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### Interpersonal voice: Antecedents and consequences of speaking up within close relationships

Brian David Bink

Yale University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, [binkbd2@gmail.com](mailto:binkbd2@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Interpersonal voice: Antecedents and Consequences of Speaking Up Within Close Relationships

Brian D. Bink

2021

This dissertation deals with people voicing concerns to a romantic partner in an attempt to change that romantic partner's attitudes or behaviors either: a) to support the partner's welfare (partner-benefiting voice) or b) to support the person's own welfare (self-benefiting voice). Existing work on voice is reviewed and it is noted that the majority of prior research on voice has focused on how individual traits influence the use of voice and has ignored how the relational context between the parties might influence the use of voice. It is on this question that this dissertation focuses. Through three studies I assess how four relational factors: communal strength, commitment, perceived communal strength, and perceived commitment influence the exercise of self- and partner-benefiting voice. Additionally, in this dissertation I also investigate the implications of expressing voice within close relationships, on relationship satisfaction. Whereas these studies yielded some evidence for a positive relationship between one's retrospectively reported use of interpersonal voice and the four relational variables, daily diary reports of the use of interpersonal voice and actual behaviors indicative of interpersonal voice observed in the laboratory yielded evidence of the opposite relationship between the four relational variables and use of voice within close relationships. Furthermore, we found a negative relationship between one's use of voice and one's own relationship satisfaction. Through this work, I begin to address how relational context influences the use of voice and hope to ignite additional research into interpersonal voice in close relationships.

Interpersonal voice: Antecedents and Consequences Of Speaking Up Within Close Relationships

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of  
Yale University  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

By  
Brian D. Bink

Dissertation Director: Margaret Clark

June 2021

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This dissertation is about people voicing concerns to a romantic partner in an attempt to change that romantic partner's attitudes or behaviors in order to support the partner's welfare or the person's own welfare. Put simply, I am looking at peoples' efforts to change a romantic partner's attitudes or behaviors as a way of supporting goal accomplishment (either the partner's goals or one's own goals). I define both pursuits as interpersonal voice. However, I break down interpersonal voice into two types. If the voice is exercised to benefit the partner, I refer to it as partner-benefiting voice. An example would be urging the partner not to eat the ice cream he has just purchased with the goal being to help the partner stick to his diet. If the voice is exercised to benefit the self, I refer to it as self-benefiting voice. An example would be a person asking a partner to turn down music she is listening to so that he can study.

Importantly, in this dissertation I only focus on verbal attempts to alter the partner's attitudes or behaviors (hence my use of the term voice) and do not address physical or non-verbal methods of doing the same. Additionally, there are likely many determinants of people exercising such voice, yet I specifically address how characteristics of a couple's relational bond link to its members' expression of such concerns. The couple characteristics on which I focus include the communal strength of a relationship felt by the participant, the communal strength (Mills, Clark, Ford & Johnson, 2004) the participant perceives the partner feels toward him or her, the commitment (Rusbult, 1980) the participant has to the relationship, and the commitment the participant perceives the partner to have toward him or her. In focusing on these relational variables in romantic relationships my research departs from most prior research on exercising voice which has primarily focused on individual

differences, such as self-esteem, in a business setting (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and, occasionally, on individual differences such as the power that a target of voice holds over others who might exercise voice (Fox, 2007), again, primarily in business settings.

In approaching this line of research, I expected to see a positive relationship between the relational characteristics described above and couple members' expression of partner-benefiting concerns. In other words, I expected that stronger and more committed relational bonds would result in members being more likely to speak up in support of their partner's welfare. With regard to self-benefiting voice, I expected to see a positive relationship with perceived communal strength and perceived commitment, but a negative relationship with own communal strength and own commitment. However, to foreshadow my ultimate conclusions, the data I collected across several studies will show my hypotheses to be mostly incorrect. Whereas it appears that couples' retrospective reports of exercising voice in their close relationships loosely support my initial hypotheses, when it comes down to observing actual day-to-day behavior as measured in daily diaries or contemporaneously in a laboratory setting, I find an overwhelmingly negative relationship to be true. That is, rather than speaking up more in efforts to get one's partner to change for their own benefit or the self's benefit, couples who are more closely connected (meaning more communal and more committed to one another) appear to let more things go and to speak up less than couples who are less closely connected. This delta between stated behavior and actual behavior, while unpredicted is both interesting and has precedence in the wider psychological literature. In fact, Nisbett & Wilson (1977) wrote long ago that people are not skilled at predicting their own behavior. The line of research I have pursued in this dissertation appears to constitute yet another example of such a mismatch in people's beliefs about their behavior and their actual behavior.

## Defining Interpersonal Voice

The idea of investigating "voice" or, in other words, speaking up to create change, is not an entirely new concept. Indeed, the business management literature includes extensive research on voice that dates back at least to 1970. These researchers, who have investigated voice outside of close relationships, typically define voice as, "intentionally expressing relevant ideas, information, and opinions about possible improvements" (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Decades of research on the topic has led to the identification of an array of factors that influence the use of voice, including factors related to the individual expressing voice, factors relating to the individual (or organization) receiving the expression of voice, and the environment in which voice would be expressed. Several factors associated with the individual who might express voice have been shown to influence whether or not voice is actually expressed. For instance, there has been shown to be a positive relationship between employees' willingness to speak up and those employees having higher self-esteem, greater conscientiousness, higher extraversion, greater agreeableness (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001), greater dissatisfaction with the company (Detert & Burris, 2007), and greater understanding of the regulation of their own emotions (Grant, 2013). Additionally, several attributes of the target persons receiving the expression of voice have been shown to influence the likelihood of the potential voicer expressing his/her concern. For instance, greater openness for change (Edmondson, 2003), greater interest in the voicer's ideas, a willingness to listen and actually consider making changes (Miliken, Morrison, Hewlin, 2003), greater ethical leadership behavior—defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009, p. 1), higher perceived psychological safety (Detert & Burris, 2007), and greater supervisor efficacy (Fast, Burris, & Bartel, 2014) all lead to higher chances of the potential voicer actually expressing his/her concern. Not all variables exhibit a clear linear relationship, however. For instance,

the relationship between a person's sense of personal control to their willingness to express voice is negative up to a point but then turns positive as one's sense of control increases beyond that point (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).

Clearly, the topic of voice has received considerable attention over the years. However, almost all of this attention has focused on characteristics of the individuals involved and far less on characteristics of the relationship between the two parties involved, with perhaps one exception. When researchers have addressed characteristics of the relationships that might influence a person's likelihood of expressing voice, power differences between the members of a relationship has been the primary relational variable investigated in the business literature. Specifically, smaller power differentials between members of a relationship have been linked to greater likelihood of expressing voice (Edmondson, 2003).

In addition to neglecting factors of the relationship, research on voice has overwhelmingly focused on voice as it is exercised within business relationships and not within close, caring, communal relationships such as romantic relationships. Business relationships typically consist of exchange relationships in which benefits are provided to one another with an expectation of receiving an equal benefit in return (Clark & Mills, 2011; Clark & Mills, 1993). For instance, an employee comes to work (a benefit to the employer) expecting that their employer will pay them (a benefit to the employee). In contrast close, communal relationships, are characterized by partners providing benefits to one another out of simple care for the other's well-being and without the expectation of receiving an equivalent benefit in return (Clark & Mills, 2012). Considering these significant differences between cooperative norms governing these two types of relationships, it is valuable to explore the antecedents and consequences of voice in both types. In particular, the expectations and obligations in these two types of relationships differ. In close relationships members have higher expectations of receiving care (Earp, McLoughlin, Monrad, Clark, & Crockett, 2020; Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987) and feel higher

obligations to track partner needs and to give care (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Dubash & Mills, 1998) but these feelings are known to vary in strength (Mills et al., 2004). As I have defined voice here as focused either on desire to have a partner take one's own needs into account (self-benefiting voice) or desire to benefit one's partner (partner-benefiting voice), it follows that the strength of one's communal relationship with a particular partner and one's commitment to that partner, as well as one's perceptions of the same variables in one's partner ought to impact a person's use of voice. Thus, here, I have chosen to look specifically at voice within close, romantic relationships and at variation in communal strength and commitment as possible predictors of use of such voice.

Among close relationship researchers the idea of giving voice or speaking up (generally) about concerns in relationships has been discussed previously, but by only one set of scholars of close relationships, and in research published long ago in the 1980s (Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988). Specifically, Rusbult and her colleagues spoke of and investigated a construct they called voice as it occurred within close relationships yet they focused on it in a theoretical way that is simultaneously both broader than my current focus (in one way) and narrower than my current focus (in another way.) Specifically, these authors wrote about four ways in which people might respond to a partner's poor behavior.<sup>1</sup> The four responses fall on the poles of two dimensions of possible responses: Negative to positive (the valence of the response) and passive to active (failing to act or acting). The combination of these two dimensions produced four types of proposed responses to a partner's poor behavior directed at the self: Loyalty (inactive and positive), Neglect (inactive and negative), Exit (active and negative) and Voice (active and positive). (Their conceptualization did not contain any responses to a partner's poor behavior affecting the partner him or herself and thus nothing akin to what is called partner-benefiting voice here.)

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<sup>1</sup> For them poor behavior was not differentiated into behavior that might hurt the person who could exercise voice and behavior that might hurt the partner to whom voice was expressed as I do in this dissertation.

Their conceptualization of voice is broader than mine in that they include any active, intentional, effort to improve a relationship following disagreements and conflict. For example, they (but not I) would include seeking help from a therapist in their conceptualization of voice. Their conceptualization of voice is also narrower than is mine in that they only focused on speaking up following a disagreement or conflict or in the face of other sorts of poor behavior directed toward the self, whereas the present focus is on voice as it occurs anytime an individual explicitly brings up concerns about their own welfare, or regarding their partner's welfare. It is also narrower than mine in that they were only concerned with partner poor behavior influencing the self, not partner poor behavior that might hurt the partner him or herself. My analysis also is narrower than Rusbult and others who utilized Rusbult's conceptualization, in that I limit my consideration of voice as it occurs within close relationships rather than voice as it occurs in any relationship. It is also narrower than Rusbult in that I consider only active and verbal responses to partner poor behavior and only active and verbal responses that target changing the partner's poor attitudes or behaviors. Thus, I do not focus on her reactions to poor behavior that are active and negative, namely her Exit category of reactions. Neither do I focus on her passive categories of reaction: Loyalty which consists of sticking with the partner with a positive attitude or Neglect which is failing to take actions that support or harm the relationship but, rather, literally neglecting the relationship.<sup>2</sup> I do so, because I am interested in tracking characteristics of close relationships per se that I view, a priori, as likely to predict interpersonal voice.

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<sup>2</sup> In light of the results of the three studies to be reported in this dissertation, I will return to Rusbult's categories of reactions to partners, as what I eventually did observe might be considered to fit in her loyalty or neglect categories.

So then, what is my conceptualization of voice? I define speaking up, or interpersonal voice, as alerting one's partner to concerns in order to improve either: a) one's own welfare (in the face of partner neglect of one's own welfare by that partner) or of b) one's own concerns about one's partner's welfare (in the face of partner neglect of his or her own welfare). The former I call self-benefiting interpersonal voice and the latter I call partner-benefiting interpersonal voice.

More explicitly, interpersonal voice is a person's verbal attempt to change their partner's attitude or behaviors in order to support a goal. This can be further broken down into at least three categories: self-benefiting, partner-benefiting, and a category not yet mentioned--mutually-benefiting. Self-benefiting interpersonal voice consists of an expression of concern about a partner's attitude or behavior that is currently (or expected to) inhibiting one's own pursuit of a specific goal. For instance, say a person, Kareem, is working from home and trying to prepare for a big meeting but his partner, Diane, is distracting him with questions and planning for the weekend. In this situation, Kareem may express self-benefiting interpersonal voice by asking his partner, Diane, to leave him alone while he works. Certainly, there are variations in *how* Kareem makes this request that can have a huge impact on how it is received by Diane but no matter the eloquence of his request, it would be an example of self-benefiting interpersonal voice. On the other hand, let's say that Kareem knows that Diane needs to study for an exam, but their children are running in and out of the living room, he may recommend that she put headphones on and study in the guest bedroom so that she will be free from distractions. This attempt to change Diane's behavior would be an example of partner-benefiting voice, as Kareem's objective is to support his partner's goal (of achieving a high score on the exam). Finally, let's say that Kareem and Diane have talked about a desire to go for more walks together and talk with one another as they do so, and after work Kareem suggests to Diane that they both stop playing on their phones and go for a walk together. Here, Kareem is expressing a concern that their current behavior is inhibiting their mutual goal to spend more time together by going for walks, and might be considered mutually-



benefiting voice. In each of these situations Kareem is making a verbal expression of concern about his partner's behavior in an effort to support a goal. I focus just on self- and partner benefiting voice in this dissertation but acknowledge that mutually-benefiting voice also exists.

Similar to voice in the business literature, when expressing any type of concern, there is an inherent risk associated with doing so. In my hypothetical situation wherein, Kareem is telling Diane that her current behavior is wrong and should change (meaning either she should not disturb him in the case of my self-voice example or that she should focus on her tasks and wear head-phones in my partner-voice example) it is not hard to see what makes that statement risky. In self-benefiting interpersonal voice, Diane may feel offended or uncared for and she may find Kareem to be selfish. In addition to these risks, expressing partner-benefiting interpersonal voice potentially comes with additional risks. Kareem may be incorrect about Diane's goals, the priority of her goals, or how she wants to be supported in pursuing her goals, and by expressing his concern he risks annoying Diane or even damaging Diane's perception of how much Kareem cares for and understands her. As is demonstrated between Kareem and Diane, with any expression of interpersonal voice comes a set of risks that vary in magnitude and direction (who the risk is towards). Therefore, how one actually expresses a concern (tone of voice, facial expression, context, etc.) will be important in mitigating the risks as well as in leading to more positive outcomes for the relationship.

