

Summer 8-2015

My Confidant, My Coworker: The Interpersonal Relationship of Work Spouses

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The University of Southern Mississippi

MY CONFIDANT, MY COWORKER:
THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF WORK SPOUSES

by

Shaunda Marie French

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2015

ABSTRACT

MY CONFIDANT, MY COWORKER:

THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP OF WORK SPOUSES

by Shaunda Marie French

August 2015

In the present study, participants described their relationship with their perceived work spouse. After completing a pre-qualifying survey to substantiate the assumed relationship, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted. The thirty individuals answered questions relating to how they identify a work spouse relationship, the effects this relationship has on both inside and outside additional relationships and the reasons the relationship developed. After analyzing and transcribing the data, the qualitative software program Nvivo was utilized to discover themes and subthemes.

Work spouses were found to be an additional type of intimate relationship, which is both unique and yet relatable to other types of intimate relationships. In relation to characteristics and dimensions of work spouses, spending time with one's work spouse was the main theme, followed by an emphasis placed on the importance of the relationship, comparisons of other intimate relationships, positives of work spouses and negatives of work spouses. Moreover, work spouse relationships were discovered to both positively and negatively influence other relationships both at work and at home. In terms of the impetus for the relationship, difficulties at work were the most frequent occurrence. Similarities with work styles and also common interests outside of the workplace were an additional factor of why these relationships develop. Lastly, future

research suggestions were provided both in organizational and interpersonal communication.

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A Dissertation
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DEDICATION

“Research is hard.” When I heard this phrase in my research methods class in 2011, I did not realize then that three marginal words would have such an impact and be repeated again and again over the next four years. I am beyond blessed for all the love and support I have received from so many amazing people throughout this dissertation journey. First, I must thank Dr. Steven Venette, my dissertation chair and the professor who infamously spoke those three words at the beginning of this dedication. Dr. V has believed in me when I did not believe in myself and for that, I can never repay him. Next, I want to thank my Ogletree family. Thank you for taking a Nebraska girl in and making Mississippi feel like home. Dr. Hillary Pennell, thank you for your friendship and never-ending love and encouragement. In addition, thank you to my Chadron State College colleagues, especially Dr. Kathleen Kirsch who has been the best mentor a first-time faculty member could ask for and Dr. Thomas Smith, who consequently happens to be my own work spouse. Lastly, thank you to my family. My mom has shown me the value of education and teaching and more importantly, loved me unconditionally. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my best friend and sister-in-law Sheri, who has always been my number one supporter. Taking your own words from your last day of treatment, “we did it!”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the entire Department of Communication Studies here at The University of Southern Mississippi. Thank you to each and every one of you for your guidance. To my dissertation chair Dr. Steven Venette, thank you for your leadership, mentorship, and being so patient with me throughout my dissertation. Dr. John Meyer, Dr. Wendy Atkins-Sayre, Dr. Eura Jung, and Dr. Charles Tardy thank you for your valuable input, feedback and insight as you served on my committee. Lastly, I would also like to thank all of my participants, including those that filled out the prequalifying survey and those that were also interviewed. Without your involvement and willingness to provide insight on work spouses, this research project would not be possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When reflecting on her assumed work spouse, Kristin, a participant in this study, stated the following “When I go through tough times in life she’s there, she’s my person. I feel like in life you’re given very few people that really get you and she’s probably one of the best friends I’ve ever had.” Humans need to be wanted, loved, and desired by other people. Put simply, a life with others is much more satisfying than a life of being alone. People desire numerous intimate relationships within their lifetime, both personally and professionally.

Intimate relationships have been studied extensively. For example, Knapp’s relational development model (1972), Altman and Taylor’s social penetration theory (1973), and Duck’s (2005) model of the dissolution of relationships are all essential to having a better explanation of why interpersonal relationships come together and potentially break apart. Moreover, although scholarship has been established for the different types of intimate relationships (friendship, romantic, family and professional) more research is needed. A better understanding of intimate relationships continues to evolve overtime. For example, the meaning of what constitutes a friend has been revised due to advances in social media. Social media networks such as Facebook have changed the terminology and perception of friendships and even romantic relationships. Payne (2012) argued, “As Facebook has grown in popularity, it has systematically changed the way society perceives personal relationships” (p.1). In addition, Lewis and West (2009) examined and questioned the meaning of friendship in relation to Facebook. However, even people that have not become embedded in the social media world still face constant transformations in intimate relationships.

In 2010, United States family households passed an important milestone. As noted in the United States Census Bureau, married couples no longer made up the majority of U.S. households. In addition, only 20% of households were categorized as traditional, which is defined as a married couple with children (Tavernise, 2011). In short, people remain single, wait longer to marry and have children, or remarry into nonnuclear families. Similarly, people's work experiences have been changing significantly recently.

“It's not necessarily the job you do, the money you make; it's the people you work with” (Sandy). American workweeks are notably longer than comparable advanced countries (Hamermesh & Stancanelli, 2014). One in three American workers engage in some level of work activity during the weekend, compared to one in five workers in France, Germany and the Netherlands. Moreover, one in four American workers work at night, compared to one in fourteen in the Netherlands and France. Additionally, Gavin and Mason (2004) found roughly 20% of Americans work 49 hours or more per week. With Americans spending more time at work and less time at home, work relationships certainly may be considered more important than in the past. At times, work relationships may develop into an intimate, yet typically nonsexual relationship. This type of close relationship is called a work spouse.

Psychiatrist Jacqueline Olds defined a work spouse as “a person at work with whom you have a special relationship in which you share confidences, loyalties, experiences, and a degree of honesty and openness” (Levine, 2010, p. 1). Work spouses share a special bond that they may not have with other coworkers, close friends outside of employment and even their own significant other at home. Thus, the main goals of the

present research are to discover more about work spouses and if indeed they are perceived as an additional type of intimate relationship. Furthermore, this study seeks to uncover characteristics and dimensions of work spouses. For example, for me personally, I would describe my own work spouse in the following way. I know what Eastwood drinks from a coffee shop downtown, a triple espresso (and out of the two coffee shops we have in our town, I know which one he prefers). I know when his wife Marie teaches her Monday night class; there is a good possibility that he and his two children, Ty and Jamie, may be eating leftovers or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I can tell when Eastwood has not made a recent trip to the dry cleaners, as he will wear a blue button-down dress shirt that is not tailored quite right. I can tell when he is tired, when he is stressed and when he has not had time for his much-needed workout to obtain some endorphins. I know that asking about his children's most recent accomplishments is a guarantee to make his eyes twinkle while a slow smile forms. How do I know all these things about Eastwood? Not because we are significant others or even family, but because he is my work spouse.

How do two coworkers know so much about one another? Furthermore, do work spouse relationships require commitment, trust, and self-disclosure (equivalent to other kinds of intimate relationships) in order to develop and grow? Because minimal scholarly research on work spouses exists, understanding the relational development of perceived work spouse relationships is a goal for the current study.

Most informal research has identified both positives and negatives to having a work spouse. Emotional support is one of the main benefits. A work spouse is someone one can confide in and trust. Increasing productivity is another positive implication of

work spouses. However, negative consequences may also occur in work spouse relationships. Other coworkers may believe the relationship is inappropriate, whether due to questioning supposed unfair allegiances or presumed sexual misconduct in the workplace. Moreover, if the two colleagues decide to terminate their relationship, what happens within their work relationship is uncertain. In addition, work spouse relationships may overlap into one another's personal relationships outside of the office, which may have positive or negative implications. Therefore, supplementary goals of the current study are to seek a better understanding of both positive and negative influences of having a perceived work spouse.

Work spouse types of relationships have become increasingly widespread in the pop culture world. For example, the television show *Happy Endings* (Casper, 2011) had an entire storyline that revolved around the concept of work spouses. In addition, popular magazines including *Forbes 500* (Lewis, 2013) and *Women's Health* (Dold, 2012) have featured articles about work spouses. Yet as stated above, in terms of scholarly research, little work has been generated about work spouses, especially with regard to organizational communication and work productivity. Psychologist Linda Young stated, "a noncompetitive ally at work makes you more likely to look forward to going to your job, which can increase your productivity" (Dold, 2012, p. 1). Relatively speaking, "coworkers are the unsung heroes of employee retention" (Lewis, p. 2). Therefore, with informal research implying work spouses may increase work production, positivity in the workplace, and an overall level of happiness, work spouses need to be examined formally. With so little being known about work spouses, qualitative exploration, using rich data gained through in-depth interviews, is warranted.

This first chapter introduced work spouses as a type of interpersonal relationship that occurs within organizations. Prior to the methodology being explained, an in-depth literature review of intimate relationships will be examined in the next chapter. First, literature about what defines an intimate relationship will be examined. Second, the basic dimensions and characteristics of intimate relationships will be discussed, followed by types of intimate relationships. The second part of the literature review will explore essential communication models and theories that help clarify the relational development and deterioration of intimate relationships. Chapter III explains the methodology used in the present study. A description of the participants is offered, and delimitations and the procedure are described in detail. Additionally, the qualitative program NVivo is briefly discussed. Chapter IV includes the analysis of the data. Thematic analysis, including the discovery of common themes found between the participants, is explained and the research questions are answered. Lastly, Chapter V concludes the present study by discussing the implications of this research. The findings are described and the limitations of the study are explained. Future research directions regarding the interpersonal relationships of work spouses conclude the chapter.

The overall goal of this current study is to have a better understanding of the perceived intimate relationship known as a work spouse. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher sought to discover if work spouse relationships are indeed an intimate relationship. Additionally, characteristics and dimensions of work spouses are articulated, along with the stages of these relationships' development. Lastly, the potential impact of these work relationships will be examined both in one's personal and professional environments.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the relevant literature regarding intimate relationships and communication. The following review first examines what constitutes an intimate relationship. Next, characteristics and dimensions of intimate relationships are discussed, followed by a differentiation of four types of intimate relationships. The latter portion of this section explains fundamental communication models and theories developed for understanding intimate relationships. Throughout the chapter, research questions pertaining to the current study are provided.

Defining an Intimate Relationship

Communication scholars have recurrently sought to have a better understanding of intimate relationships. In order to know if a work spouse is perceived as an intimate relationship or not, understanding the parameters of intimacy is important. Laurenceau Barrett, and Rovine (2005) defined intimacy as “a feeling of closeness and connectedness that develops through communication between partners” (p. 314). However, no universal definition exists of what constitutes an intimate relationship. Tellingly, Moss, and Schwebel (1993) suggested 61 scholarly definitions of intimacy.

Phillips (1976) examined intimate communication through a rhetorical lens and suggested the following assumptions of intimate relationships. The first notion is that each individual relationship acquires its own uniqueness, yet commonalities may be found within intimate relationships. The second belief is intimate relationships seek an overall pleasurable goal both consciously and subconsciously. Consciously, pleasure arises from the satisfaction of the relationship, and subconsciously pleasure results from

the confirmation of one's self. The third suggestion is intimate relationships are founded on roles. These expectations are apparent within and between relationships and may transform as the relationship changes over time. The fourth implication is intimate relationships "conform to a structure" (p. 22). Furthermore, Phillips argued that relationships pass through stages. Not only is intimacy hard to describe, but also specific relational titles are challenging to define.

Knapp, Ellis, and Williams (1980) suggested that defining specific relationship titles might be problematic because relationship status can be ambiguous to partners. These scholars identified 45 different intimacy terms ranging from lover to sidekick to pal, which reflects the inherent ambiguity of relationship statuses. For example, one may assume that the label lover involves a sexual relationship, whereas someone else may see love as platonic.

This current research project is attempting to discover if work spouses meet criteria that define an intimate relationship. Ambiguity found in intimacy definitions provides an opportunity for the present research to clarify if work spouses are an intimate relationship found within an organizational context. The following literature describes particular characteristics and dimensions found within intimate relationships.

Intimate Relationships and Trust and Commitment

Two main characteristics of intimate relationships are commitment and trust. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) discovered ten different indicators of commitment found within romantic partners, including affection, providing support, sustaining integrity, companionship, making an effort to communicate, being respectful, discussing the relationship's future, establishing a positive environment, working on relational

problems together, and lastly, expressing commitment. In a comparable study, Weigel, Brown, and O’Riordan (2011) found, over a four-month period, that romantic partners who more often used commitment indicators within their relationship had a higher level of commitment than those who did not. Commitment indicators included features such as respect, affection, and support. Moreover, additional benefits of commitment indicators were partners who were more positive about the relationship and had a lower level of relational uncertainty. Recently, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2014) determined that the greater level of commitment men and women had, the higher their usage of commitment indicators including everyday expressions of commitment. In other words, committed individuals desired the need to express to their partners that they were committed to them.

In addition, Hendrick and colleagues (1988) sampled fifty-seven dating couples regarding their romantic relationship and what they believed to be significant factors for wanting to maintain the relationship. Commitment, the ability to self-disclose, investment in the relationship, and positive self-esteem were some of the factors that influenced a person wanting to sustain a relationship.

Continual investments generally include time, energy, and attention. Research such as Hecht, Marston and Larkey (1994) has shown that those who spend approximately equal amounts of investment in the relationship are found to be more satisfied. “Allocating time, attention and empathic energy to someone else can constitute an affectionate message” (Floyd, 2014, p. 7). Thus, it may be argued that empathic listening is an affectionate communication method since this type of listening requires time, attention and empathy.

In two parallel studies, dating relationships and sacrifices were examined (Impett, Gable & Peplau, 2005). Sacrifices were categorized into areas such as family, friends, work/school, intimacy, gifts/money, recreation, errands/chores, appearance, communication and major sacrifices. The first study discovered that friend, recreation, errand/chore, school/work and family sacrifices occurred most frequently. In the second study, participants kept a two-week diary, and an average of 8.7 sacrifices were made. Additionally, in 48% of those fourteen days, a sacrifice occurred.

Now that the commitment and continual nature of intimate relationships has been discussed, a second characteristic of intimate relationships is trust. "Trust is a key component of any healthy relationship" (Weber, Johnson, & Corrigan, 2004, p. 319). Relational maintenance behaviors including commitment, trust, openness, assurance and positivity were examined among adult siblings (Myers, Goodboy, members of COMM 201, 2013). Results found that siblings who perceived their relationship to be equitable used openness more often than if siblings were in an inequitable relationship. Moreover, those in equitable sibling relationships conveyed higher degrees of trust, commitment, satisfaction and loving.

Dating, engaged, married and divorced people were participants in a study of trust and self-disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Trust is associated considerably with intimacy, love and self-disclosure. Those involved in a committed, monogamous relationship had high levels of trust. On the contrary, casual or terminated relationships held lower levels of trust. Now that commitment and trust have been discussed, an additional characteristic of intimate relationships is the idea of transformation.

Intimate Relationships and the Transformation of “We not Me”

Using a phenomenological approach, Register and Henley (1992) analyzed 20 participants and their experiences with intimacy. Transformation was one theme discovered, and participants talked about the development of one’s self as the intimacy changed how the person saw herself. Olson (2003) discovered both interdependence and transformation as themes. Married male participants discussed becoming a better man, due to the romantic love for their wives. As one man exclaimed, “It’s helped me grow and mature, become more responsible. Not just focusing on me but us” (p. 41).

French (2010) also examined males and romantic love, and participants mentioned that loving their significant other had improved the person they were. Stated differently, they believed they had transformed into better people. In addition, the males also discussed that loving their romantic partners had made their understanding of life different. As one male stated, “I’m more aware of how my own actions affect others now. I wasn’t as empathetic of a person before I met her. I definitely think there’s a desire to improve myself as someone else is relying on me” (p. 142). Now that transformation and interdependence have been discussed, the following characteristic of intimate relationships is affection.

Intimate Relationships and Affection

Affection occurs both in verbal and nonverbal communication. In terms of verbal communication, compliments are a type of affection found in intimate relationships. Compliments were defined as demonstrations of love found both in Olson (2003) and French (2010) research. Furthermore, Doohan and Manusov (2004) examined the use of compliments in romantic relationships. Their two research questions were “what topics

do women and men report giving compliments about most often?” and “what topics do women and men report receiving compliments about most often?” (p. 176). The 163 participants were undergraduate students from a large Northwestern university. Each person had to be in a current heterosexual romantic relationship. One-half of the participants were asked to keep a diary pertaining to receiving compliments from their romantic partner, and the other half kept a diary recording the giving of compliments to their partner. It was discovered that women are more aware of compliments than men. However, females did not rate compliments as more important than men. Moreover, males and females had almost an equal weight on the importance of compliments in romantic relationships. This study shows that demonstrations of love, specifically compliments, are comparably important to both males and females.

Hopper, Knapp, and Scott (1981) examined romantic couples’ intimate talk and personal idioms for one another. Interviews in two separate studies discovered that expressions of affection were one of the most commonly used idioms found within couples’ communication. Incidentally, teasing-based phrases were also a commonality found within couples’ intimate dialogue.

