of children with autism enrolling their child in school for the first time?

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9. Over the past few days, I've questioned how I should or should not behave around my spouse.

**C. Influence Scales** Solomon & Knobloch, 2001

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

**Interference from a Partner Scale**

10. Over the past few days, my spouse has interfered with the plans I made.  
11. Over the past few days, my spouse has disrupted my daily routine.

**Facilitation from a Partner Scale**

12. Over the past few days, my spouse helped me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.  
13. Over the past few days, my spouse helped me to use my time well.

**D. Relational Turbulence Scale** McLaren et al., 2011

*Indicate where your relationship with your partner falls along these dimensions, over the past few days:*

14. Chaotic	2	3	4	5	Stable
15. Calm	2	3	4	5	Turbulent
16. Tumultuous	2	3	4	5	Running Smoothly
17. Peaceful	2	3	4	5	Stressful

**E. Process Indicators Scale**

*Please indicate how often you engaged in the following behaviors, over the past few days.*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not very often					Very Often

**Self Transition Processing Activity**

*Over the past three days, I...*

18. I tried to spend extra time with my spouse  
19. I tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.  
20. I made time in my schedule to be alone with my spouse.  
21. I tried to share my feelings with my spouse.  
22. I tried to be open with my spouse about how I felt.  
23. I put forth effort to maintain my emotional bond with my spouse.  
24. I tried to make sense of how my child affects my relationship with my spouse.  
25. I tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for my relationship.  
26. I tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.

27. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong through affection.
28. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong by offering them support.
29. I reassured my spouse that I wasn't going anywhere.

#### **Partner Transition Processing Activity**

30. my spouse tried to spend extra time with me.
31. my spouse tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
32. my spouse made time in his/her schedule to be alone with me.
33. my spouse tried to share his/her feelings with me.
34. my spouse tried to be open with me about how he/she felt.
35. my spouse put forth effort to maintain his/her emotional bond with me.
36. my spouse tried to make sense of how the event affected his/her relationship with me.
37. my spouse tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for our relationship.
38. my spouse tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
39. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong through affection.
40. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong by offering me support.
41. my spouse reassured me that he/she wasn't going anywhere.

#### **F. Qualitative Experiences**

42. What were the low points of your day today?
43. What were the high points of your day today?

## Appendix F

**Study 2 Pre-Test Questionnaire****A. Reflection**

Take a moment and reflect on the overall experience you have had transitioning your child into school. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about how this transition has been going.

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*For this study, we would like to understand more about how you feel about your relationship with your spouse. When filling out this questionnaire, please focus on how you feel about your relationship right now.*

**B. Relational Uncertainty Measure**

Solomon &amp; Knobloch, 2001

*Please consider your relationship with your spouse and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	

**Self Uncertainty:**

1. Sometimes I wonder whether or not I want my marriage to work out in the long run.
2. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not I want my marriage to last.
3. Sometimes I wonder how much I like my spouse as a person.
4. Sometimes I am unsure how important my marriage is to me.
5. Sometimes I question if I am sexually or romantically attracted to my spouse.
6. Sometimes I wonder how strongly I am committed to my spouse.

**Partner Uncertainty Scale**

7. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse wants our marriage to work out in the long run.
8. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not my spouse wants our marriage to last.
9. Sometimes I wonder how much my spouse likes me as a person.
10. Sometimes I am unsure how important our marriage is to my spouse.
11. Sometimes I question if my spouse is sexually or romantically attracted to me.
12. Sometimes I wonder how strongly my spouse is committed to me.

**Relationship Uncertainty Scale**

13. Sometimes I am unsure whether or not me and my spouse feel the same way about each other.
14. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse and I will stay together.
15. Sometimes I question whether or not my marriage is a romantic one.
16. Sometimes I am unsure of the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in our relationship.
17. Sometimes I wonder whether or not my spouse loves me as much as I love him / her.

18. Sometimes I question how I should or should not behave around my spouse.

**C. Influence Scales** Solomon & Knobloch, 2001

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

**Interference from a Partner Scale**

19. My spouse interferes with the plans I make.
20. My spouse makes it harder for me to schedule my activities.
21. My spouse interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
22. My spouse disrupts my daily routine.
23. My spouse interferes with how much time I devote to my work.