Although expressing concerns comes with risks, it also comes with potential rewards. The most obvious rewards are elimination of barriers to making progress towards one's own and one's partner's goals and, indeed, actual progress towards one's goals (in the case of self-benefiting voice) and one's partner being able to do the same (in the case of partner-benefiting voice). So too might persons who express self-benefiting voice enjoy the satisfaction and reassurance that the partner cares for them if the partner responds positively to the exercise of self-voice. In other words, both forms of voice that I investigate can be viewed as forms of responsiveness, which has been broadly defined as a person

promoting another's welfare and more specifically as a person demonstrating understanding of the other, acceptance of the other, and care for the other (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Clark, 2013). Self-benefiting voice can be taken as a person's request for the partner to be responsive to the person; partner-benefiting voice can be taken as evidence of the person being responsive to the other. However, as already mentioned, so too does voice carry risks of being interpreted in other ways, for instance as criticism of the other, hostility toward the other, and/or disdain for the other.

Partner-benefiting voice can be thought of as more of an altruistic act, wherein the benefit comes from helping to advance a partner's goals. Research now provides ample evidence that providing support to a partner enhances one's own happiness (Dunn, Aknin & Norton, 2008; Dunn & Norton, 2014) especially when one desires a close relationship with that partner (Williamson & Clark, 1989). So too might self-esteem rise as a result (Williamson & Clark, 1989) and the partner may feel and express gratitude toward the person both of which can boost the strength of the relationship (Algoe, 2012; Lambert & Fincham, 2011).

More often than not, however, these expressions of voice are not solely motivated by partner-benefiting motives but are a mix of self- and partner-benefiting motives. The key differentiator is which motivation is at the forefront of the expression of voice; with partner-benefiting voice the driving motivation is to support the partner. For example, if Kareem tells Diane that she shouldn't eat so much sugar, this may have been said primarily to help Diane with her goal of eating healthier food but Kareem also may have a sub-goal of wanting a thinner partner and hopefully, the former goal is the salient goal to his partner. Flip the expresser's motivations and the expression of concern becomes self-benefiting voice and may be resented specifically because it is seen as falsely presented as a benefit to the partner. Thus, it is the primary motivation of the expresser behind the expression of voice that dictates what type of voice it is. Certainly, identifying the primary motivation is not without its own set of challenges

and people may not fully realize what is motivating their action (Bargh, 1990; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, & Barndollar, & Trotschel, 2001; Kilhstrom, 2019).

### What interpersonal voice is not

In understanding what interpersonal voice is, it is helpful to think about what it is not. Interpersonal voice, as analyzed in this paper, is not just expressing a difference of opinion. For example, it is not just saying that one disagrees with one's partner on whether the restaurant they have just dined at is good or not. This is not speaking up as I define it here because it does not represent an attempt to further one's own (or one's partner's) welfare at some risk. Neither does voice represent just an attempt to further one's partner's welfare without some risk. For instance, if a wife tells her husband that they shouldn't accept another couple's invitation to go on a ski trip because they both would prefer a warm vacation and only have funds for one vacation, that would not be included in my present discussion, as neither person wants to go on a ski trip. In addition, expressing a concern for the benefit of a third-party also is not voice as I discuss it here. Thus, if a person suggests to their partner that they should not argue lest their child overhear them and be distressed, that would not qualify as self- or partner-benefiting voice as defined in this dissertation, though it may be a form of voice that other researchers may want to explore. Finally, when I refer to speaking up, I do not include complaining about something that one knows cannot be changed or fixed. For example, saying, "I really wish you had not spent money on the ski trip we took last year." is not a form of speaking up included in my present discussion as it cannot realistically result in a change of behavior that would improve the person's own or the partner's life.

### Purpose of this dissertation

In this dissertation I consider the concept of voice within close romantic relationships and focus on characteristics of these relationships that may influence one's use of interpersonal voice. In the process I will expand research on voice in two important ways.

First, I will be expanding the study of voice beyond the domain of business relationships, something that has rarely been done to date. More specifically, I investigate the antecedents to expressing interpersonal voice within close relationships as well as the consequences of doing so. Second, I investigate how two truly relationally based variables, communal strength and commitment to a specific relationship influence voice, which contrast with most work on voice that has been done in business settings. Whereas the topic of speaking up has been often discussed within the management literature (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004; Dyne, Van, & Botero, 2003; Burris, 2018; Spencer, 1986; Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Edmondson, 2003; Okuyama, Wagner, & Bijnen, 2014), there is a dearth of research regarding expressing voice within the context of close relationships. The wider available research, indicates that voice is influenced by both contextual and individual factors (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009), yet the contextual variables considered do not include relational context.

Through a series of three studies, I explore the associations between communal relationship strength, commitment, and interpersonal voice (Studies 1), and I study the same associations via a 2-week, dyadic, longitudinal study in Study 2. Finally, I examine how these variables influence the actual expression of interpersonal voice in the laboratory (Study 3).

### **The importance of studying Interpersonal Voice**

Investigating the antecedents to interpersonal voice is important as it may allow researchers to understand the challenges people face with speaking up. Although people may wish to provide help to their close others via speaking up as well as to seek help for themselves, the risks associated with so doing may be at odds with the potential benefits. Certainly, the perceived benefits and perceived risks of expressing one's concerns play an important role in one's willingness to speak up, regardless of the context (Cavallo et. al., 2014). However, both perceived risk and perceived benefit are likely influenced

by the relationship between the two parties involved. Thus, it is useful to understand the effect of various relational variables on one's expression of interpersonal voice.

Further, although this is not a sole reason to investigate a phenomenon, the concept of speaking up (or expressing concerns) within relationships is one that is pervasive in all manner of relationships. This adds another reason to investigate interpersonal voice. It is a phenomenon that many people (if not all) encounter within their relationships, and developing a greater understanding of the determinants and consequences of expressing voice (or failing to do so) is essential to guiding the use of interpersonal voice within healthy, thriving, relationships. I am particularly interested in partner-benefiting interpersonal voice as social psychological paper generally (and even papers within the area of relationship science specifically) often is written from the perspective of individuals who are watching out for their own interests rather than from the perspective of individuals who, often, are watching out for their partners' interests.

Considering voice in the context of close, interpersonal, relationships suggests selecting a set of variables that have to do with the very nature of the relationship in question (rather than variables inherent in individuals alone) which may influence voice. Two such variables which I consider in depth are: commitment to the relationship (Rusbult, 1980) and the communal strength of the relationship (Mills et al., 2004) as well as their counterparts of perception of a partner's communal strength felt toward one and of a partner's commitment to the relationship.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important for me to acknowledge the prior research that indicates that a person's perception of the risks involved with carrying out an action has a significant influence on one's willingness to carry out that action. However, for the sake of this dissertation, I am not interested in furthering the discussion of risk levels or how people perceive risk and therefore will not discuss risk independently from the relational variables of interest

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory Regarding the Antecedents of Interpersonal Voice in Relationships

Throughout the studies to be presented in this paper, I continue to assess these relational variables to better understand the antecedents to expressing both partner-benefiting and self-benefiting interpersonal voice. As just noted, the two variables (communal strength and commitment) are considered from two perspectives (own felt communal strength and commitment; and own perception of partner communal strength and commitment), each may impact interpersonal voice in different ways. I turn now to discussing how communal strength and commitment (both own and perceived) may influence interpersonal voice.

#### Communal Strength

Communal strength, in its simplest definition, is an individual's concern for his/her partner's welfare. The greater one's communal strength (i.e. concern for the partner's welfare), the more one should: a) track partner needs (Clark, Mills & Powell, 1986; Clark, Mills & Corcoran, 1989), b) be responsive to one's partner's needs (Clark, Ouellette, Powell & Mills, 1987; Mills et al., 2004; Mattingly, Oswald & Clark, 2011), c) feel good after having given help (Kogan, Impett, Oveis, Hui, Gordon, & Keltner, 2010; Williamson & Clark, 1992) and d) feel worse about not helping the other (Williamson, Clark, Pegalis & Behan, 1996). This degree of motivation to respond to a communal partner's needs should influence partner-benefiting voice (Mills et al., 2004; Clark & Mills, 2013). [Additionally, communal strength is associated with caring about the partner's welfare and part of being concerned about the partner's welfare is avoiding harm to the partner whatever the cause of that harm might be included self-induced harm (Wieselquist et al., 1999). As such, my hypotheses are this, greater

communal strength will be positively associated with frequency of expressing partner-benefiting voice and negatively related to expressing self-benefiting voice.

As previously stated, partner-benefiting interpersonal voice is the act of expressing a concern with the intention to help the partner. Thus, persons with greater communal strength should express more partner-benefiting interpersonal voice. The motivation to be responsive and supportive to one's partner is known to lead to greater helping behavior (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew 1999; Mills et al., 2004), and partner-benefiting interpersonal voice is one way a person may attempt to provide that help. Another way to think about communal strength is the degree to which someone is willing to put his/her partner's needs above his/her own needs (Wieselquist et al., 1999; Clark & Mills, 2012). When viewing communal strength in this light, greater communal strength should lead a person to lean towards expressing voice when doing so has equally weighted perceived positive effects for the partner and perceived negative effects for the self. Furthermore, when the self-risks are greater than the perceived partner-benefits, it should require significantly greater perceived risk than the perceived benefits in order for someone to not speak up. For instance, speaking up to remind one's partner about the diet s/he is on and recommend s/he not eat the ice cream may lead one's partner to stay true to his/her diet but it also may lead to the removal of all ice cream from the house (in order to remove the temptation). The person expressing voice may realize these potential outcomes, but due to her heightened sense of communal strength towards her partner she is more willing to sacrifice her own desires (having ice cream in the house) for her partner's benefit (sticking to his diet). Indeed, Van Lange and colleagues find that communal strength is positively related to willingness to sacrifice for one's partner (Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997).

The same concern for the partner should lead to fewer expressions of self-benefiting voice. This could be seen as a form of self-sacrifice for the benefit of the partner, where an individual refrains from asking his/her partner to change something for that individual's benefit so as to minimize potential harm

to the partner. Certainly, I am not saying that high communal strength felt toward the partner will lead individuals to neglect their own welfare, simply that it will reduce the number of times they speak up about it.

At the start I also realized that communal strength might influence partner-benefiting voice in the negative direction as well. That is, a person who is high in communal strength towards his partner might be less likely to express partner-benefiting voice as well, out of concern for his partner's feelings in the moment or out of desire for the relationship to flow smoothly in the moment. If an individual perceives that speaking up may cause distress in the moment to his/her partner, in addition to providing the intended benefit, then having a greater concern for the partner may lead that person to be less willing to express interpersonal voice. Thus, I recognize that communal strength may have differing effects on interpersonal voice depending on upon whom the potential consequences fall. Specifically, under conditions of high communal strength, when the potential negative consequences fall on the individual expressing the concern, frequency of expressing interpersonal voice should be higher than when communal strength is lower, however, when the potential negative consequences fall on the expresser's partner, frequency of expressing interpersonal voice may be lower than when communal strength is higher.

### Perceived Communal Strength

Perceived communal strength is similar to communal strength but instead of one's own concern for one's partner, it is a person's perception of how concerned the partner is for their wellbeing. This perception of how much a partner feels towards him or her also likely influences the frequency with which they express both types of interpersonal voice. Although research has indicated that perceived communal strength is heavily influenced by projection of one's own communal strength towards the partner, this perceived communal strength from the partner also has been shown to be differentiated



from actor's own felt communal strength toward the partner (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008). My hypothesis is that perceived communal strength should be positively related to the frequency of using both self- and partner-benefiting interpersonal voice, however, it should influence the use of voice in a very different manner. Specifically, it should operate by providing a sense of safety and security for the self in exercising the voice (Lemay, & Clark, 2008). When a person perceives his/her partner to have high communal strength towards him/herself, that person perceives the partner to care for that person's wellbeing. This should lead the person to feel that the risk in expressing voice is reduced. There should be greater confidence that the partner will perceive the expression of concern as well-intentioned versus being critical or solely self-motivated, or the partner may be more willing to enact accommodation rather than reacting negatively. In either case, perceiving greater communal strength in one's partner indicates a reduced risk associated with the act of expressing partner-benefiting interpersonal voice. In addition, the actor's perception of the partner's communal strength may influence voice by affecting how receptive the partner is perceived to be in responding to the actor's expression of interpersonal voice (due to concern for the actor). Thus, actor's perceived partner communal strength may have its impact on the actor's likelihood of exercising interpersonal voice through its effect on that actor's perceptions of the efficacy of speaking up. That is, if an actor thinks a partner cares for him, he also should think that the partner will listen to his concerns and act accordingly.

## **Commitment**

Another relational characteristic likely to influence interpersonal voice is a person's commitment to the relationship. Commitment refers to the person's intention to stay in a relationship over the long-term (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). My overall hypothesis is that commitment will be positively related to partner-

benefiting voice but negatively related to self-benefiting voice. Partner-benefiting voice is expected to be positively related to commitment because people who are highly committed to their partners should seek to provide benefits to the partner as a way of showing the value they bring to the relationship (thereby encouraging the partner to stay committed as well). Since partner-benefiting voice is supposed to be used as a form of supporting one's partner I expected it to be used more by people who are more committed to the relationship, and want the relationship to last and for it to be of the highest possible quality. Self-benefiting voice, on the other hand, does not provide direct benefits to the partner but retains the same risks of speaking up and should therefore be negatively related to one's own commitment to the relationship. Further, commitment may increase the willingness to make sacrifices to the partner despite costs to the self (including taking the risk of angering the partner by implying that they cannot determine what is best for themselves, or the expresser, on their own) (Van Lange, et al. 1997).

Whereas the above is what I expect to find, I acknowledge that partner-benefiting voice may also be impacted by the risks. It is possible that the same concern about maintaining the relationship may lead a person to be highly focused on the risks associated with expressing partner-benefiting concerns, thereby resulting in fewer instances of partner-benefiting voice. As speaking up for the partner's benefit often indicates that s/he is doing something that the expresser would recommend not doing, or would recommend doing differently, expressing that concern can lead the partner to feel inadequate or incompetent which can then translate into resentment, hurt feelings, and animosity toward the expresser. This direct threat to the relationship may lead persons with high commitment towards their partner to shy away from expressing interpersonal voice because expressing voice has the risk of damaging the relationship.