In terms of nonverbal communication (French, 2010) discovered males showed their love the most through affectionate touching and gift giving. Examples of affectionate touching include hugging, kissing, rubbing her back and making love. Examples of gift giving included small gestures such as sending flowers, giving cards, and bringing a favorite dessert home.

The reviewed literature described intimate relationships and particular characteristics and dimensions associated with intimate relationships. The present study

inquires if work spouses are an intimate relationship. Presumably, if work spouses are intimate relationships, they will exhibit characteristics and dimensions equivalent to other similar relationships. Therefore, this study asks:

RQ1a: Is a work spouse a unique type of intimate relationship?

RQ1b: What dimensions and characteristics of intimate relationships exist between work spouses?

Types of Intimate Relationships

Now that intimacy and qualities of intimate relationships has been examined, the following analysis will define different types of intimate relationships: friendships, work, family and romantic relationships. These specific intimate relationships need to be outlined in order to examine if work spouses are a unique type of intimate relationship or if work spouses are simply friendships at work. Thus, the first intimate relationship discussed will be friendships.

Friendships

Friendships are typically associated with three traits. First is the sharing of interests. Next is the concept of trust and last is emotional support. Males in particular associate friendship with mutual activities. Females on the other hand, often relate friendship with characteristics such as self-disclosure, trust and emotional support. Johnson and colleagues (2004) discovered that these friendship traits are what greatly draw together or pull apart a friendship. For example, a shared activity was repeatedly something that brought a friendship together and when that shared activity ended, it was also what influenced that relationship to deteriorate. Similarly, being able to confide in

someone brought friendships closer yet, the breach of trust may dissolve these relationships.

One of the most unique characteristics of friendships as intimate relationships is that friendships are voluntary. Unlike in family or work relationships, people can choose with whom to be friends. Put simply, a person can choose whether to be friends with another person or not. Friendships are typically between peers, which may be defined as someone who is comparable to the other in authority or position. Third, similar to all intimate relationships, friendships are governed by rules, and an additional characteristic is friendships differ by sex. Same-sex and opposite-sex friendships may differ, however both types of friendships offer incentives.

“There are no blanket prescriptions regarding what communicative practices preserve trust in a close friendship” (Rawlins, 1983, p. 5). Interviewing ten pairs of close friends, lack of openness was uncovered due to a fear of vulnerability, hurt feelings, and other potential setbacks to a friendship. Rawlins persisted, “therefore, it is often difficult to choose what should and should not be said to a close friend” (p. 5).

Rawlins and Holl (1987) interviewed high school students and inquired about their classifications of friends. Best friends, close friends, average friends, activity friends, school friends, specialized friends, and proximate friends were all types of friendship types defined in this qualitative study. In this same study, violations of trust were examined. Two main violations of trust were discovered “revealing a secret and backstabbing” (p. 354). Even at a young age, the violation of trust may lead to the dissolution of a friendship.

Convenience, cooperation, and commitment were three underlying themes discovered within conflicting young adult friendships (Legge & Rawlins, 1992). After videotaping a topic that both individuals disagreed about, the participants then watched their discussion and commented on the conflict. Remaining silent, or ignoring a particular topic to minimize or avoid a conflict entirely was found. It appeared that “understanding helped the friends identify points where honesty or openness might undermine their friendship and to restrain needless confrontation or retaliation” (p. 242).

Friendships emerge throughout one’s life. Adults spend considerable time in their workplace organization. Naturally, friendships often develop at work.

Professional Relationships

There are many different power levels and types of work relationships that occur. Sluss and Ashford (2007) emphasized that relational identity in the organizational environment is key. That is, how individuals define/identify themselves in their workplace is essential. Coworkers, subordinates, and superiors are all types of work relationships. Coworkers are generally people who share comparable work and power levels. A subordinate, on the other hand, is someone that ranks lower in the organizational work scheme. For instance, an assistant manager would be the subordinate to a manager. Lastly, a superior is someone that has more power and ranks higher. For instance, an example may be the dean of an academia institution and her superiority over an assistant professor.

Quite often, coworkers do not communicate solely about work issues and at times, blended work relationships emerge. Bridge and Baxter (1992) discussed the concept of blended relationships, which are relationships embedded into one’s social contexts. This

research found that work friendships come with both positives and negatives. Improved job relationships, psychological support, work-related assistance and information access were several of the benefits found. However, conflict was discovered between people who were close to a coworker, as respondents cited “A rich array of problems, difficulties, and challenges in their blended friendships” (p. 216). In agreement, Morrison and Nolan (2007) discovered that friendships at work lead to “distracting effects, extra work, and conflicts of interest” (p. 37).

Not only does it appear that friendships at work may increase the chance for conflict, but opposite-sex friendships at work showed a further increase of potential problems (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). A worry about misinterpretation was a common theme discovered throughout interviews. Many employees were concerned their opposite-sex work friends misconstrued the friendship as a romantic or sexual pass. Moreover, humor and conversational topics were additional apprehensions due to the fear of sexual harassment. For example, one male manager stated, “If I make an off-color joke or something like that, I’m more likely to do that with a male than a female” (p. 1090).

Acts of indirect aggression, idealized gender roles and friendship expectations, and self-constrained behavior were three themes that emerged when women were interviewed in relation to female communication in the workplace (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). The female participants strongly believed that their workplace friendships should influence how a coworker behaves; yet this was not always the case.

Sias and Cahill (1998) examined three transitional periods in workplace friendships: acquaintance to friend, friend to close friend, and close friend to almost best friend. In the first friendship phase, interviewees described close proximity, collective

assignments, and socializing as examples of coworkers becoming friends. The transition from friend to close friend was highly influenced by contextual problems, both inside and outside of the workplace. Work-related dilemmas, such as difficulties with a supervisor, quite often brought two coworkers closer. Personal problems, such as health concerns, also increased the intimacy between colleagues. Commonalities between two people additionally influenced peers to become close friends. In the last advancement, close friend to almost best friend, commonalities and the length of time the two had been friends increased the level of communication and intimacy.

Additional research by Raile and colleagues (2008) examined workplace friendships and overall job satisfaction. Participants from a construction company completed a job satisfaction survey to see if there were correlations found within degree, closeness, and betweenness. Degree was measured through direct contact with individuals; closeness was measured through identification and the defining as friends. Lastly, betweenness was established as “placement within the overall friendship network” (Raile, Kim, Choi, Seorta, Par & Lee, p. 172). The study found that closeness was the exclusive characteristic tied to job satisfaction. Degree and betweenness were not connected to job satisfaction.

Kram and Isabella (1985) examined three work relationships: informational, collegial and special. Informational peer relationships are used for obtaining and sharing information within the workplace. These relationships are low in self-disclosure, emotional support and trust. These informal interactions do not require much maintenance to uphold. The second type of work relationship is the collegial peer relationship. Along with obtaining and sharing information, these relationships are higher

in self-disclosure, emotional support, and trust as opposed to informational peer relationships. Within the collegial relationships, colleagues may begin to discuss more intimate work-related topics and in addition, relationships outside of the workforce, such as family. The third type of work relationship is the special peer relationship. These work relationships are high in self-disclosure, emotional support and trust. Both work and out-of-the-office conversations are held. As one participant stated, “I can say anything to Art and he will be understanding. I am able to get frustration and anger out in a more constructive fashion talking to him. We do that for each other” (p. 121).

In a comparable study, Myers and Johnson (2004) also examined the three organizational peer types (information, collegial, and special) in relation to the attributions of trust, solidarity and self-disclosure. Trust and solidarity levels were discovered to be lowest in information peers; interestingly, self-disclosure was not.

Workplace relationships may be beneficial and harmful to the coworkers and organization. With past literature determining work relationships have positive and negative qualities in the work environment, the present study seeks to uncover if work spouses also have positive and negative attributions. Thus, the second research question will ask:

RQ2a: How has having a work spouse affected the respondents’ professional relationships?

Family Relationships

Family relationships are a third type of intimate relationship. No typical family exists. As mentioned in Chapter I, married couples no longer made up the majority of

U.S. households and nontraditional families have become dominant (Tavernise, 2011). Thus, varieties of family relationships continue to exist and need to be studied.

With the average American working more hours, the overlap between personal and professional life has increased. As Clark (2000) argued, “though people shape their environments, they are, in turn, shaped by them. It is this very contradiction of determining and being determined by our work and home environments that makes work/family balance one of the most challenging concepts in the study of work and the study of families” (p. 748). Paug (2012) examined family discussions of work during dinnertime. In these video recorded narratives, even the children (who were not purposefully included in the conversation) participated in the work-related dialogues between adults.

Frisby and Martin (2010) investigated the use of social support behaviors between parents and their college-aged children and in undergraduate peer friendships. The results found both parents and friends that displayed higher levels of affection were more likely to provide emotional support and advice. In other words, college students whose parents provided them with high levels of affection and support were more likely to utilize these same communication tactics with their undergraduate friends.

Myers, Byrnes, Frisby, and Mansson (2011) examined affectionate communication usage between siblings. Participants completed the Affectionate Communication Index scale in relation to nonverbal and verbal communication and social support behaviors. Examples of nonverbal communication included: kissing on the cheek, hugging and holding hands. Verbal communication included affectionate statements such as: “I love you” (p. 156). Lastly, supportive behaviors included:

celebrating birthdays, disclosing important information and giving compliments. The results discovered that adult siblings utilized affectionate communication in strategic ways more than as a regular behavior. Stated differently, affectionate communication was frequently applied more in premeditated ways, than just as a routine.

Bishop (1992) examined self-disclosure between mothers and daughters. A three-part survey uncovered that daughters between the ages of 19-23 disclosed the highest amount of information to their mothers. Stated differently, as the daughters left their family homes to go into their adult lives, their self-disclosure increased. Interestingly, all the daughters surveyed reported higher levels of self-disclosure as time passed.

In related research, fathers and sons and the usage of affectionate communication were studied (Morman & Floyd, 2002). Three types of affectionate communication were examined: nonverbal, verbal and support. Society's influence of a strong, masculine gender role had presumably affected the lack of affectionate communication between fathers and sons in the past. However, this study discovered that fathers had higher levels of relational satisfaction, closeness, and affectionate communication than they did with their own fathers. In addition, the sons had higher levels of respect for their fathers, than the fathers did for their own fathers. Now that family relationships have been discussed, the last intimate relationship will be examined, romantic relationships.

Romantic Love and Concepts of Romantic Relationships

Abraham Maslow once proclaimed, "We must study love. We must be able to teach it, to understand it, to predict it, or else the world is lost to hostility and to suspicion" (Oord, 2004, p. ix). A universal concept of romantic love has been difficult to define (Olson, 2003). Recently, McCornack (2010) defined a romantic relationship as "a

chosen interpersonal involvement forged through communication in which the participants perceive the bond as romantic” (p. 326). According to this definition, there are five components of romantic relationships: perception, diversity, choice, tensions and communication.

The perception two people have about a relationship is important. For example, if one person believes the relationship is romantic and the other person does not, then the relationship cannot be classified as a romantic relationship. Furthermore, if one believes the romance is causal and the other does not, these different perceptions may lead to conflict.

Aloni and Bernieri (2004) hypothesized that people in love, and those that had more experience with romantic love, would be able to better identify perceptions of love found within video clips than those participants that were not in love and had little to no romantic past. However, this was not the case. Those in love were not as accurate with their love perceptions of the couples in the video clips. As Aloni and Bernieri insinuated, “Is love blind? Perhaps with certain glasses” (p. 294).

At times, workplace friendships may turn into romantic relationships. Organizational romances have been examined throughout the years and are defined as “relationships that occur between men and women working together that are characterized by mutual sexual attraction, and made known to others through the participants’ actions” (Mainiero, 1996, p. 750). Much research has focused on both managerial and employee beliefs about workplace romance (Brown & Allgeier, 1995; Lickey, Berry & Whelan-Berry, 2009; Jones, 1999; Malachonwski, Chory, & Claus, 2012; Quinn, 1977). This research found a strong negative connotation of workplace

romances. Put simply, most employees and higher administration have off-putting feelings and beliefs about romantic relationships in organizations. Needless to say, workplace friendships and romances have their problems and setbacks. The present study seeks to uncover if work spouses also have negative conditions. Yet not all research shows that intimacy in the workplace is harmful. Therefore, the following material will discuss the positive aspects in professional relationships.

Diversity is found in romantic relationships due to characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic, and religious background. Choice is the third component of romantic relationships. Choice simply suggests that people have the option to become involved in a romantic relationship and the right to terminate the relationship. Relational dialectics are classified as the fourth component. As previously discussed, openness versus protection, autonomy versus connection, and novelty versus predictability are the three dialectical tensions. Lastly, communication is found in romantic relationships. As Wood (1982) pointed out, “communication constitutes human relationships. It is through talk that persons define themselves and their relationships and through talk that definitions once entered into are revised over the life of a relationship” (p. 75). Now that key components of romantic relationships have been examined, the following discussion will include characteristics of romantic relationships.

Characteristics of romantic love

The first characteristic is that romantic love is generally associated with exclusivity (Floyd, 2011). That is, most people assume that a romantic relationship should take a form of monogamy. Monogamy, as defined by Floyd (2011) suggested, “being in only one romantic relationship at a time and avoiding romantic or sexual

involvement with others outside that relationship” (p. 184). Although exclusivity is associated with romantic relationships, it is important to note a few exceptions. Some romantic couples subscribe to the idea of an open relationship, in which sexual and romantic participation outside of the relationship is acceptable. Moreover, polygamy is a type of romantic love in which a person has two or more romantic partners.

The second characteristic of romantic love is voluntariness. Put simply, both partners in the romantic relationship should be able to choose on their own whether they want to be in a relationship or not. However, there are exceptions to this trait as well. In certain situations, one partner or both are unhappy but stay in the relationship due to children, religious beliefs, finances or other binding circumstances. In addition, some particular cultures practice arranged marriage. That is, people marry a partner that is selected by others, such as their parents.

A third characteristic of romantic relationships is the idea of love (Floyd, 2011). The majority of people place a high emphasis on love in romantic relationships. A loss of love often predicts a dissolving relationship. Yet not all people see love as a priority for being in a romantic relationship. Power, money and status are just a few of additional reasons people become romantically involved with someone.

The fourth and final characteristic of romantic relationships is sexuality. That is, people may become involved in romantic relationships due to a sexual attraction. Thus, whether it is a heterosexual or same-sex relationship, sexuality plays a role in the relationship. Now that the characteristics of romantic relationships have been identified, qualities of what people look for in a potential partner will be examined.

Qualities desired in a romantic partner

Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, and Giles (1999) conducted six separate studies inquiring first, what attributions define one's ideal partner, and second, what characteristics are desired in one's ultimate relationship. Warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness and status-resources were three qualities determined as ideal in selecting a mate. Characteristics highlighted in the warmth-trustworthiness category included defining the ideal mate as: "supportive, sensitive, trustworthy, honest, communicative, and affectionate" (p. 85). Under the grouping of vitality and attractiveness, the participants listed a person's overall health, energy, sense of adventure, and drive as likeable traits. Thirdly, the status and resources element described essentials such as employment, financial resources, and age. When defining one's ultimate relationship, two qualities were discovered: loyalty and passion.

In a relatable study, Levine, Aune, and Park (2006) inquired about romantic relationships and asked participants, "What characteristics do you look for in a potential romantic partner?" (p. 473). In order of frequency, the following ten qualities were desired: honesty, attractiveness, humor, intelligence, understanding, a good personality, compassion, good communication skills, caring, and being sensitive. Now that desirable traits in a romantic partner have been examined, the following section will discuss romantic love as an attachment process.

Romantic love as an attachment process

Romantic love is a desired, yet complicated, act of communication. Romantic love has been defined as an emotion, and also as an attachment process. Hazan and Shaver (1987) hypothesized that people who were experiencing romantic love would

classify the love depending on the type of attachment style they possessed. For example, people who viewed themselves as having a secure adult attachment were more likely to define their romantic love as an experience of “trust, friendship, and positive emotions” (p. 513). Those that categorized themselves as avoidant attachment adults would describe the experience of romantic love as a “fear of closeness and lack of trust” (p. 513). Finally, people who described themselves as anxious/ambivalent attached persons would see love as a “preoccupying, almost painfully exciting struggle to merge with another person” (p. 513). The results found secure people did experience romantic love as a happy, friendly, trusting aspect of life. Avoidant lovers characterized themselves as having a “fear of intimacy, jealousy, and emotional highs and lows” (p. 515). Thirdly, extreme cases of anxious/ambivalent people viewed love as “an obsession, extreme sexual attraction and extreme jealousy and extreme emotional highs and lows” (p. 515).

Thirteen years later, Fraley and Shaver (2000) reexamined romantic love as an attachment process and acknowledged that the process of romantic love as an attachment needed revision. Several critiques were identified. In the first, they concluded that not all romantic relationships should be characterized as attached relationships due to the simple fact that not all people become attached. The second critique was that a better explanation was needed for the attachment progression. The original format was argued to be unclear. The third and fourth modifications both involved the argument that secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles are too specific and that not all people may completely fit into one of these categories. Finally, the fifth revision was to alter the parts of the theory revolving around the attachment, care giving, and sexual behavioral

systems. It is often questioned, how different men and women view love. Therefore, the following section will discuss gender differences found within romantic relationships.