**Facilitation from a Partner Scale**

24. My spouse helps me in my efforts to make plans.
25. My spouse helps me to do the things I need to do each day.
26. My spouse helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
27. My spouse helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.
28. My spouse helps me to use my time well.

**D. Relational Turbulence Scale** McLaren et al., 2011

*Indicate where your relationship with your partner falls along these dimensions:*

29. Chaotic	2	3	4	5	Stable
30. Calm	2	3	4	5	Turbulent
31. Tumultuous	2	3	4	5	Running Smoothly
32. Peaceful	2	3	4	5	Stressful

**E. Relational Satisfaction Scale** Norton, 1973

*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

33. We have a good marriage.
34. My relationship with my partner is very stable.
35. Our marriage is strong.
36. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.
37. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

**F. Transition Magnitude Scale** MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2004

*Considering your child's transition to school, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:*





57. I tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
58. I reminded my spouse that our relationship was strong.
59. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong through affection.
60. I showed my spouse that our relationship was strong by offering them support.
61. I reassured my spouse that I wasn't going anywhere.

### **Partner Transition Processing Activity**

62. my spouse tried to spend extra time with me.
  63. my spouse tried to arrange for the two of us to spend quality time together.
  64. my spouse made time in his/her schedule to be alone with me.
  65. my spouse made it a point to do fun things with me.
  66. my spouse tried to share his/her feelings with me.
  67. my spouse tried to be open with me about how he/she felt.
  68. my spouse made it a point to focus on our bond as a couple.
  69. my spouse put forth effort to maintain his/her emotional bond with me.
  70. my spouse tried to communicate about how things were different now in our relationship.
  71. my spouse tried to make sense of how the event affected his/her relationship with me.
  72. my spouse tried to reflect on the positive consequences that resulted for our relationship.
  73. my spouse tried to foster positive discussion about our relationship in light of the changes that had occurred.
  74. my spouse reminded me that our relationship was strong
  75. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong through affection.
  76. my spouse showed me that our relationship was strong by offering me support.
  77. my spouse reassured me that he/she wasn't going anywhere.
- N. Please take a moment to reflect on your experience throughout your child's transition to school so far and your participation in this study. How has this experience impacted your relationship with your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_
- O. Would you be interesting in participating in a follow up study to enhance this research in the future?  
Yes/No
- P. Thank you for participating in this research study. We appreciate your help in our attempts to improve marriages for parents of children with ASD. If you have any comments or concerns for the researchers, feel free to leave them here:

**KELLIE ST.CYR BRISINI**  
*CURRICULUM VITAE*  
May, 2018

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**EDUCATION**

- Ph.D. in Communication Arts and Sciences** **May, 2018**  
The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA  
Dissertation Title: *Relational turbulence and marital communication when children with autism start school: A longitudinal dyadic diary study*  
Dissertation Advisor: Denise Solomon
- M.A. in Communication Studies** **2009**  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA
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University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS

**SCHOLARLY WORKS**

**Publications**

- Brisini, K. S.**, & Solomon, D. H., (in press). Relational transitions and stress: Turbulence over the lifespan of marriage. In L. A. Aloia, A. Denes, & J. P. Crowley (Eds.), *The Physiology of Interpersonal Communication*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Brisini, K. S.**, Solomon, D. H., & Nussbaum, J. (2017). Transitions in marriage: Types, turbulence, and transition processing activities. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication.
- Solomon, D. H., & **Brisini, K. S.** (2017). Operationalizing relational turbulence: Measurement and construct validity. *Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication.
- MacGeorge, E. L., Guntzviller, L. M., **Brisini, K. S.**, Bailey, L. C., Salmon, S., Severen, K., Branch, S. E., Lillie, H., Lindley, C., Pastor, R., & Cummings, R. (2016). The influence of emotional support quality on advice evaluation and outcomes. *Communication Quarterly*, 65, 80-96.
- Bodie, G. D., **St. Cyr, K.**, Pence, M., Rold, M., & Honeycutt, J. (2012). Listening competence in initial interactions I: Distinguishing between what listening is and what listeners do. *International Journal of Listening*, 26, 1-28.

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

- 2017 Superior Teaching and Research Award, The Pennsylvania State University, College of the Liberal Arts
- 2017 Kathryn DeBoer Distinguished Teaching Award, The Pennsylvania State University, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences
- 2017 Research and Graduate Studies Dissertation Grant, The Pennsylvania State University, College of the Liberal Arts