### Perceived Commitment

Perceived commitment is a person's perception of how committed his/her partner is to their relationship. I predicted that perceived commitment would act on interpersonal voice in a straightforward manner. That is, greater perceived commitment should be associated with more frequent expressions of both self- and partner-benefiting voice. This is because perceived commitment indicates to the expresser that it is safe to express concerns within the relationship (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). Stanley, Blumberg, and Markman (1999) help to further understand the influence of perceived commitment, viewing it as a contribution to one's sense of safety in intimate relationships. They divide this sense of safety into two broad categories, safety in interaction and relationship security. Thus, perceived commitment extends beyond providing general relationship security into providing a sense of safety during tense situations, such as conflict or expressing interpersonal voice. Persons who perceive their partner to be high in commitment should think that there is a much higher threshold of discontent that the partner must reach before that person would terminate the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Tan, Agnew, & Hadden, 2020; Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006). This should indicate to the expresser that the potential consequences of expressing voice are lower (as the likelihood of termination is reduced) when the partner is perceived to be high in commitment. As Rusbult (1980) describes in her investment model, there are multiple factors that lead people to leave or stay in a relationship. Three of these factors are: satisfaction with the relationship, quality of alternatives, and investment size (or sunk costs in the relationship). Perceiving any one of these factors to be higher should increase commitment and, in turn, make it safer to take risks (such as expressing concerns) (Waters & Cummings, 2000).

Summary of Relationship Variables Predicted to Influence Voice. Overall, I theorized that these four factors, communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment would have a positive significant influence on the extent a person expresses partner-benefiting concerns to his/her partner. Similarly, perceived communal strength and perceived

commitment should be positively related to the frequency with which an individual expresses self-benefiting voice, but, in contrast, commitment and communal strength should be negatively related to self-benefiting voice. Although, not specifically assessed in the studies presented in this dissertation, I suspect that this positive relationship is operating through the perceived risks of expressing the concern. Persons with higher scores on the relational variable see the relationship as one that is safer to express the concern (i.e., lower risk).

### Interpersonal Voice and Relationship Satisfaction

In addition to addressing the antecedents of expressing interpersonal voice, I also am interested in the relational consequences of expressing interpersonal voice—specifically focusing on how the use of both kinds of interpersonal voice would relate to relationship satisfaction. My prediction for partner-benefiting voice should come as no surprise at this point, it is that frequency of expressing partner-benefiting voice should be positively associated with relationship satisfaction. As I described throughout my discussion of the relational variables, partner-benefiting voice is a means of supporting a partner's goals, and existing evidence on the occurrence of partner support within a relationship shows it to be positively linked to higher ratings of relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2006; Schokker, et al., 2010). Additionally, as partner-benefiting voice is a verbal form of support, it may lead to higher perceived support as well. That is, partner-benefiting voice is perhaps a more overt, direct, way of supporting one's partner than, say, acts such as doing the dishes or taking out the trash (which are often forms of invisible support) (Girme, et al., 2018).

Self-benefiting voice may not be as straight forward, however. More frequent expressions of self-benefiting voice may indicate greater dissatisfaction with the extent to which the partner is responsive to oneself. Moreover, too much self-benefiting voice might be viewed as being selfish. Therefore, I expected to see a negative relationship between self-benefiting voice and relationship

satisfaction. At the same time, I acknowledge that, more frequent expression of self-benefiting voice may suggest to partners that the persona exercising voice feels a sense of safety and security with the status of the relationship. This might be valued and therefore result in self-benefiting voice being positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Whereas the latter explanation is plausible, I believe the former rationale to be more likely and, therefore, I predicted a negative relationship between self-benefiting voice and relationship satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 3. STUDIES

### **Overview of the three studies comprising this dissertation.**

I had three aims for the work presented in this paper: First, to test my theoretical ideas by measuring the four relational variables of interest to me (communal strength, perceived partner communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment) and then by asking participants to self-report their retrospective use of expressing interpersonal voice (Study Series 1). From this study (Study 1 is actually a set of related studies) I address the existence of interpersonal voice within close relationships and begin to develop an understanding of how the stated relational variables affect one's self-reported general expression of interpersonal voice. With this providing a foundation, I move into more complex studies. In Study 2, I examined daily frequency of expressing interpersonal voice and the effects of doing so on both partners in the relationship through conducting a longitudinal, dyadic, self-report study (Study 2). A representation of this model is presented in Figure 1. Finally, in a third study, I attempted to behaviorally observe partner-benefiting interpersonal voice through an in-laboratory study (Study 3). The idea was that observing partners engaging in (or not engaging in) interpersonal voice would enable me to support (or deny) my proposed framework. Furthermore, pairing behavioral observations with stated general expression of interpersonal voice will provide me with a better understanding of how consistently this behavior aligns with stated belief about their expressions of partner-benefiting interpersonal voice.

### **Study 1: Self-report Interpersonal Voice Assessment**

In Study 1, I examine how communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment relate to one's retrospective beliefs about their expression of interpersonal voice. For this study, participants (persons in exclusive, romantic relationships) completed measures

assessing each of the four relational variables (perceived partner communal strength, communal strength, perceived partner commitment and commitment) as well as a measure of their expression of partner- and self-benefiting interpersonal voice. The purpose of this study was to understand how differences in relationships are associated with the use of interpersonal voice. Specifically, I predicted that higher levels of perceived communal strength, communal strength, perceived commitment, and commitment would, on their own, each be associated with higher self-reported retrospective use of partner-benefiting voice, while higher reports of perceived communal strength and perceived commitment would relate to higher reports of self-benefiting voice due to the inherent risks associated with expressing self-benefiting voice.

The rationales for my predictions are as follows. Partner-benefiting voice: Most straightforwardly, a person's own communal strength should increase partner-benefiting voice simply because true concern for one's partner should lead one to speak up in support of one's partner when the partner is neglecting his or her own needs, even when there is some risk to the self in so doing. So too did I expect a person's perception of a partner's communal strength to predict speaking up on the partner's behalf, but for a different reason. If a partner cares for you, I suspect that the perceived risk in speaking up on their behalf will drop. They ought to be more likely to attend to what one has to say and to be willing to process the information when their care for a partner is greater. (It is noteworthy that it is now well-established that people project their own communal strength onto their partners (e.g., Lemay & Clark, 2008; Clark, Von Culin, Clark-Polner & Lemay, 2017) so I also anticipated that perceived partner communal strength will be driven in part by own communal strength).

Regarding commitment, perceived partner commitment to the relationship should predict speaking up on behalf of the partner as it ought to decrease the perceived risk in so doing. On the other hand, one's own commitment to the relationship should increase the likelihood of expressing partner-benefiting voice because it ought to increase the value and importance of so doing. Regarding self-

benefiting voice, many of the predictions for self-benefiting voice mimic those for partner-benefiting voice, for instance, perceiving a partner is committed to the relationship should lead a person to feel that it is safe to speak up about issues that benefit his/her own goals. So too should perceived communal strength act on self-benefiting voice in the same way that partner-benefiting voice is expected to be impacted by perceived communal strength. However, a person's own commitment and communal strength may relate to self-benefiting voice in the opposite direction than partner-benefiting voice relates to those measures. Specifically, it is possible that the more committed an individual is to his/her partner, the more fearful s/he may be about the partner terminating the relationship, and expressing self-benefiting voice risks upsetting the partner (which could theoretically lead to the partner terminating the relationship). Communal strength, however, may elicit less fear but more concern about the impact of expressing self-benefiting voice. The more communally oriented persons are towards their partners, the more concerned about their partners' welfare they should be and expressing self-benefiting voice risks offending partners which also could lead to a negative relationship between self-benefiting voice and own communal strength.

## METHODS

### *Participants.*

Participants were 196 individuals in exclusive, romantic relationships recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk Prime. 231 individuals initiated the survey but data from 35 participants were excluded for failing to complete at least 50% of the survey. Participants were paid \$0.50 to complete this online survey. On average, participants were 34 years old and ages ranged from 21 to 69 years old. There were 107 male participants and 88 female participants and 1 who did not indicate gender. 81% were White/Caucasian, 8% Black/African American, 4% Native American/ Native Indian, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Other. Although all were in a romantic relationship with a single other person,



participants varied in their exact relationship status (47% Seriously dating one person, 15% Engaged, 38% Married).

### *Measures*

*Communal Strength.* Conceptually, communal strength is the degree to which people assume responsibility for a partner's welfare in terms of their willingness to devote time, energy and resources into promoting that partner's welfare. To measure this, participants responded to Mills et al.'s (2004) communal strength scale which includes 10 questions measured on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely). Some examples include: "How far would you be willing to go to visit [Partner's name]", "How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of [Partner's name]", and "How high a priority for you is meeting the needs of [Partner's name]?" 3 of the 10 questions are reverse scored, "How easily could you accept not helping [Partner's name]" "How readily can you put the needs of [Partner's name] out of your thoughts" and "How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for [Partner's name]?" The communal strength scale can be viewed in Appendix A. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was = .83.

*Perceived Communal Strength.* In addition to measuring each participant's communal strength felt toward a partner, I measured each participant's perception of the partner's felt communal strength toward the participant with an adapted version of Mills et al., (2004) communal strength scale. This scale included the same 10 questions measured on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely). Examples of how the questions were modified to assess for perceived communal strength include: "How far would [Partner's name] be willing to go to visit you", "How large a cost would [Partner's name] incur to meet a need of yours", and "How high a priority for [Partner's name] is meeting the needs of you?" The same 3 questions (as in the original communal strength scale) will be reverse scored, "How easily could [Partner's name] accept not helping you", "How readily can [Partner's

name] put the needs of you out of his/her thoughts”, and “How reluctant would [Partner’s name] be to sacrifice for you?” The complete scale for each of these measures is in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was = .86.

*Commitment.* Commitment refers to a person's intent to remain in a relationship for the long term. To measure the participants’ commitment level, participants responded to a subset of items designed to tap commitment included a larger scale developed by Rusbult and Agnew’s in connection with Rusbult's investment model (1998). The seven statements for commitment level were measured on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Do not agree at all) to 8 (Agree completely). Examples of the statements are: “I want our relationship to last for a very long time.”, “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.”, and “I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future (R).” Two out of the seven statements are reverse scored. The entire scale can be seen in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was = .88.

*Perceived Partner Commitment.* Along with the participants’ commitment level felt toward their partner, I measured ‘participants perceptions of how committed their partner was to them. The same set of items from the commitment scale (Rusbult & Agnew, 1998) was adapted to assess perceived commitment. Examples include, (“[Partner’s name] wants our relationship to last for a very long time”, “[Partner’s name] is committed to maintaining his/her relationship with me”, “[Partner’s name] is oriented toward the long-term future of our relationship”, “[Partner’s name] imagines being with me several years from now)”, and “[Partner’s name] would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future (R).”) The statements for perceived commitment level are also measured on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Do not agree at all) to 8 (Agree completely), two out of the seven statements will be reverse scored. The full scale is available in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was = .87.

*Partner-benefiting Voice.* Partner-benefiting voice refers to the participant verbalizing concerns about their partner's attitudes or behaviors, to their partner with the goal of advancing the partner's welfare. Respondents completed a 4-item version of the Partner-benefiting Voice scale (2019) that was developed for this dissertation. The instructions for the partner-benefiting voice scale read "How often have you done the following in order to benefit your partner's welfare?" The 4 questions are as follows: "Expressed concerns with {partner's name}'s behaviors.", "Did not suggest/advise changes to [partner's name]'s behavior even though I wanted to." (R), "Suggested/advise changes to [partner's name]'s attitude.", "Did not express concerns with [partner's name]'s attitude, even though I wanted to (R)." These items were rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 7 (Very often). This scale was devised for this study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was = .86.

*Self-benefiting Voice.* Self-benefiting voice refers to the participant verbalizing concerns about their partner's attitudes or behaviors, to their partner with the goal of advancing their own welfare. The same set of items used to tap partner-benefiting voice was modified to assess participant's self-benefiting Voice. The modified instructions read, "How often have you done the following in order to benefit your own welfare?" These items were answered on the same response scale as described above (alpha from this study = .79). Both partner- and self-benefiting scales were developed for the purposes of the present research and validated through a series of four online studies, with over 600 total participants, that indicated strong alphas and high degrees of reliability. Additional information on scale development can be obtained from the author.

## RESULTS

Table 1.0 provides basic descriptive statistics for the measures used in Study 1, including the means, for the relational variables (perceived communal strength, communal strength, perceived commitment, and commitment), standard deviations, minimum and maximum response values. The

interpersonal voice scales means indicate that respondents, on average, indicated using both types of interpersonal voice slightly above average by selecting values slightly above the mid-point of the scale (with 3.5 representing the middle of the scale).

Table 1.0 Means, standard deviations and ranges for the four primary relational predictor variables and two primary outcome variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Communal Strength	8.50	1.55	4.50	11.00
P. Communal Strength	7.99	1.61	1.40	11.00
Commitment	7.06	1.42	2.00	8.67
P. Commitment	6.89	1.50	1.00	9.00
Partner-benefiting Voice	4.20	0.95	1.50	7.00
Self-benefiting Voice	4.12	1.01	1.00	7.00

Possible range for communal strength and P. communal strength 1 – 11, possible range for commitment and perceived commitment 1 – 9, possible range for partner-benefiting and self-benefiting voice 1- 7

### Partner-benefiting voice

A multiple regression was conducted to see if communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment predicted the retrospective use of partner-benefiting voice. Of these four predictor variables, only perceived communal strength significantly, and positively, related to expressing partner-benefiting voice (as predicted). The betas for communal strength fell in the same, predicted, direction but did not approach significance. Commitment and perceived commitment showed no evidence of supporting the hypotheses and, indeed, fell in the opposite direction. See Table 1.1 for full results.