Gender differences and romantic love

The majority of past research looks much more frequently at females' viewpoints (Cancian, 1986; Dickson, Hughes, & Walker, 2005; Schafer, 2008) as it is argued that "women are much more interested and more skilled at love than men." (Cancian, p. 699). However, this is often due to the fact that these studies use feminine styles of language; yet when gender-free styles are used, the differences found between males' and females' differences in regards to romantic love are quite small. Put simply, romantic love is extremely important to both men and women.

Schafer (2008) examined the viewpoints of heterosexual participants. In this study, Schafer interviewed a group of eight heterosexual females. These participants were a variety of ages and were single, dating or married. Results indicated three occurring themes: all the females viewed love as ambivalent, positive and also as negative at times in the relationship. The limitation found in this study was that all eight of the participants were highly educated women who were either post-graduate psychology students or psychologists. Therefore, it is safe to assume these women have an interesting and unique perspective on romantic love.

With the majority of research associated with females, Olson (2003) argued it was imperative that more research focus on males and how they view romantic love. Olson examined ten married males (mean age=29.40) and asked the following two research questions: "What common themes will be articulated by the male participants regarding romantic love?" (p. 39) and "How do these men express romantic love?" (p. 39). Through

a qualitative phenomenological process, Olson asked ten open-ended questions and five occurring themes regarding romantic love were found: process, connection and interdependency, appreciation, transformation, and demonstrations of love.

Process was explained by the men stating that their romantic love for their spouse was something that continuously changed throughout the years. For example, one husband suggested, "I think you kinda fall in and out of love" (p. 39). For the second theme-- interdependency-- the men discussed how "things just felt right" (p. 40), and "I couldn't imagine my life without her" (p. 40). The third theme-- appreciation--was defined by the males' as wanting to do things to make their wives happy. Whether that involved picking up around the house, helping take care of the kids or just being someone she could vent to, numerous males felt appreciation was an essential aspect in their romantic relationship.

The fourth theme discovered was transformation. The men discussed becoming a better man, due to the romantic love for their wives. As one man exclaimed, "It's helped me grow and mature, become more responsible. Not just focusing on me but us" (p. 41). The fifth and final theme found was demonstrations of love. The majority of males stressed how important expressing their love to their wives is. Examples of demonstrations of love included taking her to the movies, surprising her with flowers, or simply complimenting her new haircut.

French (2010) also examined males, yet unlike Olson's participants who were married, French's participants were single, dating males. French found the following four themes: compatibility, friendship, transformation, and demonstrations of love. In Olson's 2003 study, the five recurring themes regarding romantic love were: "process, connection

and interdependency, appreciation, transformation and demonstrations of love” (p. 39-42). Thus, three of the four themes found in French’s study were quite similar to those found by Olson (2003).

The present study attempts to see if this overlap may be helpful or hindering. Hence, RQ2b asks, “How has having a work spouse affected the respondents personal relationships?” Now that the fourth type of intimate relationship has been discussed, the following literature will explain popular communication models and theories that help explain the development and deterioration of intimate relationships.

Relationship Processes

Knapp’s development model

Throughout the years, numerous theories and models have been developed to explain distinct processes that relationships may go through. One of the most prominent is Mark Knapp’s relational development model. Knapp (1972) discussed questions that motivated him to create the relational model:

Are there regular and systematic patterns of communication that suggest stages on the road to an intimate relationship? Are there similar patterns and stages that characterize the deterioration of relationships? Can we identify communication strategies that attract and repel us at various stages in a relationship? Specifically, how do people talk to each other when they are building, maintaining, or tearing down a relationship? What are the mysterious forces that propel us in and out of relationships? What determines how fast or slow a relationship progresses or dissolves? (p. 4)

This uncertainty about personal relationships motivated Knapp to create a relational development model that consists of ten stages (Knapp, 1972). In understanding Knapp's model, one must first realize that this model was developed for all types of developing relationships. Thus, although one may assume the model was solely established for romantic relationships, it was not. Knapp stressed that the relational model may be applied to any form of intimate relationship.

The first stage of Knapp's (1972) model was initiating. In the beginning of a potential relationship, interactions between two people are very brief. Communication is short, and more than likely this conversation is the first that two people have with one another. This stage may lead two people to exchange names and other minute information. Additionally, the two people will decide whether further communication is desired in the future.

The second stage was the experimenting phase. The experimenting phase begins after conversation is initiated and one begins to try to find out information about the other person. In other words, one tries to find out the unknown. One may ask where the other person is from, her interests, and so forth. In the experimenting phase, people are looking to find a sense of similarity. Common areas of interest or experiences are sought, something relatable to the other person. This phase is highly emphasized in intimate relationships as people spend a significant amount of time communicating and discovering things about one another.

The third stage takes a strong move forward and is known as the intensifying phase. Here, each person unfolds her uniqueness while simultaneously blending her personality with the other person's. A level of intimacy is established in the intensifying

phase. People may give each other nicknames, show affection, and personal disclosure will occur.

In romantic relationships, somewhere between the intensifying and integrating phase, a talk may take place. “The talk is culturally understood to mean a discussion whereby both parties reveal their feelings about each other and their commitment to the future together” (Nelms, Knox, & Easterling, 2012, p. 178). Sampling undergraduate couples, research showed that this communicative discussion occurred 65% of the time within a year of the relationship beginning and approximately 36% of the time within six months of the relationship. Additionally, the most frequent approach in inquiring about the future involved one partner directly asking what the person wanted out of the relationship and if she saw a potential future.

In the integration phase, the idea of coupling takes place. In other words, the two individuals begin to see each other as a couple more so than individuals. Both verbal and nonverbal integrating may occur. For example, a couple may begin to dress similarly, open a joint bank account, and an individual may refer to himself as “we” instead of “I.”

If the relationship continues to progress, bonding occurs next. Bonding usually entails the institutionalization of the relationship. In this particular stage, a public announcement of the relationship may happen. Examples of bonding may include: an engagement, a wedding, or even a baptism-like celebration of the union. Although many relationships may stabilize at the bonding phase, other relations may start to disband.

Gordon (1993) explained, “Intimate relationships have been falling apart for the last 20 years or so. The truth is that couples have never learned reliably how to sustain pleasure in intimate relationships” (p. 40). Knapp developed five stages to explain the

deterioration of a relationship. Differentiating is the phase where one starts to desire a sense of individuality. Fighting and conflict may often transpire, and quite possibly may be the start of the couple coming apart. Knapp suggested differentiating could happen if the process of bonding happens too quickly. For example, think about a whirlwind romance. Quite often, these relationships fall apart due to the unity of the couple occurring too quickly.

Next, the phase of circumscribing may occur. Circumscribing is the opposite of integration, and in this phase communication between the couple significantly decreases. Secrets, negative communication and purposeful silence take place between the couple. A person in this phase of the model is making it apparent that there are serious problems in the relationship that need to be discussed.

In the stagnation phase, if communication does take place, it is simply small talk. There are different goals that a person may be attempting in the stagnation phase. Some people in this stage are prolonging the inevitable, the termination of the relationship. Yet, others are longing for the chance to salvage the relationship.

The next phase is avoiding. This takes the stagnation stage one step further as the couple no longer occupies the same physical location. At times, a person may move out of their joint home. Furthermore, a person may not want to communicate face-to-face or at all. In social settings, one may act as if their partner does not exist.

Last is the terminating stage. Here, the relationship legitimately dissolves. Distance and disassociation of the relationship are found in this ending stage. More often, when two people enter the termination stage, they will go their separate ways and no

longer sustain a relationship. Knapp's relational model is not the only model for the terminating of relationships. Next the relational dissolution model will be examined.

Duck's relational dissolution model

In comparison, Duck (2005) created a model of the dissolution of relationships. Duck defined five phases of the ending of a relationship. First is the intrapsychic phase. In this point of the relationship, one typically will complain to other individuals about his partner, but not specifically to the significant other. If the person venting feels a satisfaction during the intrapsychic phase, one may not proceed to the next phase. In fact, venting is a recurring act and occurs in most intimate relationships, but does not necessarily lead to a termination of the relationship.

The second phase of Duck's model is the dyadic phase. In this part of a relationship, the displeasure has reached a level where the issues need to be discussed between the two partners. With married couples, this phase often directs the couple to counseling. Yet this relational dissatisfaction does not necessarily mean the relationship will end. The discussion between the couple may improve and benefit the relationship, and the couple may choose to continue the relationship with aspirations of working through the relational problems.

The third phase of Duck's relationship model is the social phase. At this point in the relationship, it is very difficult to resolve the communicative problems and maintain a relationship. This period reveals the relational turmoil to others including: friends, family, and additional people connected to the couple. If the relationship dissolves, not only will the two people in the relationship be influenced by the termination of the relationship, but also those that are close to the two partners.

Next is the grave-dressing phase. At this time period, people note the finality of the relationship. More often, people feel the sense to defend the relationship, the ending of it and most importantly, themselves. People do not want others to think less of them, or that they are to blame or even undesirable. Thus, people want to save face in order to successfully build new relationships in the future.

The resurrection phase is the final stage. In this period, people desire the need to move on and gain a sense of normality again. Therefore, the resurrection process lets the person “review and adjust psychological beliefs about the self, others, and relationships that might hold up better in the future” (Duck, 2005, p. 212). Additionally in this phase people want to make sure the same mistakes are not repeated in upcoming relationships. Therefore, they may illustrate a list of avoidance. Examples may include: “No more psychology students! Never again will I date a manual labourer! No more blondes for me!” (p. 212).

Sahlstein and Dun (2008) analyzed eight heterosexual couples that had terminated their relationship. An examination of the idea of “I” and “we” was investigated. In a case study, couples stated that autonomy-connection differences had led to the termination of their relationship. As one male suggested, “I think she wanted more of my time than I was willing to give her” (pp. 40-41). In agreement, his ex-girlfriend stated, “I felt like we didn’t spend as much time together as we should. The ‘we’ identity kinda fell apart” (p. 41). Another couple did not feel the transformation of looking at themselves as us instead of me. As one female pointed out, “independence was more important” (p. 43).

In a longitudinal study, Felmlee, Sprecher, and Bassin (1990) surveyed undergraduate students involved in a romantic relationship. If by the end of the semester

the relationship had terminated, the participants answered the same questions as they did at the beginning of the semester in order to discover factors that were believed to have impacted the dissolution of the relationship. A distinction in race, lack of support from the partner's social network and the length of the relationship all were key influences that were perceived to contribute to the breakup. Moreover, time that the couple spent together was a significant predictor. Put simply, time spent together was viewed as investment and commitment to the relationship.

The phases or stages of discussed relational models may not always follow the allotted steps. A qualitative study of terminated heterosexual relationships (Baxter, 1984) implicated that not all relationships may be applied to a collective stage or relational process. Baxter argued, "A single set of stages or steps does not generalize to all, or even most, relationship dissolutions" (p. 43).

Moreover, a criticism of Knapp's relational model was that there is not specific system for concluding what relationship stage a relationship is in. Attempting to advance Knapp's model, Avtgis, West, and Anderson (1998) incorporated "cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of each stage" (p. 281). Three focus groups had participants respond to what they "thought, felt, and did" (p. 282) at different stages of Knapp's relationship model. This beginning research gave a better understanding into Knapp's specific relational stages.

Knapp and Duck both gave a detailed understanding of the complexity of relationships, especially when the relationship grows and then falls apart. Around the same time that Knapp and Duck were both working toward their relational models, an

additional group of communication scholars was examining the duration of relationships. Altman and Taylor (1973) created the theory of social penetration.

Social penetration theory

One of the most well known theories is social penetration theory (Taylor, 1968; Altman & Taylor, 1973). Social penetration theory suggests throughout a relationship, a continual process occurs within the development, maintenance, and potential deterioration of a relationship. Stated differently, a relationship is constantly changing and never stays at the same degree. According to the theory, an initiating relationship includes the following stages: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange.

In the orientation stage (similar to Knapp's initiation phase) when two people meet, only modest information is shared as beginning interactions occur. More than likely, two people will exchange names, where they are from and other trivial information. This stage focuses on solely getting to know basic information. If both parties are interested, the two people will make the decision to communicate in the future.

In the second stage, exploratory affective exchange, people start to comfortably communicate with one another. In this stage, people start to discover one another. The two will move past basic interactions and start to converse about personal topics. If positive communication occurs, this should lead to the third stage, affective exchange.

A growth of the exploratory stage, the affective exchange stage will continue to increase personal communication. The relationship will strengthen, and a decent amount of information is shared and reciprocated between both parties. Self-disclosure will occur

in the affective exchange stage. Romantic partners, best friends, and other close relationships are examples of relationships that reach the affective exchange stage.

The final stage of growth is stable exchange (which is similar to the bonding phase in Knapp's model). In this stage, two people are highly comfortable with one another and have formed an intimate bond. The two know each other quite well, and can generally predict how one another will react and communicate. Altman and Taylor (1973) proposed that as people continue to spend more time with one another, the relationship should continue to grow and the two should become closer.

Part of that growth involves the process of self-disclosure which may be defined as the opening of one's personal self to another. Altman and Taylor suggested that self-disclosure has two aspects; breadth and depth. Breadth is the amount of topics one may choose to talk about, whereas depth is the amount of information given about that topic. This theory is often associated with the metaphor of peeling an onion. Layer by layer, people reveal more and more about themselves. As self-disclosure takes place in the relationship (the depth and breadth of communication) a layer of unknown gets peeled off.

Altman and Taylor (1973) implied that as a relationship grows, disclosure should become more recurrent. Wheelless, Wheelless, and Baus (1984) hypothesized that the discussion of sexual satisfaction between partners would be significantly different depending on the couples' relational stage. Answering a questionnaire, the participants' results proved the assumptions correct. Communication was significantly lower between partners who were in the beginning stages of a relationship or in one that was close to being terminated.

Rubin, Rubin, and Martin (1993) predicted that people who are able to develop affinity in relationships have a tendency to self-disclose to increase the intimacy of the relationship. Affinity-seeking is “the process by which individuals attempt to get other people to like and to feel positive toward them” (p. 115). The scholars questioned, “When people develop relationships, is their self-disclosure related to their abilities to get others to like them? Is this influenced by how aware they are of their own thoughts and feelings and their own behavioral role?” (p. 116). The researchers found self-disclosure was indeed connected to affinity seeking. Rubin and associates pointed out, “People who see themselves as being able to make others like them report they disclose more good/positive things about themselves” (p. 124). This is important research because it shows that people need to be able to self-disclose positive information about oneself, as this may influence whether people see others in an affirmative way or not.

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory (Thibault & Kelley, 1959) is based upon a rewards and costs system. Put simply, people desire the need for relationships where the benefits outweigh the costs. In other words, are there more positives in this relationship as opposed to negatives? For example, if two people are in a romantic relationship and one person believes there are more negative factors than positive in their relationship, it is possible that this person’s social exchange may lead her to terminate the relationship.

Knapp’s relational development model, social exchange theory, and social penetration theory are three critical elements to understanding how intimate relationships develop and potentially terminate the way that they do. Although no two intimate relationships are identical, this information gives a basic knowledge on how relationships

grow and change over time. With work spouses potentially being an intimate relationship, it is important to examine if work spouses follow an established relational developmental model. Therefore, the third research question will ask:

RQ3: What is the impetus for work spouse relationships?

The preceding review of literature examined intimate relationships and communication. As people continue to begin and terminate relationships, the need for studying intimate relationships remains constant. “Although it is our desire to better understand intimate relationships, we do not ever expect to fully complete the task,” (Hendrick, Hendrick & Adler, 1988, p. 987). However, Montgomery (1984) pointed out, “What we choose to study and how we choose to study it are ultimately justified by an understanding of communication that will help intimates better achieve their communicative goals” (p. 324). With pop culture emphasizing a new work relationship known as a work spouse a substantial amount of scholarly questions arise. Are work spouses an intimate relationship? Moreover, what characteristics/dimensions describe work spouses? Additionally, do work spouse relationships influence other professional and personal relationships? And lastly, how do work spouse relationships develop? These types of questions should be examined through a qualitative lens to discover the unknown about this novel phenomenon. The following chapter will describe the methodology to discover the answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in the present study. In particular, this chapter explains the study, the participants, the sample size, delimitations of the study, the procedure used to acquire the data and verifications of qualitative research. As noted in the prior chapter in the literature review, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1a: Is a work spouse a unique type of intimate relationship?

RQ1b: What dimensions and characteristics of intimate relationships exist between work spouses?

RQ2a: How has having a work spouse affected the respondents' professional relationships?

RQ2b: How has having a work spouse affected the respondents' personal relationships?

RQ3: What is the impetus of work spouse relationships?