Table 1.1 Communal Strength, Perceived Communal Strength, Commitment, and Perceived Commitment as predictors of Partner-benefiting Voice

Variable	b	SE B	$\beta$	p-value
Communal Strength	0.09	0.07	0.14	0.231
P. Communal Strength	0.13	0.06	0.22	0.033*
Commitment	-0.02	0.08	-0.03	0.821
P. Commitment	-0.08	0.07	-0.13	0.262

R<sup>2</sup> = .06, \* <.05

### Self-benefiting voice

Similarly, a multiple regression was conducted to see if the same relational variables predicted the retrospective reports of self-benefiting voice. As with partner-benefiting voice, perceived communal strength was the only relational variable to significantly relate to self-reports of expressing self-benefiting voice. This time no trend in the same, expected, direction was found for communal strength and, again, perceived commitment actually trended in the opposite direction, with greater perceived partner commitment trending toward being associated with less self-benefiting voice. See Table 1.2 for full results.

Table 1.2 Communal strength, Perceived Communal Strength, Commitment, and Perceived Commitment as predictors of Self-benefiting Voice.

Variable	b	SE B	$\beta$	p-value
Communal Strength	-0.04	0.08	-0.06	0.640
P. Communal Strength	0.19	0.07	0.30	0.004**
Commitment	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.769
P. Commitment	-0.13	0.08	-0.19	0.093

$R^2 = .05$ , \*\*<.001

## DISCUSSION

These analyses indicate partial support for my hypotheses. The more that individuals perceived their partners to feel communal strength towards them (meaning they perceived the partner to care for their welfare), the more frequently they, retrospectively, reported having expressed partner-benefiting concerns, and the more they reported having expressed self-benefiting concerns. As I theorized, this may indicate that perceiving one's partner to be more communally oriented toward the relationship leads one to view these risky expressions as less risky since the partner is more caring towards oneself and therefore is more likely to give the benefit of the doubt to perceive good intentions behind the expression rather than looking for the potential selfish nature of the statement. That is when Kareem

hints to Diane that she may not want to eat the ice cream because of the diet she is on, if Kareem perceives Diane to have a strong communal orientation towards him then he may worry less about Diane thinking he just wants her to be thinner rather than his true intention of supporting her on her diet plan. Of course, this requires assuming that those who care for a partner's welfare are also more benevolent in their interpretations of that partner's intentions.

### **Interpretation of non-significant results for partner-benefiting voice**

Communal strength is defined as a concern for the partner's welfare and considerable evidence supporting the validity of the communal strength scale used in this research has been reported in the literature (e.g., Mills et al., 2004; Li & Hui, 2019; Stafford, 2020). Our measure of partner-benefiting voice was supposed to tap supporting the partner's welfare. Thus, this non-significant relationship of communal strength with partner-benefiting voice requires explanation. Assuming the communal strength scale to be valid, my best guess as to why it was unrelated to my measure of partner-benefiting voice is that exercising voice (as I define it) is determined by more than just care for one's partner. I posit that it also taps two additional constructs: First, exercising partner-benefiting voice likely involves the risk of hurting one's partner's feelings in the moment as a form of criticism (ideally constructive criticism, but criticism nonetheless). That risk harming the partner's well-being. So too may exercising partner-benefiting voice tap one's own unwillingness to just "let the small things go" for the sake of maintaining a calm, non-disruptive, flow of interdependence in the relationships. Perhaps when one truly cares for a partner's welfare one is especially reluctant to hurt that person's feelings in the moment and also especially willing to let minor issues pass to insure a calm, non-disruptive, flow of behavior in the relationship. If so, such tendencies might cancel out other urges to exercise partner-benefiting voice to truly benefit the partner resulting in the non-significant effects observed for communal strength here. This raises an interesting new issue for future research of what is truly beneficial to the welfare of a partner and a relationship both in the short run and in the long run.

Similarly, commitment did not significantly relate to partner-benefiting voice and this is likely a reflection of the tenuous nature of expressing partner-benefiting voice. There may be times when there are clear benefits to the partner with little risk in which highly committed people see as benefiting the longevity of the relationship, and there may be just as many times when that benefit/risk ratio is not as overwhelmingly one-sided.

Interestingly, the non-significant findings for perceived commitment trend in a direction that is opposite to my hypothesis. I expected to observe a positive relationship between perceived commitment and frequency of expressing partner-benefiting voice, but the results indicate a negative relationship between the two. The initial hypothesis was driven by the relational safety that should be felt when the partner is perceived to be more committed to the relationship, but instead it may be that this perception actually increases the potential harm that can be inflicted on the partner through interpersonal voice. This enhanced harm shifts the benefit/risk ratio in favor of the risks and leads to fewer expressions of partner-benefiting voice.

Notably, one's own commitment to a relationship may cut two ways. Whereas high commitment might make one worry more about risks out of fear that the partner will leave, low commitment might also lead to a lack of expressing concerns for a different reason. That is, when one is not committed, and possibly willing to lose the relationships or one considers it to be already lost, then one may be less concerned about the partner's well-being and therefore less likely to speak up. In contrast, when one is committed it might seem especially important to keep the peace in one's relationship and to keep things working smoothly. The idea that partners who are higher in commitment may be more concerned about keeping the peace and engaging in positive interactions is supported by work done by Gottman and colleagues. Specifically, one topic that Gottman analyzed is how couples respond to each other during times of conflict. Specifically, in a study of 240 couples where each couple was video-taped during times of conflict, he had the couples watch their respective video-taped

discussions with their partners and continuously rate how positive, negative or neutral the interaction felt. He found that couples who were more committed to the relationship rated the interactions as more positive than did those who were less committed to the relationship (Gottman, 2011). From these ratings Gottman developed his revised Sound Relationship House, which outlined Gottman's understanding of what holds a relationship together, to include trust and commitment as the pillars of the house—essential components for the relationship to stand. Gottman describes how commitment interacts with the relationship this way: Commitment is “the ultimate social and emotional investment, it is based on cherishing one's partner, comparing the partner as much more desirable than alternative real or imagined alternative relationships" ... "Cherishing nurtures gratitude for the relationships. It is a decision to maximize one's partner's positive qualities and minimize negative qualities. This leads to mutual nurturance and moral responsibility for building a life together (Gottman, Gottman, & McNulty, 2017, p. 445).” Gottman further explored the negative ways in which couples respond to each other. The two affective regulation strategies that are used by couples who are low in commitment and headed for divorce are 1) an emotionally inexpressive pattern, and 2) an emotionally volatile attack-defend pattern (Gottman & Levenson, 2002). So, rather than frequently expressing concerns, as might occur in the “attack-defend” couple, people low in commitment might simply distance themselves emotionally from their partner and not care enough to speak up about concerns.

### **Interpretation of the non-significant results for self-benefiting voice**

Both communal strength and commitment failed to come close to reaching significance with self-benefiting interpersonal voice. For communal strength, this may indicate conflicting feelings regarding pursuing one's own goals through self-benefiting voice and being mindful of one's partner's welfare. They may want to express concerns that benefit the self but frequently choose to hold back as to limit the potential of upsetting their partner. Commitment is likely operating in a similar fashion, but instead of a concern for the other's welfare, the conflict comes from wanting to maintain the



relationship and wanting to pursue one's own goals. For people who are high or low in communal strength and/or commitment it looks like they bounce back and forth between holding back from expressing self-benefiting voice and actually verbalizing their concerns.

While perceived commitment failed to reach the .05 significance threshold, it trended in the negative direction for self-benefiting voice. That is, greater perceived commitment was associated with fewer expressions of self-benefiting voice. This too runs contrary to my initial hypothesis. I anticipated that perceiving greater commitment from the partner would lead to greater feelings of security within the relationship which in turn would lead to less concern about the risks associated with expressing self-benefiting voice and then to more frequent expression of self-benefiting voice. The negative relationship indicates that something else entirely is going on. Perhaps, self-benefiting voice is also the victim of an increased perception of the potential harm associated with expressing voice and people who perceive their partners as more committed opt to limit their self-benefiting voice so as to limit the potential harm done to their partners. Certainly, this is an area that warrants further investigation in future studies.

This cost-benefit analysis is not unique to interpersonal voice, rather it is something that individuals in relationships do in a number of arenas. For instance, researchers have shown that people weigh the risks and benefits before self-disclosing personal information (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006; Cuming, & Rapee, 2010), before behaving in a way so as to draw closer to another (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008), and when deciding whether to move the relationship forward (Murray, & Holmes, 1993). Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) discuss this decision about progressing the relationship as a conflict between a desire for closeness and the risk of rejection, describing it as a feature of interpersonal life. The authors continue on to describe a risk regulation system that optimizes assurance when facing these conflicts which is done by assessing the other person's regard and adjusting accordingly (Murray, et al., 2006). This risk regulation model is, perhaps, a good one to use when interpreting these results, as the expression of partner- and self-benefiting voice is risky and

greater perceived responsiveness has been shown to be positively related to feelings of safety and security (Lemay, Clark, Feeney, 2007). This feeling of safety may extend itself into communication patterns within close relationships, offering a sense of protection from the partner taking statements that were intended for good, negatively and thereby limiting the extent to which each partner feels on edge about sharing a concern.

Although in this study I asked participants, “How frequently did you express” each type of interpersonal voice, I did so without providing a specific timeframe. That is, I left it up to each participant to think retrospectively regarding how often they exercised self and partner-benefiting voice. It may be that persons in stronger (or weaker) relationships interpret the scales in somewhat different ways. As will become evident, in Study 2 I conceptually defined self- and partner-benefiting voice in the same manner but I measured them as they actually occurred on a daily basis. I return to this difference later as I discuss the results of Study 1 and Study 2 together.

### Study 2: Daily Diary

With initial testing showing a positive relationship between perceived communal strength and self-reported expression of partner-benefiting voice, I set out to understand if this relationship would hold true when participants do not rely on past memories to report on partner-benefiting voice but rather report on actual daily occurrences of self- and partner-benefiting voice. That is, in Study 2 I sought to address the relationship between the relational variables and more proximal, daily, expressions of self-benefiting voice.

When confronted with the realities of expressing interpersonal voice in the moment, I asked, will participants who perceive their partners to be higher in communal strength continue to show increased levels of self- and partner-benefiting voice or might the risks associated with expressing these concerns in the moment outweigh the benefits? This study also allowed for a second test of whether the

three other relational variables (communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment) might influence self- and partner-benefiting voice in the manner I had originally predicted that they would.

Specifically, to better understand these relationships, I conducted a daily diary study of couples in romantic relationships, in which each partner within a couple filled out a pre-survey and then reported the number of times s/he expressed each type of voice over the past 24 hours for each of 14 consecutive days. If participants reported expressing voice, they were then asked to describe the first example of exercising each type of voice each day, and to report on how cold/critical their delivery of such voice was. Participants also reported on how effective they perceived their own expression of voice to have been. Finally, participants reported on daily relationship satisfaction each day for the same 14 days. I specifically look to address three primary questions, 1) Would the results from Study 1 replicate with a sample of romantic couples? 2) How would the relational variables be associated with the frequency with which people actually express interpersonal voice? and 3) What is the relationship (if any) between expressing each type of interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction? Further, I explored whether the manner in which interpersonal voice is delivered mediated the possible relationships between exercising each type of voice and relationship satisfaction.

## METHODS

### *Participants.*

Participants were 76 couples (152 individuals) recruited through online advertisements and social media—primarily Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace. Participants were offered \$50 for completing this study (\$0 for completing 1- 3 surveys, \$10 for completing 4 surveys, \$20 for completing 7 surveys, \$25 for completing 10 surveys or \$30 for completing 14 surveys. Additionally, they were offered \$5 for completing the final survey, and if both individuals completed at least 12 days, including the last survey, an additional \$10 per person).

For their data to be included in the dataset, both members of a couple had to have completed at least 6 daily surveys in addition to the pre-survey, data from 11 couples were removed for this reason. The individuals who are included in the final dataset ranged in age from 18 to 64 years ( $M = 32.38$ ,  $SD = 10.37$ ), and reported their race/ethnicity as White (70%), Native American/Alaska Native (8%), Black (7%), Hispanic (3%), Asian (6%), or other (0.7%). Participants reported their relationship status as married (57%), seriously dating one person (26%), engaged (16%), or casually dating one person (.7%). Relationship length ranges from 3 months to 43 years ( $M = 83.25$  months,  $SD = 99.13$  months).

### *Procedure*

Once both partners of a couple agreed to participate in the study, each one was sent the pre-survey which had to be completed, independently, before the following Friday. Then, the following Sunday, all members of each couple who completed the pre-survey on time were sent the first of 14 daily surveys. Each daily survey, including the first one, was sent out at 5 PM (EST) and each participant was given until 11:59 PM (EST) to complete it, independently from their partner. On day one of the collection of daily reports, our survey contained information about interpersonal self- and partner-benefiting voice and then tested participants on their knowledge of it. This test started with a lengthy definition of each type of interpersonal voice and examples of what is and what is not interpersonal voice. Participants were then provided three scenarios, separately, and asked whether the quoted expression was a form of partner-benefiting voice, self-benefiting voice or not an example of interpersonal voice. If participants answered all three questions correctly, they continued on to the rest of the survey but if they missed a question, they were sent to the beginning of the test where the definitions were provided and prompted to go through the entire test again. If participants failed the test a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, they were removed from the study altogether. Details of this testing phase are including in Appendix H.

Following this learning and testing step, the survey then asked about interactions with their partner that involved interpersonal voice. Days two to seven asked about interactions with the participant's partner that involved interpersonal voice. On day eight, they were once again tested on their knowledge of interpersonal voice before asking about interactions with their partner that involved interpersonal voice. The test on day 8 was the exact same test as the one asked on day one. The day nine to fourteen surveys repeated the items from day two.

After the 14-day daily diary portion of the study was over, each participant was sent a written debriefing and an Amazon gift card in an amount proportionate to the number of daily surveys completed as described in our "participants" section. The total amount paid ranged from \$0 to \$50 per person.

### *Measures*

#### **Primary Pre-survey measures**

*Perceived Communal Strength (Presurvey).* Ten items adapted from Mills et al. (2004) were used in the pre-survey to measure communal strength by having the participant judge how their partner would answer each question. Items were scored on an eleven-point scales. Items measured perceived such things as how far their partner would travel to benefit them, how happy their partner would be to benefit them, and the costs the partner would incur to benefit them. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was .86.

*Communal Strength (Presurvey).* Ten items from Mills et al. (2004) were used in the pre-survey to measure communal strength. Items were scored on an eleven-point Likert scale depending on context of the item. Items were similar to those of "perceived communal strength" but framed to tap one's own communal strength. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was .88.

*Perceived Commitment (Presurvey).* Seven items were adapted from Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) and used in the pre-survey to measure perceived commitment levels. Items were measured with a nine-point Likert scale identical to those in “commitment”. Items include those from “commitment” but with the person answering was perceiving what the other partner was thinking. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was .86.

*Commitment (Presurvey).* Seven items from Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) were used in the pre-survey to measure commitment level. Items were measured with a nine-point Likert scale with (0) do not agree at all to (8) agree completely. Examples include “committed to maintaining my relationship”, “would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end”, and “want our relationship to last forever”. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was .84.

*Partner-Voice (Presurvey).* Four items were used in the pre-survey to understand how much one partner retrospectively recalls expressing partner-benefiting voice to their partner. The instructions for all four items read, “How often have you done one the following in order to benefit your partner’s welfare?” Items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale: (1) never to (7) very often. The four items included, “Expressed concerns with {partner’s name}’s behaviors”, “Did not suggest/advise changes to [partner’s name]’s behavior even though I wanted to” (R), “Suggested/advise changes to [partner’s name]’s attitude”, “Did not express concerns with [partner’s name]’s attitude, even though I wanted to (R).” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was .79.

*Self-Voice (Presurvey).* The same four items, as were used in the partner-benefiting voice scale, were used in the pre-survey to understand how much one partner retrospectively recalls expressing self-benefiting voice. The instructions for this scale read, “How often have you done the following in order to

benefit your own welfare?” Items and scales were identical to “partner voice”. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was .86.

*Relationship Satisfaction (Presurvey).* Funk and Rogge’s (2007) thirty-two item couple satisfaction index (CSI) was used in the pre-survey to measure relationship satisfaction. Items were responded on six-point Likert scales and summed to determine a total score. Items measured satisfaction through overall happiness, number of disagreements, relationship strength, satisfaction of needs, comparing relationship to other relationships, number of times a couple was together, and description of an adjective (e.g., discouraging to hopeful, interesting to boring, and full to empty) and rating how a relationship may fit the adjective. The full scale can be found in Appendix B. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in this study was .96.

### **Primary Daily Diary Measures**

*Instances of self-benefiting voice (Daily Diary).* Each of the fourteen daily surveys asked for the number of instances that the participant expressed self-benefiting voice, “How many times today did you express a concern, primarily intended to benefit your own goals (i.e., self-benefiting concern) to \_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_’s attitude or behavior.” When participants indicated expressing at least one instance of self-benefiting voice that day, they were then asked to provide more details about their first expression of self-benefiting voice that day. In addition to providing a brief description of the event, participants were asked two follow-up questions, that were scored using a seven-point scale, “How effective was this expression of concern?”, and “How cold and critical was your delivery of this expression of concern?”.

*Instances of partner-benefiting voice (Daily Diary).* Daily partner-benefiting voice was measured with the same follow up items as those listed in the daily self-benefiting voice measure. However, the first question was adapted to read “How many times today did you express a concern, primarily

intended to benefit your partner's goals (i.e., partner-benefiting concern) to \_\_\_ about \_\_\_'s attitude or behavior."

*Relationship satisfaction (Daily Diary).* Each of the fourteen daily surveys also asked about relationship satisfaction. This was measured through a single seven-point Likert scale: (1) not at all satisfied and (7) completely satisfied. Specifically, participants were asked, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your relationship today?"

#### **Additional Exploratory Measures:**

*Power-Over (Presurvey).* Mazurek (1998) ten-item power-over scale used in the pre-survey to measure partner dominance in a relationship. Items were measured with a four-point Likert scale: (1) strongly agree to (4) strongly disagree. Examples include "I feel powerful when I'm more intelligent than my partner", "I feel powerful when I do risky things", and "I feel powerful when I can dominate my partner". The full scale can be found in Appendix B. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was .92.

*Attachment (Presurvey).* Attachment assesses how one perceives closeness in relationships. Using Franley, Waller, and Brennan's (2000) "Experiences in close relationships" (ECR-R) scale participants fall along two dimensions, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. People can be high or low in one or both dimensions. Those that are high in anxious attachment and avoidant attachment are considered fearful-avoidant, while those that are low in both anxious and avoidant attachment are considered securely attached. This 36-item measure was used in the pre-survey to measure attachment. Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Examples include "I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love", "My romantic partner makes me doubt myself", and "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down". The ECR-R includes sub-measures of both avoidant attachment (18 items) and anxious attachment (18) items. The full scale



can be found in Appendix B. Cronbach's alpha for these measures in the study were as follows: anxious attachment = .93, avoidant attachment = .92.

*Rosenberg's self-esteem (Presurvey).* Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale was used, which measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. Items were scored on a four-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Examples include "feel that I am a failure" and "take a positive attitude toward myself". The full scale can be found in Appendix B. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was .85.

*Optimism (Presurvey).* To measure general life optimism, Scheier and Carver's (1994) life orientation test-revised was used. Each of the 10-items on this scale was scored on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Examples include "if something can go wrong for me, it will", "always optimistic about my future", and "expect more good things to happen to me than bad". The full scale can be found in Appendix B. Cronbach's alpha for this scale used in this study was .78

*Self-Construal Scale (Presurvey).* Self-construal refers to how people view themselves in relation to others—-independent or interdependent. A twenty-four-item scale adapted from Singelis (1994) was used in the pre-survey to measure self-construal. Items were scored on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Examples include "important for me to maintain harmony within my group", "comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards", and "prefer to be direct and forthright". The full scale can be found in Appendix B. The Cronbach's alphas for these measures in this study were as follows: self-construal .81, interdependent self-construal .79.

## RESULTS

Three primary questions were addressed in this study, 1) Would the results from Study 1 replicate with this new sample of romantic couples (using just the pretest data)? 2) How do the relational variables influence the frequency with which people actually express interpersonal voice? and

3) What is the relationship (if any) between expressing interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction?

First, I present descriptive statistics for the primary variables, see Table 2.0 (descriptive statistics for the additional variables can be found in Appendix C) and key correlations, this is followed by a brief description of the analysis model used for this study, and then an analysis of the data sequentially addressing these questions in order.

Table 2.0 Descriptive Statistics for primary predictor and outcome variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Possible Range</b>
Communal Strength	8.61	1.86	2.60	11.00	1 -11
Perceived Communal Strength	8.14	1.80	2.20	11.00	1- 11
Commitment	7.47	1.53	1.57	9.00	1-9
Perceived Commitment	6.14	0.78	3.29	8.00	1-9
Partner-benefiting	4.13	0.84	2.20	7.00	1-7
Self-benefiting	4.17	0.95	2.00	7.00	1-7
Daily Relationship Satisfaction	4.04	1.00	0.31	5.47	1-7

### **Correlational results for each of the three questions**

Bivariate correlations were conducted between the relational variables and each type of interpersonal voice, between the retrospective forms of interpersonal voice and daily expressions of interpersonal voice, and between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction.

**Q1:** As presented in Table 3, the results show a positive correlation between retrospective partner-benefiting voice and communal strength, perceived communal strength, and commitment. No relationship was found between perceived commitment and retrospective partner-benefiting voice ( $r = .10, p = .219$ ). Similarly, positive correlations were found between retrospective self-benefiting voice and all four relational variables (communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment). With regard to the relational variables and daily expressions of interpersonal voice, a negative relationship was found for each of the relational variables and partner-benefiting voice, as well as for each of the relational variables and self-benefiting voice.

Table 3: Correlations between relational variables and interpersonal voice measures on the pre-test and in the daily measures

	<u>Pre-test</u>		<u>Daily</u>	
	Partner-benefiting voice	Self-benefiting voice	Partner-benefiting voice	Self-benefiting voice
Communal Strength	0.25**	0.33***	-0.33***	-0.30**
P. Communal Strength	0.24**	0.34***	-0.34**	-0.31**
Commitment	0.26**	0.33***	-0.35**	-0.35**
P. Commitment	0.10	0.21*	-0.39**	-0.33**

\*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

**Q2:** Next, I address the correlation between the retrospective interpersonal voice and daily interpersonal voice. For both partner-benefiting and self-benefiting voice there is a negative correlation between retrospective reports of interpersonal voice and daily expression of interpersonal voice, as might be expected from the results shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Correlations between retrospective and daily reports of interpersonal voice

	Daily Partner-benefiting voice	Daily Self-benefiting voice
Retrospective Partner-benefiting voice	-0.21**	-0.21**
Retrospective Self-benefiting voice	-0.18*	-0.18*

\* <.05, \*\* <.01

**Q3:** Finally, the relationship between each type of interpersonal voice variable (partner- and self-benefiting, for both retrospective and daily reports) and relationship satisfaction. Broadly, these results show a positive relationship between retrospective interpersonal voice of both types and relationship satisfaction and a negative relationship between daily expressions of both types of interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction. Results are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Correlations between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction

	Pretest Relationship Satisfaction	Daily Relationship Satisfaction
Retrospective Partner-benefiting voice	0.26**	0.14
Retrospective Self-benefiting voice	0.31**	0.19*
Daily Partner-benefiting voice	-0.41**	-0.33**
Daily Self-benefiting voice	-0.39**	-0.29**

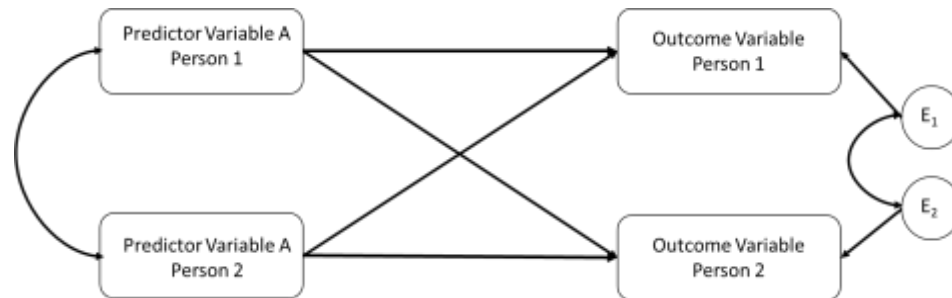
\* <.05, \*\* <.01

Note that the correlations do not take the interdependence between dyad members into account. Next, I present the results using methods that appropriately account for that shared variance between members of a couple.

### Overall Analysis Approach

Due to the dyadic nature of these data, I used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2014), which analyzes data from both partners simultaneously thereby accounting for the interdependence between the two partners' data. Although I am primarily concerned with the actor effects, this model also yields partner attribute effects on actors. For example, partner 1's communal strength may lead him/her to express more voice in the relationship (the actor effect) but it may also lead partner 2 to express more (or less) voice in the relationship (the partner effect). In Figure 1, I depict a traditional APIM framework where the actor effects show the impact of each individual's predictor variables on his or her own outcome (paths A & B) and the partner effect shows the impact of the individual's predictor variables on his or her partner's outcome (paths C & D). For simplicity and ease of reading, I will continue to refer to the effects as "actor" or "partner" effects.

Fig. 1



**Question 1: Will the results from Study 1 replicate with a sample of romantic couples?**

Analyses were conducted on the 4-item pre-test measure of self- and partner-benefiting voice to validate the findings from Study 1. However, due to the dyadic nature of these data, analyses had to be conducted in such a way that takes into account the relationship between the two partners in a couple. For example, both the effect of own perceived communal strength (actor) and the effect of partner's perceived communal strength (partner) must be entered into the equation that predicts own partner-benefiting voice. For more information on this approach to dyadic data analysis—the actor-partner Interdependence Model (APIM), read Kenny, Kashy, Cook (2006). Additionally, with this type of analysis it is easier to interpret, and often more appropriate with a smaller sample size, when a limited set of predictors is included in the equation, therefore each relational variable will be analyzed independently of the others (i.e., when analyzing the effects of communal strength on partner-benefiting voice, commitment will not be included in the equation). For instance, a simplified equation may look like:

$$\text{Retrospective partner-benefiting voice} = \text{Actor's communal strength} + \text{Partner's communal strength}$$

However, for each of the relational variables there is significant collinearity between the actor's ratings and the partner's ratings. This collinearity can arise for a number of reasons, the dyad members are similar even before they were paired, the characteristics of one person affects his or her partner's outcomes, one person's outcomes directly affect the other person's outcomes and vice versa, and/or

both members are exposed to the same causal factors. Either way, this similarity in scores needs to be accounted for to ensure the results are unique to the actor and partner and can be accounted for by creating a dyad variable (a dyad level variable is one in which both partners have the same score on that particular measure). This dyad variable will be created for each analysis by multiplying the actor's score by the partner's score (on each relational variable). Adding this dyad variable to the equation above, the updated simplified equation would look like:

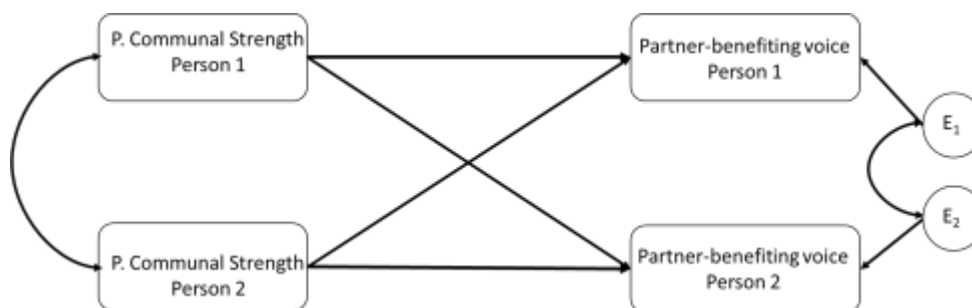
$$\text{Retrospective partner-benefiting voice} = \text{Actor's communal strength} + \text{Partner's communal strength} + (\text{Actor's communal strength} \times \text{Partner's communal strength})$$

These interaction effects were included in each of the following analyses but since they are not of theoretical interest, they are only reported in Appendix D. Actor-partner interaction models can be conducted by viewing the members of each couple as distinguishable from one another or indistinguishable from one another. The difference between distinguishable dyads and indistinguishable dyads is two-fold, 1) can the members within each dyad be consistently distinguished from one another using a single variable, and 2) is there a theoretical reason to distinguish the members of a couple from one another. For instance, a common way in which partners are distinguishable is by sex but since this sample included both same-sex and mixed-sex couples, sex could not be used to distinguish between members of all dyads (and, I had no theoretical reason to distinguish partners based on sex or any other variable in any case), thus, for purposes of these analyses the members of our dyads were conceptually considered to be indistinguishable. All predictor variables are grand-mean centered. Finally, generalized least squares with restricted maximum likelihood estimation was used for all APIM analyses and coefficients were tested using Z test and correlations were done using one-way ANOVA tests.