Phenomenological Studies

With little scholarly information known about work spouses, the researcher believed that a qualitative methodology was the best way to investigate the idea of work spouses. There are several definite characteristics of qualitative data research: participants' meanings, emergent design, theoretical lens, interpretive inquiry and holistic account (Creswell, 2007). The current research strongly focused on participants' meaning. Put simply, the researcher sought to gather data from participants that helped explain and give meaning to their work spouse relationship.

More specifically, in qualitative research the present research utilized a phenomenological approach. The researcher sought to discover the perceptions of participants who believe they have a work spouse and to understand how these relationships developed. With phenomenological studies, “the focus on this methodology is on understanding the unique lived experience of individuals by exploring the meaning of a phenomenon” (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012, p. 379). Since little empirical research has been established with work spouse relationships, “the lived experience can be a starting point in a phenomenological study” (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 5). Additionally, Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015) explained, “the general purpose of the phenomenological study is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth and reach at the essence of participants’ lived experience of the phenomenon” (p. 3). The main concept of a phenomenological study that was emphasized in this research was participants’ lived experiences with a work spouse relationship. Therefore, the focus of the current study was work spouses and the main objective of this phenomenological study was to examine these intimate relationships, their relational development and their communicative tactics. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how work spouses communicate with one another, express their gratitude and appreciation to one another and inquired about any potential positive or negative consequences.

Sample and Participants

Purposive sampling was used “to make sure [the researcher had] adequately understood the variation in the phenomena of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about that setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). Less than one-half of the people that contacted

the researcher and filled out the prequalifying survey met the requirements to be interviewed as a participant (five of the seven questions had to be answered with a yes). Thus, 30 individuals (24 females and six males) qualified and were interviewed for this research. The participants' ages ranged from 20-60 years old. Participants differed both geographically (from Michigan to Louisiana to Oregon) and also professionally (from education to marketing to the entertainment industry). It is important to note that if both partners in the assumed work spouse relationship agreed to be interviewed (not all did) participants were still interviewed individually, not together as the work spouse couple. This approach was used so that participants were more apt to speak freely and honestly about these intimate relationships.

The Institutional Review Board at The University of Southern Mississippi approved this study and the use of human subjects. In addition, a participant waiver was also approved through IRB. Participants signed the waiver after they acknowledged that they understood the study, risks and benefits and that they were participating voluntarily. To protect the identity of the participants, all names remained anonymous and a pseudonym was given to each participant. Lastly, once the data were collected, the researcher kept all data, transcripts and recordings in a locked environment in which only she had access to these files.

In terms of saturation in qualitative research, there is no universal number. In other words, there are not a minimum number of participants that must be interviewed in order to achieve the saturation of data. Guest, Bunst and Johnson (2006) examined saturation in qualitative research. Interviewing sixty women, their results discovered that saturation occurred quite early. They argue that if "the aim is to understand common

perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals, twelve interviews should suffice” (p. 79). Creswell (2010) suggested five to 25 participants. Thus, with a sample size of 30 participants, the researcher believed an adequate number of participants were interviewed for the current study.

Delimitations

Only people in a work spouse relationship were included in the study. Additionally, participants had to be over the age of 18. Lastly, since the focus of this study was on work spouse relationships, data about other types of relationships were only analyzed in relation to this potential relationship type.

Procedure

Through a snowball sampling method, the researcher sought out presumed work spouses and contacted these potential participants through social media and email. The initial Facebook post and email are provided below (see Appendix A).

Before the qualitative interviews took place, it was imperative that the researcher made sure that the potential participants did indeed have a close friendship at the workplace that met the preconceived notion of a work spouse. Therefore, potential participants who contacted the researcher completed an informal work spouse quiz in order to determine if they fit the work spouse criteria (see Appendix B). The seven questions were created based on the descriptions popular media has used to describe what a work spouse is. Based on their answers, the researcher determined if this person did have a potential work spouse and was able to be a participant in the current study. If a potential participant answered yes to at least five out of the seven questions, the researcher contacted the person to inquire if she would be interested in being interviewed

for the study. If the participant was willing, the researcher then set up a time to interview the participant.

The In-Depth Interview

An in-depth interview searches for thick, descriptive data when not much is known about a particular topic. “The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, pp.128-129). Both in-person and Skype/Facetime recorded interviews took place in mutually agreed upon locations. Interviews ranged between 25 to 60 minutes. The present study used a structured interview process. Stated differently, each participant was asked the same 11 open-ended questions, concerning their thoughts about their perceived work spouse (see Appendix C).

The overall goal was to get the participants to reflect on their interactions with their work spouse and thus self-disclose their feelings and thoughts about their relationship with their work spouse. In other words, the present study sought to understand how someone communicates with his or her work spouse, how one expresses his or her appreciation for the close relationship, and how one manages the potential effects this relationship may have with colleagues and loved ones.

Analysis

After each interview, the researcher listened and transcribed the interview. The interviews were then uploaded into the qualitative program NVivo (version 10). NVivo is a software program designed to assist in the sorting, organizing, and classifying of qualitative data into themes. “Coding data around themes is a key characteristic of

qualitative research” (Castleberry, 2014, p. 1). Also, the transcribed data was also examined for themes through the usage of Owen’s interpretative themes criteria. Owen (1984) states that reoccurrence, repetition, and forcefulness are three ways of identifying a theme. Reoccurrence occurs if the same idea is mentioned numerous times. In regards to repetition, this may be defined as when the word or phrase is mentioned more than twice. Lastly, forcefulness may be defined as when a participant (through verbal or nonverbal communication) places a strong emphasis on a particular word or topic.

It is important to note that quotations taken from the participants are verbatim. The researcher wanted the participants natural voices to be heard. Thus, grammar, foul language, etc., were not edited. In addition, a quotation could be coded in more than one area. In other words, examples could be associated with more than one theme and/or subtheme.

Verification in Qualitative Research

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2008) defined verification as “the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain” (p. 17). That is, the means used throughout research to safeguard reliability, validity and the rigor of a study. Investigator responsiveness emphasizes that the researcher must “remain open, use sensitivity, creativity and insight, and be willing to relinquish any ideas that are poorly supported regardless of the excitement and the potential that they first appear to provide” (p. 18). Moreover, a researcher must truly listen to the data, not solely what she wants to hear. Supplementary verification in qualitative research includes: methodological coherence, appropriate respondents, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, and theory development.

Methodological coherence suggests that the research questions and the method must align with the data and analytical procedures. Furthermore, the researcher must understand that modifications within the sampling and methods may occur. Secondly, the sample must be appropriate with “participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008, p. 18). A prequalifying informal survey was distributed to individuals who contacted the researcher inquiring about the study. Five of the seven questions had to be answered in agreement for the individuals to be perceived as having a work spouse relationship and thus qualify for the in-depth interviews. Thirdly, collecting and analyzing data are essential to verification in qualitative research. Next is thinking theoretically. As Morse and colleagues (2008) pointed out “thinking theoretically requires macro-micro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation” (p. 18). Lastly, in terms of verification, the potential of theory development must occur.

This chapter explained the qualitative methodology used in the present study. The participants, sample size, delimitations of the study, the procedure used to obtain the data and the verifications of qualitative research were all described. Next, the following chapter includes the presentation and analysis of the data. Thematic analysis including the discovery and categorization of common themes and subthemes found between the participants will be discussed, along with the answering of the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter explains the findings of the current study organized by research questions. Emergent themes and subthemes associated with the concept of work spouses will be discussed. Furthermore, examples of how these intimate relationships occur will be illustrated by the participants' thoughts.

Is a work spouse a unique type of intimate relationship?

The results found that the majority of the participants believed their work spouse to be a unique type of intimate relationship. In relation to the notion of intimacy, Luarenceau and colleagues (2005) described intimacy as “a feeling of closeness and connectedness” (p. 314). Both closeness (in terms of physically and emotionally) and having a connection were two themes discovered. Furthermore, Phillips (1976) suggested uniqueness and commonalities are two major characteristics of intimate relationships. In agreement, the current participants often described their work spouse relationship and the commonalities that led them to becoming close and additionally defining the relationship as unique, rare and special.

Participants frequently explained the uniqueness of the relationship in a variety of ways. Exclusivity was one concept that separated work spouses from standard coworker relationships. Exclusivity is the idea that the relationship these two coworkers have is not like a relationship one has with anyone else in the workplace. Elsa for example stated, “I actually think that the other two in the office could be somewhat jealous of our relationship. They tried to form a similar bond with one or both of us and it's not as

easy.” In addition Kalyn claimed, “I don’t have that kind of relationship with anybody else in the office.” Moreover Kara indicated, “This is not just a work relationship.”

On the contrary, although exclusivity was discovered as a theme, comparisons with other intimate relationships were also uncovered. Comparisons may be defined as a theme in which participants describe their work spouse relationship and equate it with an already known intimate relationship. For instance, many participants associated their work spouse relationship to a family-type of intimacy. Buffy for example, often told her work spouse “I feel like I am your other daughter.” Courtney suggested, “She’s like the little sister I never had.” Terry believed it to be “almost like a brotherhood.” Additional participants categorized their work spouse relationship to a romantic relationship. Amber, when asked about her feelings about her having a work spouse stated, “I guess it’s kinda true though because we kinda have that relationship like a spouse.” In agreement Dave proclaimed that his work spouse relationship was “kinda like a dating relationship.”

Lastly, although the majority of the participants believed their work spouse relationships are unique, a few did not perceive it that way. Tina reasoned, “He’s just a colleague, and we don’t necessarily hang out after work.” Liz explained, “I’m constantly rotating between different groups of people.” Additionally, numerous participants believed that either she or her work spouse had more than one partner, therefore, not making it solely a unique relationship.

The first part of research question one inquired about a work spouse being a unique intimate relationship. The majority of the participants believed it to be unique. The preponderance of the collected data suggest that work spouses are indeed an additional type of intimate relationship that differs from a coworker, a friend or family

member. Now that work spouse relationships have been defined as a unique type of intimate relationship, the second part of research question one will explain what features a work spouse has to make it unique. The organization of research question 1b will begin with a description of the major themes, followed by an explanation of the subthemes.

What dimensions and characteristics of intimate relationships
exist between work spouses?

The five themes discovered included: spending time outside of work, the importance of the relationship, comparisons of other intimate relationships, positives of work spouses and negatives of work spouses. Below is a table with the themes and the subthemes that support them.

Table 1

Dimensions and Characteristics Found Between Work Spouses

| <i>Theme</i> | Subthemes |
|--|--|
| <i>Spending Time Outside of Work</i> | Recognition of important events, meals, similar interests, talking outside of work and post-work relationship. |
| <i>Importance of Relationship</i> | Emotional attachment, connection, self-disclosure, appreciation, trust, respect, honesty, transformation, love and affection. |
| <i>Comparisons of Other Intimate Relationships</i> | Family and friends. |
| <i>Positives of Work Spouses</i> | Makes work more enjoyable, the uniqueness of the relationship, similar viewpoints, jokes, work closely, favors, gifts, will do anything for me and will stick up for me. |
| <i>Negatives of Work Spouses</i> | Conflict, difficulties at work and would potentially quit if work spouse left. |

Spending Time Outside of Work

The first major theme that was discovered in describing a work spouse was the idea that work spouses spend a considerable amount of time outside of work with one another (see Table 1). Subthemes included: the recognition of important events, meals, similar interests, talking outside of work and post-work relationships. Work spouses do not solely have a relationship inside the office, but also outside of the eight to five workday. As Devon stated, “We are good friends outside of work and know a lot about our personal lives. She threw me a baby shower for my daughter Jayden and I go to her kids’ soccer games.” Moreover, she explained, “Pretty much every day on the way home from work we call each other to debrief about the day.” In agreement, Terry suggested, “The fun things happen after five o’clock” with his work spouse. Vacations, church and weekly meals are a given within his work spouse relationship.

The recognition of important life events was a subtheme found between work spouses. Both joys (e.g., engagements, baby showers, or graduations) and tribulations (e.g., divorce or deaths) were discussed. Nikki explained, “In the fourteen months we’ve worked together, we’ve both had deaths in our families, we’ve had fun joys too, where we’ve had vacations, celebrations, those kinds of things to talk and share about.” In agreement Ella stated, “She was there when I got into my new relationship; she was there when my stepbrother passed away. I had to talk to somebody about it. It happened naturally, and she was there.”

The next subtheme was meals. Lunches, coffee dates, happy hour and dinners represent an additional theme discovered within work spouses. Several participants explained that this was a daily routine. Brad stated, “We go to coffee everyday;

everybody sees us leave. We'll do lunch sometimes." Kalyn expressed, "We're very in sync with each other's eating habits." And Buffy explained,

I always know when I get this one salad I can never eat the tuna. So I was laughing today, because I knew I was going to be doing this interview. Well we went to lunch, and without a break in conversation, I took my fork, scooped up the tuna and put it on his salad.

Hence, work spouse relationships do not solely stay at the office and during meal breaks; work spouses may often go together.

Similar shared interests were an additional subtheme that brought the colleagues closer as work spouses. The mutual enjoyment of music artists, television shows, shopping, working out and other social activities were expressed by participants. In addition, commonalities within age and family were also a similar interest factor. Bobbi Jo explained,

We have families the same age, kids the same age, we started working out together. We started going on walks around the campus, then working out after work, occasional lunches, that kind of thing. Just through talking at work. We've always had the same boss and we have the same job title. We just started talking. We have lots of things in common, we graduated the same year, just started hanging out. Just all the commonalities. I think the drawing force was we're exactly the same age, grew up in very similar families and have very similar families now. We have the same issues, the same concerns. There's very little separation.

Sandy claimed,

We both have similar interests, we enjoy similar things. We're very simpatico when it comes to how we look at things and our personalities, which is another reason why I think we work really well together and have such a strong relationship outside of the office.

Liz expressed,

We started going to comic conventions together. We have the same geeky interests and all of that. We both love a particular comic character, so we did a themed birthday for her. We are fans of the same television show. We have a shared Amazon shopping cart. There aren't too many coworkers that will geek out with me and that's what kind of separates her from the rest.

Talking frequently outside of the office was the next subtheme uncovered.

Numerous participants described the fact that they talk to their work spouse simply not on solely a Monday-Friday, 8-5 basis. For example, Devon explained that her work spouse and her talk daily to and from work on their commute. Nikki stated,

We'll text each other if one of us is out of the office, or at night if we know something is going on in our personal life. We'll check in, call each other, those kinds of things that go beyond just normal communication in the workplace.

And Courtney discussed, "The ongoing texts that just kinda go throughout the weekend. It's the continuing conversation--99% personal things, family things, stuff like that."

Lastly, the idea of maintaining a relationship if one or the other left their current place of employment was an additional subtheme found. Ella explained, "Emotionally I would definitely say we're attached. I would say that hopefully even when we're no

longer working together we would still stay in each other's lives because we do know about each other's significant others and families." Chelsea stated, "If I wasn't here, we would still be as close as we are now. There's been other jobs applied for, we would definitely still stay in touch." Lastly Nikki proclaimed, "If I no longer worked with this person, I would still want to know how her day was going, how she's doing, how she's enjoying life, those kinds of things." This subtheme is reflective of the idea that work-spouse relationships exist over the long-term.

Importance of the Relationship

The second theme that was uncovered was the recognition of the importance of the relationship. Subthemes found under this category include: emotional attachment, connection, self-disclosure, appreciation, trust, respect, honesty, transformation, love and affection. The majority of the participants explained how much their work spouse meant to them, both inside and outside of the office. In other words, their work spouse relationship means a great deal to them in a similar way that other intimate relationships do. Marissa explained,

The strength in that relationship has brought me to a lot of good places. If either one of us is having a bad day or a great day to have that person available to share with one way or the other is wonderful. If something were to happen, not having the access to Nancy would be harmful to me. At fifty, I don't need to be friends with everybody. I don't have to have everybody's approval. Figuring out that the significant relationships that add significant value and happiness to my life and the importance of that is one of the things I have found with my relationship in Nancy. What it physically does, the positive reinforcement, spiritually. I have

found that it's added to my mental health and my physical health. Is it a negative that if my girlfriend is sad I feel sad? Yes but no, to be able to have that connection with someone. To have that person that loves us like that. They love us and don't want us to hurt. When you are that emotionally connected to someone or vice versa, there's a potential that hurts. But the flipside is way too expensive to not have that.

Moreover, Dave expresses the importance of his work spouse constantly,

Let's face it at the end of the day relationships are built and reinforced on trust and respect. I am not afraid to tell her how valuable she is to me, how much I appreciate her, thanking her regularly. She's one of the few people that puts up with my shit.

Elsa claimed,

I mean she's one of the people along with my best friend and fiancé; she's in the inner circle. I'm very private and don't share with a lot of people. When I do, I pick and choose who does know things, and she's one of those.

Regardless of how they chose to express the thought, the majority did value their relationship and highlighted its importance.

The first subtheme is emotional attachment. An emotional attachment may be defined as a closeness that one another feel toward each other and their well-being. Kara proclaimed, "I feel like I connect with her within her heart. Things that make her upset, I get upset for her . . . connecting with her emotions . . . feeling her feelings. If something were to happen to her, I can't imagine, honestly." Additionally, Tyler indicated,

I care if she's happy or if she's upset. Just as much as I would with any really, really close friend. I mean you start to feel like a family. You care about all aspects of their life. You care if their kids are happy and what's going on.