In these analyses (APIM), the results are broken up by the actor effects and the partner effects. For example, the association between the actor's perception of the partner's communal strength

(communal strength, commitment, or perceived commitment) and actor's retrospective beliefs about the frequency with which the actor expresses partner-benefiting voice would be considered the actor effect, whereas the association between partner's perception of the actor's communal strength and actor's expression of partner-benefiting voice would be considered the partner effect (Fig. 2). It is primarily the actor effects which are relevant to testing our hypotheses.

Fig. 2



### Partner-benefiting (retrospective reports)

The series of APIMs revealed significant actor effects for communal strength and commitment in relation to retrospective expressions of partner-benefiting voice in the directions originally predicted. That is, every one-point increase in the actor's communal strength was associated with a .17 increase in the actor's retrospective expressions partner-benefiting voice, and every one-point increase in the actor's commitment was associated with a .17 increase in that person's retrospective reports of expressing partner-benefiting voice. The actor effects for all four relational variables can be found in Table 4. There were no significant partner-effects (Their details can be found in Appendix E). The effects for perceived communal strength and perceived commitment fell in the same (and predicted) directions and thus should not be considered to be in conflict with the results of Study 1. However, notably, this

time it was the links with actor own communal strength and own commitment that reached significance (and the effects were stronger than the perceived communal strength results in Study 1).

Table 4: Actor Effect Estimates for retrospectively reported partner-benefiting voice

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Communal Strength	Actor	0.17	0.07	0.26	0.001**	0.31	0.23
P. Communal Strength	Actor	0.07	-0.04	0.17	0.216	0.12	0.09
Commitment	Actor	0.17	0.05	0.29	0.005**	0.26	0.21
P. Commitment	Actor	0.10	-0.11	0.31	0.351	0.08	0.07

\*\*<.01

### Self-benefiting (retrospective reports)

Results from the APIMs predicting retrospective self-benefiting voice indicate a positive and significant relationship between each of the relational variables and retrospective self-benefiting voice for the actor. These results demonstrate that stronger relationships (relationships with higher scores on the four relational variables) are associated with higher ratings of expressing self-benefiting voice. More specifically, a one-point increase in perceived communal strength is associated with a .15 increase in self-benefiting voice, a one-point increase in communal strength relates to a .18 increase in self-benefiting voice, while a one-point increase in commitment is associated with a .19 increase in retrospective self-benefiting voice, and a one-point increase in perceived commitment connects to a .23 increase in self-benefiting voice. These actor effects are reported in Table 5 while the partner effects can be found in Appendix E.

Table 5: Actor Effect Estimates for retrospectively reported self-benefiting voice

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Communal Strength	Actor	0.18	0.08	0.28	<.001***	0.33	0.25
P. Communal Strength	Actor	0.15	0.04	0.26	0.007**	0.27	0.21
Commitment	Actor	0.19	0.07	0.31	0.003**	0.29	0.23
P. Commitment	Actor	0.23	0.02	0.44	0.033*	0.18	0.17

\*<.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001



**Q2: How do the relational variables influence the frequency with which people actually express interpersonal voice?**

Next, I moved beyond general, retrospective expressions of interpersonal voice, as assessed by the interpersonal voice scales administered during the pretest, to daily reported expression of interpersonal voice. These results will indicate whether the relational variables are significantly related to the daily number of times a person expresses each type of interpersonal voice, a significant and positive relationships will indicate alignment between how people responded to the partner- and self-benefiting voice scale (retrospective report) and their daily (more proximal) report of expressing interpersonal voice.

**Partner-benefiting (Daily Expression)**

These APIM analyses revealed negative significant actor effects for each of the four relational variables, communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment. Instead of the positive effect found in the results above, these results indicate that a one-point increase in perceived communal strength and communal strength were each predictive of a .10 decrease in daily expression of partner-benefiting voice, a one-point increase in commitment predicted a .14 decrease in daily expressions of partner-benefiting voice, and a one-point increase in perceived commitment was associated with a .37 decrease in expression of partner-benefiting voice. These actor effects are shown in Table 6 while the partner effects, which also demonstrate a negative relationship between communal strength, perceived communal strength, and perceived commitment and daily expression of partner-benefiting voice, are presented in Table 7.

Table 6: Actor Effect Estimates for daily expression of partner-benefiting voice

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	R
Communal Strength	Actor	-0.10	-0.17	-0.03	0.007**	-0.19	-0.15
P. Communal Strength	Actor	-0.10	-0.18	-0.03	0.006**	-0.20	-0.15
Commitment	Actor	-0.15	-0.23	-0.07	<.001***	-0.24	-0.21
P. Commitment	Actor	-0.33	-0.50	-0.17	<.001***	-0.27	-0.26

\*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

Table 7: Partner Effect Estimates for daily expression of partner-benefiting voice

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	R
Communal Strength	Partner	-0.109	-0.179	-0.04	0.003**	-0.211	-0.165
P. Communal Strength	Partner	-0.107	-0.18	-0.03	0.005**	-0.202	-0.155
Commitment	Partner	-0.151	-0.233	-0.07	<.001***	-0.241	-0.204
P. Commitment	Partner	-0.24	-0.402	-0.08	0.004**	-0.196	-0.190

\*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

### Self-benefiting (Daily Expression)

Similar to the results for expressing partner-benefiting voice, daily expression of self-benefiting voice is related to each of the relational variables in a significantly negative manner. The stronger the relationship feels (both in terms of communal strength and in terms of commitment) from the actor's point of view, and from the partner's point of view, the less the actor expressing self-benefiting voice. Results for the actor effects are presented in Table 8 while results for the partner effects are presented in Table 9.

Table 8: Actor relationships between daily expression of self-benefiting voice and relational variables

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Communal Strength	Actor	-0.10	-0.18	-0.02	0.016*	-0.16	-0.13
P. Communal Strength	Actor	-0.10	-0.19	-0.02	0.020*	-0.16	-0.12
Commitment	Actor	-0.14	-0.24	-0.05	0.005**	-0.19	-0.16
P. Commitment	Actor	-0.37	-0.56	-0.17	<.001***	-0.25	-0.24

\*<.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

Table 9: Partner relationships between daily expression of self-benefiting voice and relational variables

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Communal Strength	Partner	-0.13	-0.21	-0.05	0.002**	-0.21	-0.16
P. Communal Strength	Partner	-0.14	-0.23	-0.06	0.001**	-0.23	-0.17
Commitment	Partner	-0.20	-0.29	-0.10	<.001***	-0.26	-0.22
P. Commitment	Partner	-0.31	-0.50	-0.12	0.002**	-0.21	-0.20

\*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

### Q3: What is the relationship (if any) between expressing self- and partner-benefiting voice on a daily basis, pre-test interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction?

Although daily expression of partner-benefiting voice is negatively related to the relational measures, it is still important to understand the relationship between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction. As a reminder, relationship satisfaction was measured in two ways, 1) in the pre-survey using the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), and 2) daily through a one-item question, "Overall how satisfied are you with your relationship today?". To understand how interpersonal voice relates to relationship satisfaction, I ran four separate APIM analyses, 1&2) retrospective interpersonal voice (partner- and self-benefiting) predicting the pre-survey CSI, 3&4) daily interpersonal voice (partner- and self-benefiting) predicting daily relationship satisfaction.

There were no significant associations between retrospective self- or partner-benefiting interpersonal voice and relationships satisfaction, however the association for self-benefiting voice trended in the negative direction. There appear to be relationships between *daily* expression of actor's self- and partner-benefiting interpersonal voice and the actor's daily relationship satisfaction, with a one-point increase in self-benefiting voice relating to a .19 decrease in relationship satisfaction, a one-point increase in partner-benefiting voice relating to a .23 decrease in relationship satisfaction. Actor results are displayed in Table 10. Although none of the partner effects are significant, there is a

nonsignificant trend toward a negative relationship between the partner's daily expression of interpersonal voice (both types) and the actor's relationship satisfaction, results presented in Table 11.

Table 10: Actor associations between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction

	Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Retrospective	Partner-benefiting	Actor	0.02	-0.16	0.19	0.833	0.02	0.02
	Self-benefiting	Actor	-0.07	-0.23	0.08	0.364	-0.07	-0.07
Daily	Partner-benefiting	Actor	-0.23	-0.37	-0.08	0.003**	-0.22	-0.13
	Self-benefiting	Actor	-0.19	-0.32	-0.06	0.005**	-0.22	-0.11

\*\*<.01

Table 11: Partner associations between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction

	Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Retrospective	Partner-benefiting	Partner	0.04	-0.14	0.21	0.696	0.03	0.03
	Self-benefiting	Partner	0.01	-0.15	0.16	0.914	0.01	0.01
Daily	Partner-benefiting	Partner	-0.14	-0.29	0.01	0.063	-0.14	-0.08
	Self-benefiting	Partner	-0.07	-0.20	0.07	0.334	-0.08	-0.04

\*\*<.01

### Delivery of Voice Analyses:

Looking more closely at daily expressions of interpersonal voice and daily relationship satisfaction, I conducted a series of multiple regressions to understand how the delivery of an expression of interpersonal voice interacts with the frequency of expressing interpersonal voice to predict relationship satisfaction. The multiple regression analyses addressed the effect of the frequency of engaging in voice (of both types, tested separately), the tone (warm or cold) and the interaction of these two variables on the actor's relationship satisfaction as well as the partner's relationship satisfaction. Admittedly, these analyses do not take into account the dyadic nature of these data but, similar to the correlational analyses above, they do provide insight into the possible relationships between the variables mentioned.

### Self-Benefiting Voice on Actor's Relationship Satisfaction

A multiple regression was conducted to see if the extent to which the expressions of self-benefiting voice was expressed in a cold/critical manner relates to the actor's relationship satisfaction when also accounting for the frequency of expressing self-benefiting voice. The variables included in this multiple regression included actor's frequency of expressing self-benefiting voice, actor's self-reported extent of being cold/critical in the delivery of the self-benefiting voice, and the interaction of those two variables, predicting actor's relationship satisfaction. Of these three predictor variables, only the extent to which the delivery of self-benefiting voice was cold/critical significantly, and negatively, related to the actor's relationship satisfaction. The betas for frequency of expressing self-benefiting voice also fell in the same direction but did not approach significance. See Table 12.1 for full results.

Table 12.1 Self-benefiting voice and how cold/critical the delivery self-benefiting voice was predicting actor's relationship satisfaction

<b>Variable</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>
Frequency of Self-voice	-0.30	0.24	-0.35	0.213
Extent of being cold/critical	-0.29	0.06	-0.55	<0.001*
Interaction between frequency and extent of being cold/critical	0.07	0.05	0.46	0.131

### **Links between the Frequency and style of delivering Self-Benefiting Voice on Partner's**

#### **Relationship Satisfaction**

A similar multiple regression was conducted to see if the same variables predicted the partner's relationship satisfaction. In other words, I assessed whether the actor's frequency of expressing self-benefiting voice, the actor's self-reported level of expressing those instances of self-benefiting voice in a cold/critical manner, and the interaction between the two variables predicted the partner's relationship satisfaction. Again, of these three predictor variables, only the level of how cold/critical the expressions of self-benefiting voice were significantly, and negatively predicted the partner's relationship satisfaction. See Table 12.2 for full results.

Table 12.2 Self-benefiting voice and how cold/critical the delivery self-benefiting voice was predicting partner's relationship satisfaction

<b>Variable</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>
Frequency of Self-voice	-0.13	0.24	-0.16	0.581
Extent of being cold/critical	-0.28	0.06	-0.53	<0.001*
Interaction between frequency and extent of being cold/critical	0.04	0.05	0.27	0.374

### **Links between the Frequency and Style of Delivering Partner-Benefiting Voice on Relationship**

#### **Satisfaction**

Turning now to partner-benefiting voice, a multiple regression was conducted to see if the frequency of expressing partner-benefiting voice, extent to which expressions of partner-benefiting voice were cold/critical, and the interaction between the two variables predicted actor's relationship satisfaction, the results of this analysis can be found in Table 12.3. A similar analysis was conducted to predict the partner's relationship satisfaction, the results of this analysis can be found in Table 12.4.

Table 12.3 Partner-benefiting voice and how cold/critical the delivery partner-benefiting voice was predicting actor's relationship satisfaction

<b>Variable</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>
Frequency of Self-voice	-0.34	0.23	-0.33	0.581
Extent of being cold/critical	-0.25	0.07	-0.47	<0.001*
Interaction between frequency and extent of being cold/critical	0.07	0.05	0.35	0.374

Table 12.4 Partner-benefiting voice and how cold/critical the delivery partner-benefiting voice was predicting partner's relationship satisfaction

<b>Variable</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>
Frequency of Self-voice	-0.31	0.23	-0.30	0.179
Extent of being cold/critical	-0.26	0.07	-0.49	<0.001*
Interaction between frequency and extent of being cold/critical	0.07	0.05	0.34	0.197

## DISCUSSION

Study 2 yielded a wide array of results. Many of them were unexpected yet interesting and interpretable. Before actually interpreting the results, though, it is prudent to first tackle their unexpected nature, starting with the retro measures of self- and partner-benefiting voice.