And Marissa explained,

I would say she means the world to me. And I say that because I am not a person that opens up easily and I am not a person who is silly easily and I am not a person who is easy to ask for help. With Nancy having that ridiculously safe place to be those things. I can see myself one time in her kitchen literally sliding down the wall in tears. Being afraid inside me, of how I was going to be perceived and having that not reflected back in their eyes. That all they cared about was that their friend felt broken. To quantify what having that person, that strength, in my corner, it is kinda hard to do. It's a constant. I can't really say what she means to me and to my life. It has been immeasurable I believe.

Having a connection to their work spouse was the next subtheme uncovered. As Jerry pointed out, "Basically for a long time our lives were intertwined. So basically our families were connected together." Courtney discussed that difficulties with a previous manager connected her and her work spouse, stating, "We're in this together and we will figure this out." Chelsea illustrated, "Even my family has a connection to her and know the importance of our friendship." Whereas Dave expressed, "I feel comfortable sharing certain things with Buffy far more than with my wife." Bobbi Jo stated, "We're kind of a tandem pair. It appears that work spouses are different from other work-based relationships because the two's lives become much more interconnected."

Self-disclosure was the next subtheme found in the importance of the work spouse relationship. Self-disclosure may be defined as intentionally telling information about one's self to another person. Karen pointed out, "There are not very many people you can tell your life story to and you know it's not going any further and they're not going to judge you." Meanwhile, Nancy expressed, "I find her very easy to confide in and I really respect her opinion and viewpoints about things and that goes both at work and personally. With our kids, our spouses, with work relationships, things like that." Courtney explained that her work spouse's breakup was a source of self-disclosure within their work spouse relationship.

I would say when she and her boyfriend broke up that intensified it (the relationship) to another level, because I had had a wedding called off and that was really ugly. Being able to give her some insight of like, 'Life will go on, you're gonna be fine, you can do this.' To give that kind of support, that's where we crossed the level of like just professional stuff.

An appreciation for one another and the relationship was the next subtheme. Appreciation may be defined as showing one's work spouse that they are thankful and grateful for this relationship. Karen articulated, "I've given her thank you cards; I've given her hugs. Just saying that you really appreciate what they do, above and beyond of what they need to. We do anything that we can to help each other out." Jerry simply states his appreciation for his work spouse, "Directly telling him that I appreciate him and I think that continuing to work with him is another way (to show my appreciation). We buy each other gifts and spend time with one another."

Crystal described,

If I go get coffee in the morning, I will grab her a small coffee and put it on her desk, things like that. For birthdays, Christmas, different little things like gift cards to say thank you. Or even simple texts, thank you cards. Just saying hey I really appreciate you.

The next subtheme discovered was trust between work spouses. Many of the participants exclaimed that they could tell their work spouses anything and know that it was between just the two of them and that they would not be judged. Put simply, Jocelyn claimed, “He’s definitely someone I can confide in and trust, both professionally and personally.” Terry described a specific occurrence in his personal life in which his relationship with his coworker strengthened due to trust.

I think anytime you go through an experience where you’re really at your basest, you are really exposed and vulnerable, and I think anytime a person shows that sort of side to someone else obviously you trust that person to be in that situation and I think that really builds on it.

Sue explained, “Because they also work in the same environment as you do if you need to bounce something off of them, they have an understanding of your work life really well. It’s a feeling of security at work, that you have a colleague that is a confidant in work.” Trusting one’s work spouse with both personal and professional issues and information is a key factor that separates an average coworker from a work spouse.

Comparable to trust, respect was the next subtheme. The participants frequently described mutual respect for their work spouse, both professionally and personally. For example, Nancy explained, “I find her very easy to confide in, and I really respect her

opinion and viewpoints about things, and that goes at work and personally . . . with our kids, our spouses, with work relationships, things like that.” Sandy stated,

The partnership that I have with this particular individual, well I tend to overwork. She is very cognizant of my stress levels and is encouraging of my personal time and respects that and also encourages me to turn off and relax. She’s allowed me to feel that I can take that break. I think that’s one of the reasons I hold her in such high esteem. She’s been respectful and doesn’t treat me like my time is less valuable than hers. Not only does she show that she respects me, but I feel that she respects me through her actions.

Thus, the importance of respect is apparent in work spouse relationships.

Honesty was the next subtheme uncovered. Jerry illustrated this concept by saying,

Part of it is the honesty thing. We definitely don’t feel like we hold back information from one another; so I think we would pretty much overtly deal with the conflict, whatever it might be. I would say for the most we’re pretty accommodating. If he said don’t do this, I would say ok. We really don’t have anything that hangs over our heads. The other thing that’s good is we don’t have hidden agendas. We’re very transparent about what we are thinking. He is also the person who taught me, if you backstab someone you have to tell them. All backstabs have to turn into front stabs. I guess the idea is if you have something bad to say to somebody, you should say it to their face.

Moreover, Sandy stated, “I can be very honest and open with her, without fear of repercussion. Which allows me to be brutally honest and she allows me to vent. I don’t

feel held back to keep my comments to myself.” Liz declared, “I really like and enjoy that she can be honest. She doesn’t have to worry about stepping on my toes.”

The process of transformation was another subtheme that arose in the recognition of the importance of the relationship. In other words, the influence a work spouse has on the individual changes the person. Terry explained,

I’d like to think that just because of the way he is, he’s helped me to be a better person. Help me in my personal life and to understand things. He’s very honest. Sometimes it’s hard to hear about your own faults and shortcomings. I feel like I’m really blessed to have someone in my life who I trust as much as I do. He’s much more sympathetic and thoughtful and caring. By being a friend with this person, I’m able to pick up on these traits. It’s helped me mellow out a little bit.

Kara reiterated the theme,

The personal growth she’s helped me achieve. Really just helping me find who I am. Where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do, who I wanted to be. Having more confidence and grounding with her guidance, she helped me become me.

Sue expressed, “I guess it enhances (my life) in that I have been extended the opportunity to meet her good friends as well. So it’s increased my personal, social life, broadened my circle. It’s like a career enhancement.” Thus, transformation due to having a work spouse is apparent. Put simply, work spouse relationships enrich one another’s lives and at times inspire the other to be the best version of her.

Feeling love, expressing love and showing demonstrations of love was the next theme uncovered. Buffy expressed, “I love him. I feel very blessed to have the relationship that I do with Dave.” Terry described his work spouse as one he “holds

nearest and dearest to my heart.” Karen recalled a time at work when her work spouse unconsciously stated her love. “She called me, we were at work, and she went to hang up and said, ‘Ok bye, love you.’ She says ‘I only say that to my family when I hang up.’ And I said, ‘That’s ok, I love you too.’” Sue explained her love as “a mutual respect, admiration, and I suppose I could equate love to that relationship too, as I would as a sister.” Perhaps this type of relationship would not be described as spousal if a high degree of love did not exist.

The last subtheme for the importance of a work spouse relationship was affection. Examples included both nonverbal and verbal communication. For instance, giving hugs and verbalizing affection were frequently discussed within work spouse relationships. Kara expressed,

I feel like I connect with her within her heart. Things that make her upset, I get upset for her. Connecting with her emotions. Feeling her feelings. If something were to happen to her, I can’t imagine, honestly. And just think this friendship is all thanks to work-it’s crazy.

Ella stated, “Every time I see her, I’ll give her a big hug.” Liz countered, “I’m not much of a hugger, I punch people on the arm. She knows that’s my hug, she’ll punch me back.” And Dave explained that when Buffy was looking for a different job, he showed his affection and care for her by letting her know, “I care more about you as a human being and so therefore I want to make sure I can help you achieve your goals and desires in life.” Therefore, affection whether shown verbally or nonverbally is repeatedly revealed in work spouse relationships. In sum, it is apparent that work spouse relationships are quite valued by the participants.

Comparisons of Other Intimate Relationships

The third theme discovered was the comparison of other intimate relationships. When describing their work spouse relationship, participants frequently compared the relationship to other types of intimate relationships. Subthemes included: family and friends.

Comparing a work spouse to a family member was the first subtheme found in the interviews. Many compared their work spouse relationship to a sibling relationship. Terry explained, “It’s almost like a brotherhood.” Devon expressed the fact that people outside of the workplace had numerous times asked if they were sisters. Tina expressed a family relationship also. “I’ll go to him for advice in a fatherly/brotherly role.” Elsa expressed, “She’s like my big sister at work and refers to me as her little sister.” Tyler declared, “You start to feel like a family.” Certainly, work spouses have strong, long-term relationships, similar to familial bonds.

The next subtheme is the description of their work spouse relationship as a friendship. Numerous participants called their work spouse a friend or gave metaphors that define a friendship. Bobby stated,

They’re a really good friend and I could see them being a friend for a really long time. It’s a long-term friendship. I think it’s someone that you wouldn’t mind to travel to see them. I think the friendship is something that I’m proud of.

Jocelyn explained,

I think if he ever left the organization, I would be really sad. I’d feel like I lost my best friend. He means a lot to me. He’s that one person I can truly count on and will receive honest feedback and I’ll always receive his support.

Positives of a Work Spouse Relationship

The next theme was the positives of having a work spouse relationship. Put simply, there are many benefits to having a work spouse relationship. Subthemes included: makes work more enjoyable, the uniqueness of the relationship, similar viewpoints, jokes, working closely, favors, gifts, will do anything for me and will stick up for me.

The first subtheme was making work more enjoyable. As Bobbi Jo illustrated, “We laugh a lot; that makes work tolerable. There’s no disadvantage to having someone to commiserate with, and to complain with and to laugh with.” Kalyn explained,

Whenever she’s not there my workdays not nearly as much fun. I don’t have that kind of relationship with anybody else in the office. It’s fun to have somebody at work; it makes the day so much better. I have a good time; we laugh all the time. It’s good to have your posse at work.”

Brad stated,

To have that person, say quit, it would be unfortunate because our group is so cohesive. It’s a good work environment and I do enjoy coming to work. If that one person were to go away, the dynamics would change pretty dramatically.

Judy simply stated, “It makes you go to work on days where you don’t want to.”

The next subtheme found was a work spouse relationship being unique.

Numerous participants talked about the rarity of a work spouse relationship. Put simply, it is not just another friendship. Chelsea offered,

I’m not necessarily good friends with people I work with. Good coworkers and good friends are two very opposite things. Very rarely do you find that you have

coworkers that are good friends. We can cuss each other out at work and we're friends after five o'clock. I've never had it before and probably won't find it again, I think it's very rare to find. I don't think you get friendships like this out of work a whole lot. It's rare that you can find someone that you work so well with and are so close. Most people can't separate it, which is why I don't encourage it, but it happened.

Buffy stated, "It's really cool, because I feel very blessed to have a relationship like that with my boss because I know it's very rare." Tyler described the uniqueness of the relationship in comparison with his actual spouse; "I probably talk to her a half an hour on the phone. Which is interesting because there's no way I talk to my wife for a half an hour a day." Kristin explained,

When I started back to work fulltime, I was going through a tough time. I had just gotten separated. I felt not very valued. She just made me feel like I was a fun person to be around and that meant a lot at that time. And I was so grateful. Even now, when I go through tough times in life she's there, she's my person. I feel like in life you're given very few people that really get you. And she's probably one of the best friends I've ever had. She's kinda my go-to person, if things are not going well she's probably one of the first three people I call. Or if things are going well, she's probably one of the first three people I call.

Bobbi Jo explained,

Everyone else I'm very separated from. In fact our relationship would be the only relationship I would feel I was leaving if I quit. Everyone can be replaced. I don't have a relationship with work, I can leave at anytime."

Consequently, these statements support the debate of the rarity of a work spouse relationship. Simply put, a work spouse relationship is uncommon and unusual.

Having similar viewpoints was an additional subtheme found within work spouses. Viewpoints, both within and out of the office, were described. Sandy stated, “We’re very simpatico when it comes to how we look at things and our personalities, which is another reason why I think we work really well together and have such a strong relationship outside of the office.” Marissa expressed, “Our core value levels are pretty simpatico with each other about things that we value, things that we feel are important. Those have always been very easy, that shared experience.” Lastly, Buffy claimed, “We see things very similarly.” Work spouses appear to have similar points of view both within and outside of the work environment.

A similar sense of humor, sarcasm and shared jokes were a frequent incident that occurs between work spouses. Approximately 75% of the participants discussed having a similar sense of humor with their work spouse. As Jocelyn explained, “Inappropriate jokes . . . like he and I don’t need a filter around one another, and we’re very sarcastic with each other. We can joke about things with one another that might be crossing a line with another coworker.” Moreover, jokes about coworkers were an additional common occurrence including the exchanging of codenames or slang for these colleagues.

An additional subtheme recognized was the amount of time working with one another in a close environment. As Bobbi Jo expressed, “You spend forty hours a week with somebody and it’s really easy to have a significant other, I guess.” Tyler explained,

I think it’s just the forced interaction of how close you to sit to somebody. If you sit ten feet from somebody, you know what they eat for lunch, what they eat for

breakfast. You hear exciting news when they get a good phone call; you hear about bad news when they get a bad phone call. When sitting close to somebody, you know everything about them for nine hours a day and vice versa.

Nikki stated,

You know when I was going through orientation at work, I had just had a baby, and the person at orientation said “these people you’re going to spend more time with them, then you will at home.” And it is true. You spend more time with your coworkers than your loved ones at home.

Favors both in and out of the office were also common and emerged as a subtheme. A majority of the participants discussed their work spouse taking care of a pet while out of town. In addition, Elsa stated, “I check on her when she’s sick; I’ll bring her things when she’s sick.” And Bobbi Jo explained helping her work spouse with her side job of selling homemade items, “She’s shy in the public so she really needs someone to be her front man at these bazaars, and so I show up to be that for her.”

Others described favors that occur within the workplace. Bobby explained, “She would cover for me if I had strep throat or she had a bad breakup and didn’t feel like she could go out in public, I took her shift.” Karen stated, “We do anything that we can to help each other out. We just make sure to take the time to ask and offer to help.” Sue discussed a reciprocal working relationship, “If I do this for you, you can do this for me, and we can both accomplish our tasks.” Therefore, it may be argued that a work spouse will go above and beyond their day-to-day requirements to make sure that her work spouse is successful.

The giving and receiving of gifts was an additional subtheme discovered within work spouse relationships. Numerous participants explained they exchanged Christmas gifts, birthday gifts and simple items that they realized their work spouse would enjoy. For example, Elsa's work spouse acknowledged their mutual liking of a particular band, and she therefore bought her a t-shirt when she went to one of their concerts. Anna stated, "I bought her a package of sarcastic sticky notes in Minnesota, because she's one of the few people who would appreciate it." Crystal exclaimed, "If I go get coffee in the morning, I will grab her a small coffee and put it on her desk, things like that. For birthdays, gift cards, Christmas, different little things." Gift seem to be an outward symbolic expression of the importance of the work spouse relationship.

Next, the willingness to do anything for one another was an additional subtheme. Stated simply, work spouses want to and feel the need to meet the needs of their work spouses. Crystal believed, "She would go above and beyond." Terry specifically stated, "He would do anything for me, and I would do anything for him." Amber exclaimed, "I go outta my way to help her." And Kristin compared it to, "Almost like family, you know I know can depend on her for anything and likewise she can depend on me for anything." As a result, work spouses are found to go above and beyond for their work spouse, both inside and outside of the workplace.

Lastly, comparable to going above and beyond, the final subtheme was sticking up for a work spouse if need be. That is, defending one another possibly to a supervisor, colleague or even a client. Several participants discussed having one another's back. Bobbi Jo stated, "I think she'd defend me because she'd be defending herself. We feel the same way about the same things." Sandy explained, "In situations she's quick to stick up

for the things I do well and quick to bring positive light to the things I necessarily wasn't seeking credit for." And Courtney recalled a time where her supervisor was blaming her work spouse unfairly.

The fact that I went in there and stuck up for her and said don't blame this on her. If you're gonna be mad at somebody, just put it all on me. I can take it. It's like then I knew we were in this together.

There are many advantages to having a work spouse relationship. However, similar to other intimate relationships, negatives of a work spouse relationship are also apparent.

Negatives of a Work Spouse Relationship

The final main theme uncovered were negatives due to the work spouse relationship. Put simply, these types of relationships were not valued and respected by all. Subthemes included: conflict, difficulties at work and would potentially quit if one's work spouse left. Many of the participants believed other colleagues were jealous of the closeness the work spouses had. Crystal described an occurrence of conflict where a coworker expressed frustration about the closeness between Crystal and her work spouse. "There was a time last year where we went to a winery and that next day at lunch another coworker started attacking me. Stating you guys do all this stuff on your own and you don't think of others." The existence of this type of relationship appears to evoke some negative emotions among others in the work environment.

Crystal described,

One day she came to me and said something to the effect of 'Do you ever feel less superior than these other women?' Good old girl drama! And she broke down and

said she felt so uncomfortable. From then on she could come in and kinda confide in me.

Others described how they had more conflict with their work spouse because of the close bond they held. Terry discussed,

I think part of the reason we are, in my opinion, great friends is because we can argue. We do have the ability to disagree and move on and not let a disagreement or argument affect the overall atmosphere of our friendship. There are some things I feel very strongly about and some things he feels strongly about.

Kristin explained,

We know our friendship is more important than any disagreement we're having. It's awful when we have a disagreement. We agree on so many things that when we do disagree on something, it's like amplified; you know? It just doesn't make sense to me, because we agree on so many things.

While conflict at work is not unusual, the interpersonal closeness makes dealing with the conflict more complex.

Difficulties at work were the next subtheme. Difficulties at work may include conflict with one's work spouse or other coworkers, however it is not limited solely to conflict. Unrealistic expectations from others, time consuming projects and demanding supervisors may also define difficulties at work. Devon explained,

Sometimes if we disagree at work I feel like I get more mad because I feel like we're supposed to be on the same page. So when we have our disagreements, I don't know . . . We have to talk it out a little longer I guess.

Jane illustrated, “We have a friendship, but I’m still her boss. Because I think she has other friendships that she builds upon so when her feelings are hurt, she goes somewhere else. It’s a tangled, working relationship.” Kara stated,

There are some things at work, where I don’t understand or she’s not understanding and we’re trying to communicate to each other. We’re pretty blunt with each other. Sometimes I honestly think to myself “she’s being a bitch today but whatever, I’m good.” I think we can tell with each other when it’s getting to the point of being too on edge.

Additionally, Kalyn expressed,

I find myself a lot of the time kinda embarrassed with how she acts with my other coworkers. She’ll just be downright rude to them and I have to kinda be this go between. I think it affects the whole dynamic; we’re not a huge staff. Everybody is in everybody’s business essentially.

As Buffy explained,

Negatively it was hard when I was looking for another job because I was feeling the pressure from my husband to find another job and move on. Even after Dave and I made changes to my current position, I feel like my husband’s still disappointed that I wasn’t able to leave Dave. It’s way harder to leave someone you like than like a dick boss—you know? I don’t know how or when that’ll happen, and I don’t think it would ruin Dave and I’s relationship, but it’ll just hurt way more.

In agreement, Kristin illustrated,

I am so comfortable where I am. I like my boss, most of the time, and just having your best buddy there when you go to work makes you . . . you don't want to change what you're doing. I could apply for other opportunities, but I've kinda been like no I'm good. It's a comfortable place to be where I don't look elsewhere...maybe this is an element of not growing professionally, because I'm comfortable where I am. If you have a place where you're fairly happy to spend eight-nine-ten hours a day though, then you're pretty lucky.

The last subtheme discovered was the interdependency of one's work spouse and the influence of the other's want to be at the job. Put simply, several participants stated that they could see themselves quitting if their work spouse left their job and/or vice versa. Bobbi Jo explained, "We often joke that when one of us goes, we'll both go. I have a feeling if I put in my two weeks' notice, hers would follow immediately." Tyler recalled, "We had a shitty boss's boss, if she would have quit, in the middle of that, consciously or subconsciously, I would have thought more about leaving." And Elsa stated, "I've threatened that if she went to a new job, I would leave as well. It'd be miserable without her."

In sum, the participants expressed that the work spouse relationship is of high importance, both inside and outside of the office. Furthermore, though it is viewed as unique, it was also compared to other intimate relationships. Lastly, a work spouse relationship has both positive and negative attributions. Taking these dimensions and characteristics that exist between work spouses, an emergent definition of work spouses was discovered in the current research. The data describe a work spouse as a coworker

someone is invested in, both inside and outside of the work place, as a valued, long-term, intimate partner. A work spouse is not just a close coworker, but a genuine companion that one seeks to spend quality time with, not solely during working hours, Monday through Friday. Moreover, work spouse relationships are intimate relationships consisting of high levels of emotional attachment, trust, and respect. Lastly, these unique relationships are often built upon similarities found between the two people; including comparable humor, interests, activities and viewpoints.

How has having a work spouse affected the respondents' professional relationships?

Now that work spouse dimensions and characteristics have been explained, the second research question asked how these unique relationships affect additional relationships. The applicable subthemes are organized by positive and negative effects of having a work spouse. In other words, each theme and/or subtheme conveys both positive and negative aspects. Thus, the following themes and subthemes will be discussed in relation to the work spouses' positive and negative influence within additional professional relationships.

Affection

Affection may take a verbal or nonverbal communication approach. Although most work organizations have a policy on public displays of affection, work spouses still appear to partake in some outward displays of affection. As Devon explained, "I sneak up behind her and hug her sometimes. Even though my boss always says we're not allowed to touch each other!" Myers and colleagues (2011) examined affectionate communication, and statements about love were an important factor. In the present research, Karen recalled a time when her work spouse accidentally said, "I love you" on

the phone. Now she is often teased by Karen's boss about inadvertently saying "I love you." Therefore, although affection may be a positive, certainly negative aspects of affection exist in the workplace.

Appreciation

Appreciating one's work spouse may lead to intentional or unintentional gratuities. For example, part of Devon's job is handing out awards to coworkers who are excelling at their job. Devon admitted that perhaps she consciously or unconsciously rewards her work spouse more than others. Jane's work spouse receives goodie bags, whereas other coworkers do not. Jane explained, "I just make sure I always try to appreciate her." Yet if one were to notice that Devon gives more awards to her work spouse than others, a point of contention could certainly occur. Consequently, these acts of appreciation may be viewed as both good and bad in the workplace. Therefore, appreciation may possibly impact the workplace both positively and negatively.

Conflict

As stated previously, conflict with others at work or conflict between the work spouses themselves occurs frequently. This conflict often influences other professional relationships both positively and negatively. For instance, Courtney's close relationship with her work spouse constantly brings contention to the small organization.

She expressed,

I would say that's a source of problems. Whether it's an annoyance . . . Well I think for one coworker it's somewhat jealousy based and for another I think it's annoyance. I try to play it down sometimes and purposefully not be in her office

and not do things. Sometimes it's just really hard though. It's never been specifically addressed by anyone. They don't realize all the benefits to it.

Kara stated that due to the close relationship she has with her work spouse, conflict occurs because the two can be upfront with one another, which many would suggest is not necessarily a negative result.

Connection

The next theme is having a connection with one's work spouse. Sandy emphasized her connection to her work spouse could be either good or bad. "I would say we influence each other—either positively or negatively. If she is struggling emotionally, that will impact my emotional status and vice versa." Buffy discussed how a problem with another coworker connected her and her work spouse on an even closer level. She explained,

Another coworker kinda went crazy, so she got fired basically, and so if anything, that kinda solidified Dave and I to say like 'Well I'm here and I'm not crazy and am not going anywhere.' We've been through other things like that since then and so it's like well Dave and I are always gonna stay the course and come out.

Thus, a connection with one's work spouse may be positive or negative. Positively, in the sense that the two people are in it for the long run, are not going anywhere (which brings a sense of security) and make things easier at times due to the connection and knowing one another so well. However, this connection may negatively influence work spouses if one work spouse is having a bad day, does not want to advance their career due to their sense of comfortableness with their work spouse and so forth.

Difficulties at Work

Difficulties at work, including numerous problematic supervisors also have impacted work spouse relationships positively. Brad discussed,

I think, uh, it stems from a previous manager who's no longer here and the trials and tribulation probably of this manager's style. I think as a group where we're relatively unified, there were things that had happened that caused a lot of probably hard feelings, and we sort of unified in a way against that manager.

When we had issues, with a particular issue, we would seek each other out to vent. Shared concerns, shared feelings about what had happened, things like that.

Jocelyn explained that shortly after beginning her job, demanding clients brought her and her work spouse together.

We had to go through a stressful time together, I guess that's what made me realize that I could trust him, and have open and honest conversations with. He's somebody I connect with on a personal level. He's a cool dude. I think it was really having to go through that challenging time that made us realize, oh wow we can get through some shit together. You know we can trust and rely on one another when put to the test. Our rapport, a really close bond was formed from the beginning.

To contradict the positive however, if a work spouse is having difficulties at work, the connection may influence the work spouse partner and thus, potentially increase their difficulties even if this person truly is not involved in the problem. For example, Kalyn admitted that at times her work spouse is rude and abrasive with her colleagues.

Consequentially, Kalyn worries that some of her coworkers treat her differently due to the association she has with her work spouse.

Favors/Doing Anything for One Another

Going above and beyond the typical coworker duties also positively influences work spouse relationships. Kristin stated, “I mean I try to be there for her when she needs me, and she does the same for me.” Bobbi Jo illustrated, “When she’s gone, I back her up, do her work, and when I’m gone, she’ll do my work. We’re very compatible workwise.” Kalyn explained, “In the office itself, I’m always offering to help if she has any additional work.” However, to refute, if these favors (similar to additional acts of appreciation) are noticed by other colleagues, jealousy may ensue. For instance, if one does not have a work spouse, one may potentially feel like she does more work because she does not have a work spouse to help her with her tasks.

Emotional Attachment

Similar to the other themes, an emotional attachment to a work spouse impacts professional relationships both positively and negatively. Ella explained that her personal relationship with her work spouse was more important than winning at a conflict. She went on to state that she was more likely to defer conflict with her work spouse because “I’d rather just keep the happiness.” Avoidance is not always a healthy conflict management strategy. Devon discussed that when her work spouse is having a bad day at work, it is hard not to let it influence her feelings too. She said,

If she’s having a bad day, I do feel like it rubs off on me. Because we do use each other to vent to. I want to say, shut up! Now you’re ruining my day. You can’t

keep doing this, because you're ruining my day. Tell me if I can help you. You can't just bitch about things and not ask me to help you.

Sympathetic reactions appear to be beneficial when feelings are positive, but they can be detrimental when emotions are negative.

Gifts

The giving and receiving of gifts generally would not be thought of as negative. However, when these gifts are from work spouses, negativity may result. For example, Elsa recalled receiving a gift from her work spouse after her work spouse returned from a trip. The other coworkers in her small organization were not pleased that solely Elsa received a gift. Elsa argued, "I think it was jealousy of our relationship." Numerous other work spouses mentioned the exchanging of gifts during holidays, birthdays and simply "just because."

Honesty

Honesty with work spouses often occurs and comparable to other intimate relationships, may be viewed as both beneficial and harmful. When Marissa's work spouse was going through a difficult time both personally and professionally, Marissa realized she had to make the decision to talk to her work spouse about it. She explained,

I felt like it was my job to say to her, "honey, you're mad all the time. Let's figure this out--let's do this. What's going on?" As opposed to pretending that it wasn't happening. It was something that had to be done.

Terry appreciates that his work spouse is one of the most honest people he knows.

I think to be a good friend you have to say the things you have to say they don't want to hear. You have to call people out on bullshit. That they're doing something wrong or acting inappropriately or whatever.

People do not always want to hear the bad. However, in the long run, most people appreciate that a work spouse feels comfortable enough to be completely honest, which means hearing the good and the bad.

Negatives of Work Spouses

Guilt and jealousy are two main effects work spouses discussed in relation to their work spouses and impact additional professional relationships negatively. Kalyn reflected that the majority of her coworkers don't care for her work spouse and she worries that this influences her relationships with others. She explained, "She does not have the best reputation at work, and by association, I don't want to have negative connotation. I'm not the same kind of person she is." An additional example would be when a coworker of Sandy's believed that Sandy had stolen her work spouse from her. She pointed out,

There have been numerous comments, sometimes positive or negative, actions, (about my work spouse relationship) although it has gotten better. There were prior relationships with this individual to where it could be seen as I was replacing relationships. But more of our relationship is driven by how our relationship is structured internally from a work perspective. Her success directly affects my success and that has kinda forced our relationship.

Therefore, although work spouses bring many advantages, there are certainly disadvantages to having a work spouse as well.

Outside of Work Activities

Socializing outside of work has also negatively affected additional work relationships. Crystal recalled a time when her work spouse and she went to a winery, and another coworker confronted her the next day about leaving people out. Judy expressed that other coworkers are aware of her close relationship, “People know we’re good friends. They know we hang out.” Work spouses activities outside of the office often led the work spouses to work days to be more enjoyable. For example, looking forward to a happy hour drink or recollecting the weekend’s past activities.

Recognizing Important Events

Important events in work spouses’ lives also impacts additional professional relationships in positive and negative ways. For example, Anna stated, “We all go to lunch for birthdays. I always go to the same Chinese restaurant.” Elsa explained, “I recently set my wedding date, and she was one of the first people to know. She was one of the important people to tell too.” However, if Elsa is significantly closer to her work spouse and not the others in her small organization, the discussion of her wedding may appear to be inappropriate to talk about during work hours. Similarly, discussion of other important life events may be seen by other workers as a reflection of an in-group, out-group dichotomy. Such perceptions could lead to additional conflict.

Self-Disclosure

The concept of self-disclosure, and how it influences professional relationships, varies from relationship to relationship. Brad expressed,

In the work environment, only people who are in the same environment as you could relate to the issues at hand and stresses of the job, having somebody that

you know that you can trust and say anything to in confidence without it turning into turmoil. There are very few people that I can vent to. And I would keep that number relatively small. I know who I say something to and it's not going past this point.

Jane discussed an example of when she confided in her presumed work spouse and her confidence was betrayed. "I told her something and said don't tell anyone and she did. I'm a very trusting person, I'm a very open person, so when someone does that, it can be disheartening." As with all intimate relationships, self-disclosure may be beneficial. However, if it is not reciprocated or the information is shared with others, the work spouse relationship may become damaged.

Stress

People generally do not think of stress as positive. However, whether it is the challenges of work duties or some difficult coworkers or clients, stress frequently occurs at work. Kara pointed out, "Honestly at work I do not know what I'd do without her. I'd probably be a crazy person." Marissa explained the value of just knowing her work spouse is there, whether it is good or bad. If "either one of us is having a bad day or a great day, to have that person available to share with, one way or the other" is important. Thus, the ability to discuss stressors with one's work spouse is helpful to one's work day being more productive.

Transformation

The changing of relationships may also affect professional connections in a positive or negative way. A work spouse relationship may lead to one changing both in the relationship and/or may influence other colleagues as well. For example, Bobby

discussed how the transformations of his work spouse relationship lead to another coworker becoming hostile and rude. Moreover, at one point, his work spouse thought about quitting due to the mistreatment of the other peer. Terry stated that he and his work spouse “rekindled a friendship, then really kinda started to become more of a confidant relationship with the stresses and frustrations I had with superiors.” Work spouse relationships, comparable to all intimate relationships are fluid. That is, these relationships are constantly changing.

Sticking Up for One Another

Work spouses defending one another are another positive and negative effect professional relationships. Amber expressed, “I know if someone was talking smack, she would stand up for me.” Meanwhile, Courtney recalled a time when a difficult supervisor was upset with both her and her work spouse and how she wanted to protect her work spouse and take all the blame. “The fact that I went in there and stuck up for her and said don’t blame this on her. If you’re gonna be mad at somebody, just put it all on me. I can take it.” Put simply, work spouses will defend one another. However, solely if they feel the need to, not just because they are work spouses.

Work is More Enjoyable

The last theme that affects professional relationships is work spouses make work more enjoyable, which certainly is viewed in a positive light. As Devon stated, “Everyone else at work drives me crazy.” Sandy claimed, “I wouldn’t appreciate my job as much if she wasn’t here and there are people I tolerate more because of her influence.” Lastly Nikki explained, “It’s a lot more fun to come to work to a place where you have friends. People that you enjoy seeing, people that you know have your back.”

It is apparent that work spouse relationships do affect additional professional relationships, both positively and negatively. That being stated, work spouse relationships support the notion of social exchange theory. These unique relationships consist of both costs and rewards in the workplace environment. With work spouses spending a significant amount of time together outside of work too, personal relationships may also be influenced by these unique intimate relationships.

How has having a work spouse affected the respondents' personal relationships?

Identical to the organization of RQ2a, the following applicable themes and subthemes are arranged by positive and negative impacts. These themes will be explained in relation to the effect they have on personal relationships. Moreover, examples of each will be provided.

Affection

Many of the work spouse relationships have overlapped with their personal lives, and the affection they have for one another has extended to others within their own families. For instance, Buffy's son will always have a relationship with "Uncle Dave." Kara now calls her work spouse's mother, "mama." Lastly, Bobbi Jo discussed her work spouse and her not only spend time together, but their daughters' join them from time to time as well. Yet with opposite-sex work spouses, affection was not as frequently discussed, as it certainly may be seen as inappropriate or that there is something romantically going on. As Brad stated, "I'm very careful and conscious of how that could be misconstrued. I'm very aware of that and would never position myself to jeopardize my career for what's personal." Therefore, affection or lack of affection has both pros and cons in impacting work spouse and additional personal relationships.