### **Addressing what was measured with the two types of interpersonal voice measures.**

In this study, I included both a retrospective measure of self- and partner-benefiting voice, in the pretest, and a daily measure of each type of voice, in the daily diary. My intent was to measure the same conceptual constructs in two different manners in order to test my original hypotheses in two, converging, manners. Yet the results indicate that the retrospective measure and the daily measures of self- and partner-benefiting voice almost certainly did not tap the same construct. Looking at the most straightforward analyses, the simple correlations between the retrospective and daily measures for each construct revealed that they were significantly and negatively correlated. That is, people who tended to report, on the pretest, that they more frequently engaged in self and partner benefiting voice reported on the daily diary measure that they engaged in less day to day self- and partner-benefiting voice than people who reported less frequent expressions of interpersonal voice on the pretest. Moreover, the APIM analyses revealed that measures of actor communal strength and actor commitment predicted greater retrospective (pretest) reports of exercising self- and partner-benefiting voice but these same relational variables actually predicted using less self- and partner-benefiting voice when utilizing the daily measures—findings which align with the significant negative correlations observed between the measures. Since these two measures, that were originally intended to be tapping the same construct did not do so, I turn to addressing why this may have occurred.

### **Speculative interpretation of diverging results**

Any interpretation of why the results between the pretest measures and the results of the daily diary is certainly speculative. One possibility is that the two measures differed in terms of one tapping into how people believe they should, ideally, behave in their relationships (the retrospective measure) and the other tapping what actually happens day-to-day in relationships (the daily diary measures). When given definitions of the two terms (self-benefiting voice and partner-benefiting voice) and then asked how frequently they engaged in expressing interpersonal voice, participants who felt especially communal and committed towards their partners agreed with my hypothesis that the use of interpersonal voice is a positive thing in relationships and reported engaging in interpersonal voice more frequently. There are at least two plausible explanations for this patterning of results.

Even though participants were provided with the same definitions for interpersonal voice in both the pretest and the daily diary, participants clearly had drastically different responses to the two different types of measurement. It is possible that when participants were completing the pretest measures, they were able to better adhere to the our own original conceptual definitions of each type of interpersonal voice which involved self-benefiting voice being something that arises when one has a true need and speaks up to alert the partner that a change in his or her behavior will help that need to be met believing that the other truly cares and will be responsive to one's need per se and partner-benefiting voice being something that arises out of true care for and focus upon one's partner and a desire to be responsive to one's partner's needs. Partners retrospective responses to questions about these kinds of voice might be driven by times (which might be rare) when they engaged in such voice for these motivational reasons. Alternatively (or in addition) participants' retrospective responses to questions about these kinds of voice might have been driven by their beliefs that voice motivated in these ways is ideal for their relationships and their gut level feel (when they truly care for their partners) that they do engage in such behaviors.



However, when completing the daily diary, they may have been less focused on the general idea that interpersonal voice is a good thing that is meant to be supportive and perhaps they use it but rarely, and instead, they may have searched for and reported any instance in which they said something about their partner's behavior over the last 24 hours that might be construed as self-or partner-benefiting voice. By doing this, participants likely included expressions that fall outside the true meaning of interpersonal voice, such as complaints or opinions. For instance, they may have included statements like, "This music is terrible, please turn it off," or "Can you switch my takeout order to be chicken instead of shrimp?" While participants may report these types of statements as self-benefiting voice, neither one might truly be considered self-benefiting interpersonal voice as the first might merely be a complaint and the latter is simply expressing a preference. Similarly, partner-benefiting voice may have been muddled to include statements that are actually self-benefiting voice ("You should take the dog for a walk, I know you feel better after getting some fresh air" but the real motivation is to encourage weight loss), or complaints ("The T.V. is so loud, you're going to wake the baby"). In other words, the basis for participants' retrospective versus in the moment responses might have been distinct. If this is, in fact true and especially if true interpersonal voice motivated by caring for self and for partner happens but is rare while daily complaints about partners behavior often take the surface form of self-or partner voice, then the overall patterning of results makes sense.

In other words, moving from asking participants to report on more abstract, positively framed, questions to more concrete actions taken on a specific day may well have moved participants from reporting on ideal behavior (which may actually have occurred) to reporting on behaviors that are more akin to complaints combined with suggestions for resolution. The suggestions for resolutions, while perhaps constructive, may still not remove the sting of complaints. This explanation aligns with broader relationship satisfaction literature. People often express complaints in order to create change that achieves a specific goal (Kowlaski, 1996). Researchers also find that complaining about pet peeves

(Kowalski, Allison, Guimetti, Turner, Whittaker, Frazee, & Stephens, 2014), and verbalizing perceived faults in the partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996) are associated with decreased relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, people tend to respond to complaints with countercomplaints and this too has been associated with deterioration of the relationship (Alberts, 1988) and the tendency to respond in this way increases in less satisfied relationships (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986a, 1986b).

Assuming this speculation is valid, it could explain the flip in results I observed. People in lower quality relationships did not report frequent use of interpersonal voice (compared to those in higher quality relationships) when thinking about it more broadly, but then when reporting occurrences in the daily diary, they were less clear about what did and did not constitute interpersonal voice. This lack of clarity may have led them to include complaints in their instances of interpersonal voice, which occurs more frequently in lower quality relationships.

### **Additional daily diary results**

Moving away from the puzzle of why the retrospective and daily reports differed, many additional results emerged for the daily diary measure than for the retrospective measure and, in the remainder of this discussion I focus on the daily diary results (taking into account these thoughts about the nature of what actually was measured in these reports).

**Actor effects on the daily diary measures of interpersonal voice:** The APIM analyses revealed clear actor links between all four relational variables (communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, and perceived commitment) and both self- and partner-benefiting voice. They are easy to summarize. Greater communal strength, commitment, perceived communal strength from the partner, and perceived commitment from the were each linked with *fewer* daily expressions of self-benefiting and partner-benefiting voice.

A plausible, but perhaps the least interesting, explanation of these effects is that there is less voice in strong, committed communal relationships because there are fewer reasons to exercise voice in such relationships. After all, these highly communal and committed relationships would seem to be the highest quality relationships. Perhaps partners in these types of relationships are simply more considerate of each other resulting in less need for self-benefiting voice (to get one's partner to pay attention to one's needs). So too might partners in these relationships actively seek support for their own problems and challenges more often thereby lessening the need for partner-benefiting voice. Certainly, attending to a partner's needs without persistent prompting is something that characterizes these types of relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). In responsive relationships partners convey understanding, validate and care for each other which leads the partner to be attentive to each other's needs. Crocker & Canevello (2008) found that having compassionate goals to support others predicts positive responsiveness dynamics, increasing both partners' relationship satisfaction. Another positive aspect of responsiveness is it tends to be reciprocated by the partner. That is, the actor's responsiveness tends to lead the partner to be more responsive as well, an effect that may be part of the reason why couples tend to express similar amounts of interpersonal voice (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007; Crocker & Canevello, 2010). However, I suspect that even in relationships that are characterized by high responsiveness from both partners, there remain many opportunities for supporting the partner (and oneself) through interpersonal voice. Thus, I do not think the negative relationships between communal strength, perceived partner strength, commitment and perceived commitment were, in fact, completely due to a lack of opportunities to express self- and partner-benefiting.

Indeed, there is another possible explanation as to why persons in stronger relationships express less interpersonal voice that is, perhaps, even more plausible. That is, actors who are high in communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment are likely

to be more relaxed and secure in their relationship. They may not feel the need to test the partner to see if the partner will accommodate their behavior to benefit the self, and this alone may cut down on self-benefiting voice. So too may they feel content in the care and commitment that their partner feels toward them and feel less need to exercise partner-benefiting voice to improve the partner for the partner's sake, thereby reducing partner-benefiting voice. In other words, perhaps their security in the relationship allows them to let more things go without comment in their relationships. These individuals may be more particular about *when* they express interpersonal voice, saving it for times when the benefit of doing so far outweighs the risk of hurting or offending the partner. For instance, Kareem may refrain from expressing concern about the ice-cream Diane is about to eat because it is the first time this week and Kareem knows that she has had a stressful day, but instead (at a different time) encourages her to look for a new job because she consistently comes home complaining about how stressed out, she is and how much she hates her job. This strategic use of interpersonal voice may result in fewer expressions of voice overall but maintains an appreciation for the importance of its use in their relationship.

A side note in this regard is that perhaps daily mundane complaints about partners are often masked in communal language in lower quality relationships to make them seem more virtuous. In other words, perhaps complaints in normatively communal relationships often take the surface form of "I'm asking this because I need it" or "I'm saying this to benefit you." when, in reality, they are more likely to reflect dissatisfaction with the partner or mere grumpiness. This too may account for why people in highly communal and committed relationships (both felt and perceived) show less evidence of daily voice. That is, people may simply be less inclined to complain (in disguised ways) in such relationships.

**Partner effects on the daily diary measures of interpersonal voice:** The partner effects of communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment also were clear in the

daily diary results. The partner results for all four relational variables parallel the actor effects. That is, when actors have a partner who is high on these positive relationship variables, the actor expresses less interpersonal voice. These effects are over and above the actor effects of the relational variables and therefore there is something unique about having a partner who feels the relationship is strong on the actor's use of voice.

Just as it may benefit the actor, so to may the quality of the relationship simply lead the partner to have fewer things to express concerns about. Additionally, simply having a partner who feels communally for the actor and who is committed to the actor causes the actor to be more aware of the potential harm they could do to the partner by expressing either form of interpersonal voice and would rather stay silent than take that risk. Alternatively, it may be that having a partner who is very unconnected to the relationship results in less concern about the risks and therefore express concerns more frequently.

### **Interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction**

This study went one step further by looking at the relationship between expressing each type of interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction. My initial hypothesis was that these two things would be positively related to one another but after observing the negative relationship between the relational variables and daily expression of interpersonal voice and speculating that our measures of voice may have been a sort of complaining, I was far less confident in my initial hypothesis. Indeed, the results demonstrated that my prediction was incorrect. Instead, more frequent daily expression of interpersonal voice, partner- and self-benefiting, was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. For both self-benefiting and partner-benefiting voice the actor effects are significant. Therefore, speaking up to express concerns for the benefit of the self or the partner appears to harm

one's own satisfaction within the relationship or, perhaps it is that being unsatisfied in one's relationship leads to expressing more self- and partner-benefiting voice (or both).

These particular results are correlational and therefore hard to ascertain directionality from but I will speculate on a few possibilities of what might be going on. The first possibility is that expressing voice leads to reduced relationship satisfaction. For partner-benefiting voice, both the actor and partner effects are significant or nearly significant. When the actor expresses a concern to the partner about his/her behavior (with the goal of supporting the partner) it may actually cause a drop in both persons relationship satisfaction, perhaps because the interaction does not go well for either person with the partner reacting negatively to the expression of concern and the person exercising voice responding with distress. Such negative reactions could be due to the way in which the concern was expressed but it could also have to do with the content of the message. The actor may have had a goal to support through the expression of partner-benefiting voice, that the partner does not value and sees as a criticism resulting in annoyance. This may lead to an argument and lower relationship satisfaction.

Another possibility is that those in less satisfied relationships express voice more frequently. This may be because partners do neglect the actors' needs more often (providing the impetus for self-benefiting voice) and because their partner does engage in more self-destructive behaviors (providing the impetus for partner-benefiting voice). Perhaps, however, less satisfied and happy people are simply more prone to complain and criticize their partners and can frame those criticisms as being necessary to benefit the self or the partner. For instance, people in less satisfied relationships have been shown to criticize their partners more than those in more satisfied relationships (Jackson, 2009) and it is possible that those in less satisfied relationships may be misconstruing their motivations for expressing concerns about their partner's behaviors/attitudes. These people may rationalize criticisms about their partner's as 'looking out for their partner's welfare'. If this is true, then it is likely that these "expressions of concern" more frequently lead to arguments thereby reinforcing the lower relationship satisfaction.

A third possible explanation is that couples in more satisfied relationships leverage partner-benefiting voice differently than couples in less satisfied relationships. That is, couples in stronger relationships may have a wider array of methods that they feel comfortable using to support their partners and therefore can be more particular about when they lean on using partner-benefiting voice as a technique. Other strategies include the provision of emotional support, appraisal support, informational support, or employment of emotion regulation strategies (Lahey & Cohen, 2000). Indeed, prior literature has shown that couples in stronger relationships use more emotional and informational support with their partners than those in weaker relationships (Stevenson, Maton, & Teti, 1999; Ekas, Timmons, Pruitt, Ghilain, & Alessandri, 2015; Cramer, 2004; Joseph, 2012; Lorenzo, Barry, & Khalifian, 2018). With a larger toolbox of strategies to pull from, couples may reserve expressing partner-benefiting voice for situations where the benefits of doing so far outweigh the risks, such as when the partner explicitly asks for this type of help in achieving a specific goal. In the diet example used in the introduction, if the partner on a diet tells her partner that she struggles to avoid ice cream but really wants to avoid it for her diet, then the actor's expression of partner-benefiting voice, encouraging her not to eat the ice cream she just pulled out of the fridge, may be a welcomed form of support by the partner. This third possible explanation may shed light on why there appears to be a positive relationship between interpersonal voice and the relational variables found in Study 1. It is possible that couples in stronger relationships may see the value of expressing interpersonal voice and see it as another tool in their toolbox of support strategies, but decide to pull it out less frequently than those in weaker relationships because of the larger selection of strategies that are also in that toolbox coupled with typically more positive motives for employing voice when they do employ it.

To, possibly, shed some light on the inverse relationship between frequency of expressing interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction, I conducted a series of multiple regressions. The analyses assessed how frequency of expressing a particular type of voice and the extent to which those

expressions of voice were cold/critical interact to predict relationship satisfaction. As expected, the extent to which the expressions of voice (both self- and partner-benefiting) were expressed in a cold/critical manner, the lower the relationship satisfaction was for both the actor and the partner. Interestingly, after taking into account the coldness with which voice is enacted, the frequency of expressing interpersonal voice was no longer a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. Thus, it appears that whether a person expresses interpersonal voice infrequently or multiple times a day what truly matters for relationship satisfaction is the way in which the expression of voice is delivered. The relationship between delivery of voice and relationship satisfaction for the actor could mean two things, 1) because the actor is less satisfied in the relationship s/he is less mindful of expressing concerns in a warm and compassionate manner, and/or 2) because the actor expressed voice in a cold/critical manner s/he does not achieve the desired results of that expression of voice and therefore is less satisfied in the relationship. Similar explanations arise when talking about the effects on the partner's relationship satisfaction.