Appreciation

Many of the participants discussed the benefits of having work spouse relationships. Moreover, loved ones at home often appreciate these benefits as well. One frequent sense of gratitude was due to not bringing work problems home. As Jocelyn pointed out, “If you have somebody you can debrief things, at work and not to like take it home with you; that’s helpful.” Moreover Bobby claimed his work spouse relationship was, “Probably beneficial for my marriage.” Additionally, Sandy discussed her husband’s appreciation for her work spouse and how it has helped improve their relationship.

He appreciates the relationship I have with her because of the support she allows to take off work. That’s always been a point of contention in our relationship is the amount of time I put into work. I would say I’m probably married to my job, more so to my spouse. So she helps to foster a positive work-life balance.

Yet comparable to affection, opposite-sex work spouses realized there were boundaries and potential negatives in showing too much appreciation. Tyler recalled that when his work spouse’s husband was away for work for several months, he wanted to help out more. Yet he refrained due to the assumption that the husband does not like him.

Conflict

Not all personal relationships are supportive of the closeness of a work spouse relationship. Kalyn explained her family’s disapproval of her work spouse relationship. “That’s been a negative thing with my husband, my mom and my dad. My husband doesn’t ever want to do anything with them (Kalyn’s work spouse and her husband). I don’t think it’s been overly positive.” Furthermore, Buffy recently considered leaving her current job but decided to stay. She noted that although her husband likes her work

spouse (her work spouse is also her supervisor) when she decided to stay at her current job, she felt that to a certain extent he was disappointed in her decision to stay at her present place of employment.

Favors/Doing Anything for One Another

Not only do work spouses help one another out professionally, but personally they also extend the generosity not only to the work spouse, but also to their loved ones, which is generally associated as positively impacting the personal relationships. Bobbi Jo recalled how her work spouse went out of her way to make all the decorations for her daughter's wedding. Moreover, Devon's work spouse hosted a baby shower for her daughter and Ella's work spouse's significant other suggested Ella to watch their dog while being out of town. Negative aspects to favors and/or doing anything for one another were not found.

Emotional Attachment

The emotional attachment of a work spouse is not only a professional influence, but also a personal relationship effect as well. Numerous participants discussed how their work spouses meant so much to them and that they truly were one of the most important people in their lives and that this relationship was such a joy to have not only for themselves, but also for their family too. For example, Buffy's son calls her work spouse "Uncle Chuck". Kara stated about her work spouse relationship that, "Her family has become my family." However, this emotional attachment may be viewed negatively. Kara recollected that her work spouse and husband were very protective of her when she began dating her now-husband. Kara believed that through the viewpoint of her work spouse and her work spouse's husband, that no one she dated was going to be good

enough, and they initially did not care for her now-husband. In fact, her work spouse's husband did not even want to meet her now-husband at the beginning of the relationship.

Gifts

Not only do work spouses give and receive gifts, but frequently gifts are given to work spouses' loved ones as well, which may be viewed as positively impacting these personal relationships. For example, Dave's wife often buys gifts for Dave's work spouse's toddler. In addition, Liz and her work spouse have given joint gifts to Liz's work spouse's mother on Mother's Day, and when Liz's work spouse's mother came back from a trip, Liz received a gift from her. No foreseen negatives were viewed with the theme of gifts and personal relationships.

Honesty

Honesty with work spouses occurs both professionally and personally. Numerous work spouses believe that their work spouse will be completely honest with them about anything either personal or professional. The element of honesty, like with professional relationships, may impact personal relationships in both positive and negative ways.

Tyler explained,

Her opinion really matters. So sometimes you're not just mentioning things that happened, but you look forward to telling them things. If something happens you think I wonder what she'll think, or I wonder what advice that she'll have.

Because you only get that close to somebody that you trust their opinion on and you know that you'll get an answer honest. If my wife and I are having an argument, that becomes the perfect person to ask for advice or to tell you that

you're being an asshole, which happens plenty of the time. That's probably what I like most about this person.

With honesty, work spouses may not always want to hear that they are in the wrong.

Thus, honesty may be viewed as negatively.

Negatives of Work Spouses

Although many benefits are accumulated with work spouse relationships, there may be negatives as well. In the past, Dave's wife has had an issue with his work spouse and he recalled the time when his wife simply asked him, "Wouldn't you just rather be with her?" In addition, Tyler's feelings were hurt because his work spouse's husband has made it obvious that he doesn't like him. He stated,

It does sort of hurt my feelings that he doesn't like me. I don't know why, I try to help as much as I possibly can. The thing I think that bothers me the most is that I think we would get along really well, but he shuts down around me. But he's very short with me, and I know he's not like that.

Moreover, Kalyn often feels pulled in two directions, as she knows her family doesn't support the relationship she has with her work spouse, and they often tell her she needs to put distance between her and her work spouse. Therefore, negatives of work spouses impact both professional and personal relationships.

Outside of Work Activities

Outside of work socialization also influences personal relationships both positively and negatively. Numerous work spouses explained that their work spouses had introduced them to new people, new activities and additional experiences that had enriched their lives. Nancy for instance had never played golf before and now is in a

league with her work spouse, whom she credits as mentoring her in golf. In addition, Marissa explained,

Our relationship has moved to the outside world. We typically got together once a week, and we're just four women going through whatever we are going through. That became a significant part of our relationship and a significant part of my life. That group of four women . . . and really it started with my relationship with her at work.

Sue stated, "I guess it enhances it (Sue's personal life) in that I have been extended the opportunity to meet her good friends as well. So it's increased my personal, social life, broadened my circle." Yet Kara recounted that at times she felt a sense of guilt spending so much time outside of work with her work spouse, and she realized that her husband did not have this type of relationship with any of his coworkers.

Recognizing Important Events

Work spouses not only recognize important events of their work spouses but additionally of their work spouses loved ones. Baptisms, birthdays, graduations, weddings and funerals were all examples of recognizing work spouses loved ones significant events. Bobbi Jo recalled, "When my daughter was getting married, she offered to throw her a shower. She's very generous, in that way." When Elsa's fiancé wanted to propose to her in the office, Elsa's work spouse was the first to know because he wanted to make sure Elsa was going to be in her office at a specific time. Recognizing these types of events is a positive influence on personal relationships.

Self-Disclosure

Not only does self-disclosure about professional relationships occur within work spouse relationships, but also self-disclosure about personal relationships does too--which may be positive or negative. For example, Anna and her work spouse discuss their mutual issues with difficult in-laws. In addition, Marissa recollected the first time her work spouse disclosed information about one of her closest friends.

At the time she shared something with me, that didn't have anything to do with work. That next level of you know, I'm going to trust you with a piece of information. It was that trust that, you know, she was visibly upset about something and needed to talk to someone about it to trust. It was quickly in our relationship that we built that rapport.

Stress

Stress affects both professional and personal lives and at times, work spouse relationships may help decrease stress both in the office and at home, thus making it a positive influence. Anna stated, "It's helped me manage the stress that I would have brought home. I still do bring things home, but having that friendship has helped me work through some of those issues." Karen claimed,

It doesn't matter how much you love your spouse, there are times they are gonna drive you nuts and I know I can talk to her and just let it go. And I know she's come in before and said, "Oh I'm so angry with him." So I think it keeps us sane.

Work is More Enjoyable

The final theme that affects personal relationships is work spouses make work more enjoyable and therefore influence home life in a positive way. Numerous

participants believed that the benefit of their work spouse making work more enjoyable correlates with their personal life as well. For example, Sandy stated,

I tend to overwork. She is very cognitive of my stress levels and is encouraging of my personal time and respects that and also encourages me to turn off and relax. She's allowed me to feel that I can take that break.

Comparable to the effect work spouses have on additional professional relationships, work spouses influence personal relationships too. That is, work spouses repeatedly make their work spouse happier, less stressed and help improve personal relationships (not taking work problems home, confiding about personal issues, etc.).

What is the impetus for work spouse relationships?

Now that it has been demonstrated that work spouses are indeed a unique type of relationship and that work spouse relationships affect both professional and personal relationships, the final research question inquires how these unique relationships are fostered. Therefore, RQ3 asks: What is the impetus for work spouse relationships? The following themes revealed motivating reasons for work spouse relationships to develop (see Table 2).

Table 2

The Development of Work Spouses

| <i>Theme</i> | Examples |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Difficulties</i> | Stress, conflict with superiors, difficult clients |

Table 2 (continued).

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Similarities</i> | Viewpoints, interests, humor |
| <i>Emotional attachment</i> | Connection, appreciation, trust, affection |
| <i>Work closely</i> | Put on same projects, work in same office, same job title |
| <i>Outside of work</i> | Happy hour, children's events, shopping |
| <i>Self-disclosure</i> | Both professional and personal |
| <i>Importance of relationship</i> | Acknowledged both at work and home |
| <i>Friend</i> | Acknowledgment of being a friend, not just a coworker |
| <i>Unique</i> | Not just a work friendship |
| <i>Transformation</i> | Changing due to one's work spouse |

Difficulties

Difficulties at work were the top reason that work spouse relationships emerged. Numerous participants described situations where difficult supervisors, coworkers and/or clients helped unify the work spouse couple. For example Brad stated,

I think, uh, it stems from a previous manager who's no longer here and the trials and tribulation probably of this manager's style. I think as a group where we're

relatively unified, there were things that had happened that caused a lot of probably hard feelings and we sort of unified in a way against that manager.

When we had issues, with a particular issue, we would seek each other out to vent. Shared concerns, shared feelings about what had happened, things like that.

Moreover Buffy explained,

Another coworker kinda went crazy, so she got fired basically and so if anything that kinda solidified Dave and I to say like ‘Well I’m here and I’m not crazy and going anywhere.’ We’ve been through other things like that since then, and so it’s like well Dave and I are always gonna stay the course and come out.

Similarities

Similarities between work spouses were another motivational factor for work spouse relationships to develop. Working styles, extracurricular activities and humor were several similarities that bonded people. Kristin explained that she and her work spouse have, “Similar styles in the workplace. [We are] both pretty driven, but both pretty silly outside of work. We have a lot in common and we both like to have fun.” In addition, Liz stated that her work spouse and her have “the same geeky interests and all of that.” And Courtney credited, “The common sense of humor, I just hadn’t found that with anyone else.”

Emotional Attachment

An emotional attachment was the next theme in relation to the impetus of work spouses. Jocelyn explained that as soon as she started at her new job conflict occurred and her work spouse was there to provide unconditional help and support, thus establishing an emotional attachment.

I think it was really having to go through that challenging time that made us realize, oh wow, we can get through some shit together. You know we can trust and rely on one another when put to the test. Our rapport, a really close bond was formed from the beginning.

Elsa explained that her work spouse's empathy and understanding during her breakup increased their emotional attachment and solidified a transition from coworkers to work spouses.

Working Closely

Long hours, joint projects and similar job all were factors in the theme working closely. Marissa described,

Our boss connected us on a large project. It was a relationship born in extreme circumstances. It was a big project; it took a lot out of us; it was new learning for both of us. It started as a large project, just spending time together and getting to know each other through that, we're both talkers. Initial personality traits . . . Our lives are and were different. I had just gone through a divorce after 22 years of marriage. Our lives outside were not the same, so we didn't run in any of the same circles or anything like that. Our relationship truly started inside [this building].

In addition Sandy stated,

More of our relationship is driven by how our relationship is structured internally from a work perspective. Her success directly affects my success and that has kinda forced our relationship. We do spend a lot of time together from a work perspective but also from a personal perspective.

Outside of Work

Quite often, once coworkers spent time outside of the office, the relationship strengthened to work spouse levels. Working out, shopping and spending time with one another's families were all examples illustrating the motivation for work spouse relationships to develop. For instance, Ella remembered having her work spouse over for dinner for the first time. By the end of that evening, she knew it was more than a "let's talk just at work" relationship. And Bobbi Jo explained, "We started going on walks around the campus, then working out after work, occasional lunches, that kind of thing."

Self-Disclosure

Confiding in a coworker early in the relationship was also a factor for work spouse relationships to develop. Anna pointed out, "She's one of the few people I will talk about tough work things with. You don't just talk to anyone about that." A previous supervisor and the issues they had with this administrator is what motivated Brad and his work spouse.

I think it's a confidant, kind-of person. In the work environment, only people who are in the same environment as you could relate to the issues at hand and stresses of the job, having somebody that you know that you can trust and say anything to in confidence without it turning into turmoil. There are very few people that I can vent to. And I would keep that number relatively small. I know who I say something to and it's not going past this point. That's important I think.

Importance of Relationship

The importance of the relationship also is a factor for work spouse relationships to emerge. Elsa stated,

I thank her daily for letting me unload things. You know, lots of times we take in a lot of stuff and need someone to confide in. Sometimes not bearing all the weight yourself, having her there, we can balance it.

Courtney suggested, “It’s just given me another outlet, another person to be close to and to receive like any kind of support from or reassurance.” And Kristin recalled,

When I started back to work fulltime, I was going through a tough time. I had just gotten separated. I felt not very valued. She just made me feel like I was a fun person to be around and that meant a lot at that time. And I was so grateful. Even now, when I go through tough times in life she’s there, she’s my person. I feel like in life you’re given very few people that really get you. And she’s probably one of the best friends I’ve ever had. She’s kinda my go-to person, if things are not going well she’s probably one of the first three people I call. Or if things are going well, she’s probably one of the first three people I call.

Friend

Becoming friends quickly lead often to work spouse relationships. Numerous participants acknowledged uniqueness to their work relationship early on. Tina, for example, realized the rareness from day one. Nikki suggested that starting work at the same time as her work spouse fostered their friendship naturally. Moreover, work spouses that were friends before working together also believed their existing friendship helped motivate the work spouse relationship.

Unique

Comparable to the friend theme, participants quickly discovered that this friendship was not just a typical friendship. Whether it is due to difficulties at work or

home, the uniqueness a work spouse relationship entails is frequently discovered quickly into the relationship. Crystal stated that early on in the relationship, “You could kinda see where we would catch each other’s eye, and she’s was totally on the same page as me.”

Moreover, Chelsea claimed,

It just happened, it was all very natural it never felt out of place. I’m not necessarily good friends with people I work with. Good coworkers and good friends are two very opposite things. Very, very rarely, do you find that you have coworkers that are good friends. We can cuss each other out at work and we’re friends after five o clock. I’ve never had it before and probably won’t find it again. I think it’s very rare to find.

Transformation

The last theme in work spouse relationships is transformation. Sue stated, “It’s increased my personal, social life, broadened my circle. It’s like a career enhancement. Your work spouse can help you talk through something or be more aware of a resource that I haven’t used that might help me.” Kara explained that her work spouse helped her find herself.

Personal growth she’s helped me achieve. Really just helping me find who I am. Where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do, who I wanted to be. Having more confidence and grounding with her guidance, she helped me become me.

The current chapter explained the findings in relation to the research questions. The first question asked if work spouses are an additional type of intimate relationship. Based on participants’ responses, work spouses are indeed another type of intimate relationship. Next, the dimensions and characteristics of work spouses were examined.

Five main themes were discovered including: spending time outside of work, the importance of the relationship, comparisons of other intimate relationships, positives of work spouses and negatives of work spouses. Subthemes underneath each theme were also listed and described.

The second research question inquired about the impact work spouses have on additional professional and personal relationships. In short, work spouse relationships have both positive and negative effects. The last research question sought to identify the impetus for work spouse relationships. Difficulties at work, similarities and emotional attachment were three main reasons why work spouse relationships develop.

This chapter described and answered the three research questions for the current study and provided an emergent definition of work spouses. The following chapter will provide conclusions, implications, limitations and future directions for research on work spouses.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to have a better understanding of the assumed concept of work spouses. Moreover, this research sought to examine if work spouses do exist as an additional type of intimate relationship, beyond the types of relationships presently identified in the literature. To reach that aim, the characteristics and dimensions of work spouses were identified through analysis of interview data. Additionally, this study was designed to determine if work spouses influence other professional and personal relationships.

All of the participants interviewed believed they had a work spouse relationship. These individuals frequently acknowledged that their work spouse relationship was unique and something special that they did not have with anyone else in the workplace. Furthermore, an emotional attachment to this person was often discussed. Many had a hard time picturing their lives without their work spouse in it (both inside and outside of the office, as spending time with one's work spouse outside of the office was the most common theme uncovered).

Like all intimate relationships, difficulties occur in work spouse relationships. For example, participants often discussed that trivial issues may be overdramatized due to the importance of the relationship. Also, jealousy of the work spouse relationship may also occur as perhaps additional colleagues note the importance of the relationship and may desire that type of relationship for themselves. Lastly, work spouse relationships may take away from additional intimate relationships.

The Work Spouse as a Unique Type of Intimate Relationship

The analysis of the interview data revealed that work spouses are an additional type of intimate relationship. As noted in the prior chapter, the definition the current research establishes is that a work spouse is someone who is not just a close coworker, but also a sincere companion with whom one wants to spend time outside of work. More often, work spouses share numerous similarities, including interests, activities, humor and viewpoints. Lastly, work spouse relationships are intimate relationships consisting of high levels of emotional attachment, trust, and respect. To wit, the definition of work spouse is

a coworker someone is invested in, both inside and outside of the work place, as a valued, long-term, intimate partner. Not just a close coworker, a work spouse is a genuine companion with whom one seeks to spend quality time, including outside of the work environment. Work spouse relationships are intimate relationships characterized by high levels of emotional attachment, trust, and respect. These unique relationships are often built upon similarities found between the two people; including comparable humor, interests, activities and viewpoints.

This definition should prove useful as future scholarship explores the nuances of work spouse relationships.

Although at times participants compared work spouses to other personal relationships (such as family members or significant others) work spouse relationships were most frequently described as unique. In support of this notion, exclusivity was a general theme participants described explaining why work spouses are a different type of intimate relationship. The exclusivity of work spouse relationships may be seen as a one-

of-a-kind relationship. Although comparable to other intimate relationships, work spouse relationships are their own type of intimate relationship. For example, when discussing how much her work spouse knows about her personal life compared to other intimate relationships, Sandy stated,

She probably shares more than some of my friends. She also shares more in my success and my failures. My best friend is a teacher, so we have very different career paths and so sometimes my success isn't something I feel comfortable sharing with her.

As discussed in the literature review, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) found ten different indicators of commitment between romantic partners. These indicators are showing affection, providing support, sustaining integrity, offering companionship, promoting communication, being respectful, discussing the relationship's future, establishing a positive environment, working through problems, and expressing commitment. In the current research, the participants, in relation to their work spouses, described all of these facets. Certainly, work spouse relationships exemplify high commitment levels between partners. Several characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of this commitment were identified in this study, but further investigation is warranted.

Not all of the characteristics found with work spouses are similar to other intimate relationships. For instance, working closely together in an organizational context was one key theme identified in the present study that does not necessarily describe other types of intimate relationships, such as friendships and significant others. Moreover, making work more enjoyable, sharing difficulties at work, and the possibility of quitting if one's work spouse left the mutual place of employment were additional differences that justify the

uniqueness of a work spouse relationship. Put simply, work spouses have certain similarities to other types of intimate relationships, but they also have their respective differences.

Register and Henley (1992) and Olson (2003) examined the notion of transformation in intimate relationships. Transformation was discovered with work spouse relationships, providing support to the conclusion that these relationships are characterized by intimacy. Additionally, according to social penetration theory, self-disclosure is a key element found in intimate relationships. Disclosure also occurred between the participants. Therefore, dimensions of work spouse relationships are indeed consistent with intimate relationships. Thus, work spouses should be considered a unique type of intimate relationship.

The discovery of work spouses as an additional type of intimate relationship is important for both interpersonal and organizational communication. As Americans continue to invest more time and energy into their careers, work spouse relationships will more than likely continue to develop and potentially deteriorate. Therefore, the present research embarked on a better understanding of this type of innovative intimate relationship. Moreover, the characteristics and dimensions of work spouse relationships contribute to past literature about intimate relationships and what is known about them. In other words, although intimate relationships often contain similar characteristics and dimensions, the work spouse relationship has its' own unique features that add to the existing literature.

The Effect of Work Spouses on Personal and Professional Relationships

In relation to the second research question, work spouses do indeed influence both additional professional relationships and also personal relationships at home. Bridge and Baxter (1992) discovered that work friendships have both advantages and disadvantages. In agreement, there are benefits and costs that exist when one has a work spouse. Raile and colleagues (2008) examined job satisfaction and work friendships and found closeness was the main attribution tied to job satisfaction. In the present study, participants frequently explained the importance of trust and self-disclosure with their work spouses without the worry of repercussions. Furthermore, work spouses believe work is more enjoyable because of their work spouses. Far from utopian, numerous work spouses reported conflict, difficulties, and additional stressors due to this unique relationship they have at work. For example, Kalyn recalled the time her work spouse's supervisor told the two that she felt like a "third wheel" around them. Moreover, Tyler explained the following in relation to his work spouse:

The only negative is that it is awkward for other spouses. Interaction, if we're all there, is different than how we would normally talk. It's like having a really close friend that sometimes you can't act the way you both normally do.

Thus, although work spouse relationships can be positive, these relationships may be a hindrance as well.

Participants often described that work spouse relationships formed naturally, indicating that these types of relationships occur as a matter of course. If so, work spouse relationships are likely inevitable in work environments. Therefore, it would be beneficial for organizations to understand work spouse relationships to maximize benefits and

minimize weaknesses. Ultimately, the data suggests that work spouse relationships do not need to be encouraged, nor discouraged, but should be considered with caution when they emerge.

One participant, Judy, believes the following in relation to work spouses and personal relationships:

It's been positive, 99% extremely positive. I think that having this relationship on a personal level, it's a great thing. All of our spouses know about one another, but there's a line that you don't cross. It makes you go to work on days where you don't want to, and that's good to have. But if a person's spouse is uncomfortable, the relationship shouldn't continue. Not if the person you're married to is uncomfortable.

Interestingly, Judy was one of several participants that discussed the boundaries and restrictions work spouses needed to have in relation to their respective spouses at home. Moreover, opposite-sex work spouses solely described these limitations. As Brad explained, "I think part of the reason is because it's a guy and a girl. And for me, I can respect that line. I think if it's two women, there might be a little more of a crossover." Thus, work spouses similar to opposite-sex friendships need to be mindful of the relationship and their additional personal relationships at home.

The current research illustrated that work spouse relationships have both advantages and disadvantages. This supports the notion of Altman and Taylor's social exchange theory (1973) and the basis that intimate relationships consist of both costs and rewards. Put simply, work spouse relationships both potentially help and hinder personal and professional relationships.

The Impetus for Work Spouse Relationships

With people spending more and more time at their place of employment, it should not be surprising that difficulties at the job and with working closely together were two main reasons that work spouse relationships develop. Several of the participants explained that their work spouse union initiated due to challenges in their organization. Whether it is a difficult supervisor or demanding clients, participants often gravitated to someone (which led to a developing work spouse relationship) and vented, complained and self-disclosed. In addition, participants often found themselves working exclusively with another person on a particular job task. Long hours between the two people also led to work spouse relationships.

The current research found that work spouse relationships often develop in a similar process comparable to other intimate relationships. That is, work spouse relationships begin with an initiation phase, which leads to the exploratory stage, and if colleagues discover a sense likeness and eventual intimacy, this may lead to a close bond, also known as a work spouse relationship.

Knapp's relational model (1972) is applicable to understanding how work spouse relationships develop. For instance, examples from the experimenting phase to the bonding phase were discovered. Bobbi Jo explained, "We started going on walks around campus at lunch and then working out after work." Whereas Kara stated in relation to the bonding phase, "her family has become my family." The examples provided by the participants frequently were able to help illustrate a specific phase of Knapp's model.

Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory (1973) may also be applied to the development of work spouses. For example, in the stable exchange, two people are very

close and can typically assume how one will react and communicate. Participants in the current research often discussed they could finish one another's sentences or even just give a nonverbal glance and know what the other was thinking. In addition, self-disclosure is a key element found in social penetration theory. In the present study, trust and self-disclosure were two subthemes that participants acknowledged.

Social exchange theory (Thiabult & Kelley, 1959) stated that people's relationships are based on costs and rewards. Two of the five main themes in the current research were positive attributions of work spouse relationships and negatives of work spouse relationships. Stated simply, work spouse relationships feature both costs and rewards. As Kalyn stated,

“My mom is always telling me this person is not your real friend, remember this; and my husband says the same thing. It's been a real struggle; I purposely will talk things down. I feel like I'm very self-conscious of the relationship. I'd like to be genuine friends with her and not have this weird power dynamic.”

In sum, work spouse relationships are applicable to relational developmental models and theories including: social exchange theory, social penetration theory and Knapp's relational developmental model. By taking participants' statements and utilizing these quotations in specific phases or stages of the models and theories, this provides a better understanding of both the models and theories themselves and also the work spouse relationships developmental processes.

Limitations

While the current study was effective overall, any research project will face limitations. First, the sample was purposive. This qualitative research aimed at rich,

meaningful description, and generalizability was not an immediate goal. Thus, specific findings may not be reproducible in other contexts.

Second, Caucasian females were highly overrepresented in the sample. This disproportionateness was not intended, and yet is important to note. More notably, out of the few male participants, only two participants were in a male-male work spouse relationship. Both acknowledged that this same-sex work spouse relationship was unique, and that the term spouse is generally associated with heterosexual relationships. Interestingly and on the contrary, numerous females were in same-sex work spouse relationships.

Third, not all work spouse relationships studied were dyadic. Some of the other halves of the work spouse relationship did not wish to participate in the study. Also, other times the additional partner in the assumed work spouse relationship did not qualify for an interview after taking the prequalifying survey. Perhaps certain work spouse relationships are more one-sided than others. Taken together, these limitations show the need for additional work spouse relationships to be studied, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Future Research

Minimal scholarship exists about work spouse relationships, and the current research illustrates that there is much more to learn about work spouses. Post-interviews, the discoveries of the themes made the researcher realize that the prequalifying survey questions for the interview should be revised. These questions were superficial and it is now apparent that work spouse relationships are more intimate than just knowing how one drinks her cup of coffee. In addition, research needs to be conducted on how the

relationships develop, how they are both similar and different than other intimate relationships and lastly, how work spouse relationships affect both organizational communication and also interpersonal communication.

As discussed in Chapter III, a prequalifying survey for potential participants to be interviewed was the first step in the data collection process. This prescreening of possible interviewees was highly beneficial in making sure that participants were indeed in a presumed work spouse relationship. At times, participants who did not qualify for the interview were surprised. Future research could certainly examine these individuals and compare the thematic analysis of their assumed work spouse relationship to the current findings. In other words, do these individuals' themes correlate with the current themes discovered in the present research?

In relation to organizational communication, work spouse relationships could be studied in the following areas. First, how these relationships should be managed, needs to be examined. Secondly, research should inquire how to maximize the benefits and minimize the disadvantages of work spouse relationships when they do occur. Thirdly, power concerns when a work spouse couple consists of a superior and subordinate should be investigated, along with how the mentoring process in organizations may be similar and yet different from work spouse relationships. An additional avenue could be work spouses conflict and the influences it may have on additional colleagues. Lastly, the dissolution of work spouse relationships and the effect this terminated relationship has on the entire organization should be studied.

Interpersonal communication and work spouse relationships could be studied in the following areas. First, in relation to the potential impact work spouse relationships

have on people's identity. Next, the help or hindrance a work spouse relationship has on other intimate relationships and lastly, gender differences within work spouse relationships.

Furthermore, the current research examined the impetus of work spouse relationships, but did not examine the dissolution of any work spouse relationships. Also, like all intimate relationships, work spouse relationships are constantly changing and transforming. Therefore, future research should examine work spouse relationships that have been terminated (1) due to a relocation in the workplace, such as a promotion and/or moving to a different department or perhaps even geographical location; (2) due to a significant conflict that inevitably leads to the termination of the relationship; and (3) due to a change in one's relational status (finding a significant other, getting married, having a child) that prevents the work spouse relationship from continuing to evolve.

Lastly, with such little still known about work spouse relationships, both qualitative and quantitative approaches should be used for future research. Two preliminary scales have been developed to quantify a better understanding of work spouses (see Appendix D and Appendix E). The first scale examines the potential advantages to having a work spouse, both professionally and personally. The second scale explores the possible disadvantages of having a work spouse. Both instruments require testing for validity and reliability.

Conclusion

In summary, the current research sought to have a better understanding of the phenomena known as work spouses. Through the use of a prequalifying survey, participants were determined and then interviewed about their assumed work spouse

relationship. Similar to any intimate relationship, no two work spouse relationships were found to be identical. However, certain characteristics and dimensions that make up intimate relationships were also discovered in these work spouse relationships. In closing, here is another description of my own work spouse. I realize that if I sleep in too late, I will miss Eastwood at his favorite coffee shop after he drops his kids off to school. I know that his son has recently taken to his dad's KU basketball obsession and that his daughter still loves her horseback riding lessons. His wife Marie is finally starting to feel like this town is her home and is much more settled than when I first met her. Most importantly though, I appreciate and take pride and comfort in the fact that if either one of us were to ever leave our current positions, we would stay close and still talk frequently. However, the absence of our day-to-day presence would most certainly be noticed and missed, just as it is now during our long academia breaks.

The present study sought to have a better understanding of the assumed intimate relationship known as a work spouse. The first chapter of this research introduced the concept of a work spouse and offered a brief explanation of what a work spouse is assumed to be, along with a justification as to why the phenomena should be examined. Next, a literature review explained what an intimate relationship is, followed by, the basic dimensions and characteristics of intimate relationships. Moreover, the different types of intimate relationships were also examined. The latter section of the literature review illustrated communication theories and models that explain the relational development and deterioration of intimate relationships. The methodology chapter focused on the procedure utilized in the current study. Through a phenomenological approach, interviews were employed as the researcher sought to have a better understanding of the

work spouse relationships. Moreover, a description of the participants interviewed and delimitations and the procedure were also described. Chapter IV discussed the results of the data. The common themes and subthemes found between the participants were explained, with examples illustrating each theme and the research questions were answered. The concluding chapter discussed the implications for the current research. Limitations of the study were explained and future research both through an organizational and interpersonal communication lens was provided.

As Americans continue to work longer hours, work spouse relationships will continue to develop and some, like other types of intimate relationships, will terminate. Now that it may be argued that work spouses are an additional type of intimate relationship, there is much more to discover about this unique phenomena.

APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMAIL MESSAGES SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

Hello Facebook friends! A friend is working on the last portion of her doctoral dissertation. Please help her out by contacting her at the email below and taking a ten minute survey. Shaunda French is seeking research participants for her dissertation. If you believe you are in a close, interpersonal work relationship, please contact her at sfrench@csc.edu to take a brief survey. In addition, if you know someone else who potentially could be a participant, please pass Shaunda's contact information along to them. Thank you for your assistance in Shaunda's research project!

Good Afternoon Colleagues:

I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation study. If you believe you are in a close, interpersonal work relationship, please contact me at sfrench@csc.edu. If willing, you will take a brief survey to see if you qualify as a research participant. In addition, if you know someone outside of campus who potentially could be a participant, I would greatly appreciate you passing my contact information along to them.

Thank you for your assistance in this research project.

Sincerely,

Shaunda French

Assistant Professor of Communication

Department of Communication and Social Sciences

Chadron State College

APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are there specific inside jokes that you and a co-worker share?
2. Can you and your co-worker finish each other's sentences?
3. Can you be bluntly honest with this person about his or her appearance, hygiene or hair (and vice versa)?
4. When something eventful happens at work, is this co-worker the first person you seek out for a de-briefing?
5. Does this co-worker know what to order for you at meals? For example, how you like your coffee, etc. (and vice versa)?
6. Do you depend on a particular co-worker for office supplies, snacks and aspirin?
7. Does this person in your office know almost as much about your personal life as your best friend or real-life spouse does (and vice versa)?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been working with this colleague?
2. How long before you realized he/she was not just another coworker?
3. Explain the process of how you and your colleague became close.
4. How do you communicate to him/her that you consider him/her more than just another coworker?
5. How do you express your gratitude and appreciation to him/her?
6. What does this person mean to you?
7. Do you have an emotional attachment to this person? (If yes, please provide further explanation).
8. Have you and this coworker ever had conflict? How did you handle it? Did it affect other colleagues too?
9. Do you think other people are aware of your relationship with this coworker?
10. If someone were to call you a work spouse, how would you feel?
11. How has the experience of having this relationship affected your personal life? Positively? Negatively?

APPENDIX D

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE POSITIVES OF WORK SPOUSES

Work spouses provide many benefits to a work organization.

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

Spending time outside of work with my work spouse is important to me.

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

I am emotionally attached to my work spouse.

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

My work spouse relationship is important to me both personally and professionally.

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

I feel like I can self-disclose to my work spouse and I trust her completely.

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

Loved ones from my personal life know about my work spouse.

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

My work spouse and I have similar interests and see things in the same way.

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

My work spouse makes work more enjoyable and lessens work stress.

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

I frequently thank and acknowledge my work spouse and the appreciation I have for her.

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

My work spouse relationship is unique.

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

APPENDIX E

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE NEGATIVES OF WORK SPOUSES

Work spouse relationships encompass many detriments to a work organization.

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

I do not spend time outside of work with my work spouse.

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

I do not have an emotional attachment to my work spouse.

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

My work spouse relationship negatively influences my work and career goals.

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

I do not disclose to my work spouse about personal issues.

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

Loved ones from my personal life do not approve of my work spouse relationship.

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

Other coworkers are aware of my work spouse relationship and do not approve.

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

My work spouse relationship causes more stress and conflict at work.

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

My work spouse relationship is not unique.

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

I have more than one work spouse.

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

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION



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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14091603

PROJECT TITLE: My Confidant, My Co-worker: The Interpersonal Relationships of Work Spouses

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Shaunda French

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters

DEPARTMENT: Communication Studies

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/02/2014 to 10/01/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

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