Taking into account the APIM analyses which find a negative relationship between frequency of expressing interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction for the actor, it may be that persons who express interpersonal voice more frequently tend to do so in a manner that is cold/critical, leading to the negative relationship. Regarding the APIM analyses addressing frequency of expressing voice on the partner's relationship satisfaction, no relationship was found between frequency of expressing interpersonal voice and the partner's relationship satisfaction, which may be due to the importance of how the expressions of interpersonal voice were made—something that was not taken into account in those analyses. Although it is purely speculative, I think that a number of effects are taking place. Firstly, I think that persons in lower quality relationships are, indeed, less mindful about being kind and compassionate when delivering an expression of voice, leading to expressions of voice that are cold and critical. This cold and critical delivery likely then leads to hurt feelings and hostility of the partner--which



lowers the partner's satisfaction with the relationship, and leads the partner to respond in a manner that is counterproductive to what the actor intended, thereby leading to even lower relationship satisfaction by the actor. These findings certainly highlight the importance of additional research that better targets how people express interpersonal voice and what methods of delivery lead to various outcomes.

### **Exploratory measures**

This study also included assessments of each individual's attachment style, general optimism, self-esteem, and perceived power in the relationship. Although these constructs are not a part of the core analyses, in the broader literature each of them has been shown to relate to relationship satisfaction in one way or another and I am able to examine their possible links to interpersonal voice in an exploratory manner. Whereas it is uncommon to present new data in the discussion section, I focused on the core narrative of this study throughout the results section and discussion section (up until this point) and therefore presenting new results in the discussion section is exactly what I am about to do.

Following the same APIM approach used in the prior analyses, the results show a positive relationship between anxious (and avoidant) attachment and daily partner-benefiting voice and between anxious (and avoidant) attachment and daily self-benefiting voice. On the other hand, the analyses show a negative relationship was shown between self-esteem and daily partner-benefiting voice, between self-esteem and daily self-benefiting voice, between optimism and daily partner-benefiting voice, between optimism and self-benefiting voice, and between perceived power-over and both daily partner- and self-benefiting voice. The full actor effect results are displayed in Table 12.

Prior literature suggests that anxiously and/or avoidantly attached individuals have lower quality relationships (Feeney, 2002; Towler & Stuhlmacher, 2013), and that people with higher self-esteem

(Sciangua & Morry, 2009; Van Scheppingen, Denissen, Chung, Tambs, & Bleidorn, 2018), higher optimism (Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2006; Assad, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007), and/or lower perceptions of having greater power than their partner in the relationship (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Gray-Little, & Burks, 1983), have higher quality relationships than do those with lower scores of the same. Thus, the findings from this study align with what prior literature expects now knowing that there is a negative relationship between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction.

Allow me to flesh out this connection more thoroughly. Take optimism for instance; this study demonstrates that greater optimism is associated with fewer instances of expressing interpersonal voice, and that fewer expressions of both self-benefiting and partner-benefiting interpersonal voice are associated with greater relationship satisfaction. These results align with the extant literature. Similar connections can be made for anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, self-esteem, and perceived power in the relationship. Whereas the directionality of attachment and self-esteem may be more straight-forward, the power-over measure warrants more of an explanation. Higher scores on the power-over scale indicates perceiving more equality in power in the relationship, whereas lower scores indicate the participants believes that s/he has greater power in the relationship. Thus, my results show that participants who believe that they have greater power in the relationship (compared to their partner), also express more self- and partner-benefiting voice. Again, these relationships were not initially set out as hypotheses to be tested, but the links are present and they do accord with past literature. Finally, they do increase my confidence that the connection between interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction identified in this study, is true. Instead of being a sign of higher care expected for self and given to partners, these results taken together suggest self- and partner-benefiting voice as I measured them seem to be emanating from more troubled individuals and more distressed relationships.

Table 13: APIM analyses for the five exploratory variables with daily self- and partner-benefiting voice

Variable	Voice	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
Anxious attachment	Partner	0.23	0.13	0.32	<.001***	0.32	0.26
Avoidant attachment	Partner	0.25	0.14	0.37	<.001***	0.29	0.28
Self-esteem	Partner	-0.04	-0.07	-0.02	0.003**	-0.21	-0.16
Optimism	Partner	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	<.001***	-0.24	-0.23
Power-over	Partner	-0.36	-0.54	-0.18	<.001***	-0.26	-0.26
Anxious attachment	Self	0.26	0.15	0.36	<.001***	0.31	0.25
Avoidant attachment	Self	0.31	0.17	0.45	<.001***	0.28	0.27
Self-esteem	Self	-0.05	-0.08	-0.02	0.005**	-0.20	-0.14
Optimism	Self	-0.04	-0.06	-0.01	0.003**	-0.21	-0.21
Power-over	Self	-0.50	-0.71	-0.29	<.001***	-0.30	-0.30

\*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001

### STUDY 3: Experimentally manipulated perceived communal strength

The two studies reported to this point were correlational in nature. In Study 3 I focused on obtaining some experimental evidence regarding determinants of voice. To be able to conduct a truly experimental study, in Study 3 I varied just one factor experimentally (perceived communal strength) and measure its impact on just one type of voice (partner-benefiting voice) which I could tap in real time. This assessment was conducted shortly after my manipulation of actors' feelings of perceived communal strength of their relationship with their partner using a behavioral measure. In this study, I also included in my pretests the same measures of communal strength, perceived partner communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment that I used in the first two studies so that links between these measures and the exercise of partner-benefiting voice in real time could be assessed.

Study 3 was designed to be an experimental, laboratory-based, study which would help to answer the questions as to whether the perceived communal strength actually leads to more, or less, partner-benefiting voice. Unfortunately, as will become evident, due to the pandemic of 2020 in person work in our laboratory was shut down and cut this study short after 50% of the intended sample was run

through my procedure. This therefore reduced the statistical power of the study I conducted and, likely, of the conclusions that I could draw from the study. Yet, I present results here as they do shed some light on the overall picture which my dissertation paints.

## METHODS

### *Participants.*

Participants were 31 romantically involved couples recruited from the New Haven, CT area through local craigslist advertisements, and word-of-mouth. Couples were paid \$30 for their participation in this in-laboratory study. Participants were sent the first part of the study as an online survey, and scheduled to complete an in-lab activity after completion of the online survey. Sixty-two participants (embedded in 31 relationships) completed both parts of the study. Of this sample, reported ages range from 19 to 55 ( $M = 25.79$ ,  $SD = 7.87$ ). 31 males (50%), 30 females (48.4%), and 1 non-binary or other genders (1.6%) were reported. Participants reported their race/ethnicity as White (53%), Asian (37%), Black (5%), or Other (5%). Participants reported their relationship status as either seriously dating one person (84%), married (7%), engaged (7%), or as casually dating one person (3%).

The original plan for this in lab study called for recruitment of 60 couples (120 individuals). However, the advent of CoVID in the spring 2020 semester meant that this "in person" research had to be stopped. The CoVID pandemic extending through the fall 2020 and projected to persist throughout the 2021 spring semester mean that this study could not be completed. Thus, with the permission of my doctoral committee members, I report the results from just 31 couples (62 people) here.

### *Procedure*

Prior to coming into the laboratory, couples completed online questionnaires separately that assessed aspects of their relationship. The measures assessed in this presurvey include: partner-benefiting voice, self-benefiting voice, communal strength, commitment, perceived communal strength,

perceived commitment, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction. Since this study used many of the same measures included in Study 1 (and Study 2), I only describe the measures that are novel to Study 3 below, in the “measures” section for Study 3. At least 3 days (actual number days ranged from 3 to 19) from the time of completing the online questionnaire, couple members came into the lab together.

Once the couple arrived in the lab the two members of the couple were assigned randomly to one of two roles; listener or speaker. The speaker delivered a pre-prepared speech (meaning, it was written out and the speaker had to deliver it while being filmed). Meanwhile the listener watched the speaker through a live stream video in another room. Both participants were told a panel of judges would watch the live stream of the speech, judge the delivery, and provide financial reward based on how the judges’ grade. Participants were granted a “practice,” ungraded round to prepare for a final, graded round. Before the practice round started, the speaker was given 5 minutes to read the speech silently and at the same time, the listener was given instructions on evaluating the speaker and given three forms: the practice round grading sheet, the final round grading sheet, and a sheet instructing the listener to list instances from the past of when their partner had been responsive, caring, or kind to them. The number of instances requested varied from three to ten depending on the condition (those in the three-item condition were in the “high perceived communal strength” condition whereas those in the ten-item condition were in the “low perceived communal strength” condition). This manipulation works by altering the recall difficulty, with recalling 10 items being harder than recalling just 3 items. Prior research has shown that greater difficulty in recall is associated with perceiving that trait to be weaker, in this case that the partner’s communal strength is weaker (Lemay, Clark & Feeney, 2007; Ruan, Reis, Clark, Hirsch, & Bink, 2019). This sheet was filled in and collected before the practice speech started.

The listener watched and graded the speaker’s delivery of a speech. The speaker was then given 5 more minutes to prepare for the final round. While the speaker was preparing for the final round, the

listener was given paper, an envelope, and the choice to write a note to the speaker that would be delivered before the final round speech. After the 5-minute preparation period, the researcher collected the envelope, and ended the study. The listener was guided to the same room as the speaker where both participants were debriefed, and compensated.

### *Measures*

In addition to the relationship measures collected in the Study 1, the following measures were collected in Study 3.

*Note Scoring.* Prior to coding the notes, I and a second reader read through all of the notes to develop a better understanding what participants included in the notes. This pre-assessment illustrated the diverse ways in which partners communicated to the speech-giver and led me to code for a broader range of communication patterns other than partner-benefiting voice. The goal of including additional coded measures is to develop a better understanding of how the expression of partner-benefiting voice relates to other means of supporting or communicating with one's partner beyond partner-benefiting interpersonal voice.

Two, independent, trained coders who were unaware of the study hypotheses and findings from Studies 1 and 2 described in this dissertation coded each note for the following traits: partner-benefiting interpersonal voice, emotional support, appraisal support, informational support, attentional deployment, and cognitive change. Each of these traits, which are described below, were rated on the extent to which the note exhibited each on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) scale. Finally, notes were coded for overall warmth on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely), and for the percentage of the note that was about the actual speech (0-100). These specific traits were chosen based on what was observed in the notes and prior support and emotion regulation research. By-and-large social support has been shown to have significant benefits to an individual (Holahan & Moos, 1982; Jacoby & Kozi-

Peak, 1997; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003), such as his/her relationship satisfaction (Stevenson, Maton, & Teti, 1999; Kaul & Lakey, 2003) and overall life satisfaction (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010). Further, social support can be broken down into sub-types of support which include, emotional, appraisal, and informational support (researchers vary on the terminology and in the various types of support, but these three appear to be the most widely recognized) (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). The literature demonstrates that partners often try to regulate each other's emotion (Niven et al., 2011), and I selected the two most frequently utilized methods (attentional deployment and cognitive change) in the notes to have the coders assess (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010). Below are the definitions provided to the coders.

*Note scoring definitions.*

Partner-benefiting voice was defined as "Expressing concerns to your partner about their attitudes or behaviors in order to benefit your partner, even when there is a potential risk in doing so."

Emotional support was defined as "General expressions of encouragement, reflection, and reassurance."

Appraisal support was defined as "Informing the partner about how they performed on the practice speech. This involves evaluating the speech-- criticizing weaknesses and/or praising strengths of the speech."

Informational support was defined as "Providing the partner with information about how their speech is being evaluated (i.e., Providing information on the scoring criteria)."

Attentional deployment was defined as "Distracting the partner from the task at hand or focusing the partner's attention on something other than the speech task."

Cognitive change was defined as “Changing how the partner should think about the speech task, or alter the emotional significance of the speech task, either by changing how s/he think about the situation or about his/her capacity to manage the demands it poses.”

*Relationship Satisfaction.* This ten-item scale from Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) was used to measure relationship satisfaction through the participant’s perspective. Item scales are identical to scales seen in “Perceived Relationship Satisfaction”; items are similar to the items from “Perceived Relationship Satisfaction”, but the focus of the questions shifts from the answerer’s partner to the answerer.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was two-fold, 1) test and replicate the relationship identified in Study 1 & 2 between retrospective interpersonal voice behavior and the relational variables, and 2) in a consistent setting for all participants (i.e., in the laboratory), understand how the relational variables are related to actual expression of partner-benefiting voice. Because the retrospective interpersonal voice behavior scales were filled out by both partners, I address the first point through a series of APIM analyses. Then, I will address whether there is a difference in amount of partner-benefiting voice expressed in the notes via an independent t-test, and finally I step back to look at the overall patterns observed within the notes via a correlation matrix (comprised of the actor’s relational variables and the coded variables in the notes).

Presented first is a summary of the general descriptive statistics of the scales assessed in the pre-survey, see Table 13.0. These results are followed by the results for retrospective partner-benefiting voice.



Table 14.0: Means, Standard Deviations and ranges for all pretest measures replicating Study 1

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Min</b>
Retrospective Self-Benefiting Voice	4.05	0.88	5.80	1.60
Retrospective Partner-Benefiting Voice	4.04	1.00	6.30	1.70
Communal Strength	9.31	0.98	11.00	7.20
P. Communal Strength	8.81	1.22	11.00	5.90
Commitment	7.91	0.89	9.00	3.67
P. Commitment	7.66	1.08	8.67	4.33

The actor-partner interdependence model was used to analyze the pretest data in R (R Core Team, 2017) using generalized least square analysis with correlated errors and restricted maximum likelihood estimation. These tests generally showed no actor effects of perceived communal strength ( $\beta = -0.03, p = .845$ ), communal strength ( $\beta = -0.13, p = .437$ ), or commitment ( $\beta = 0.12, p = .562$ ) predicting retrospective partner-benefiting voice. However, perceived commitment, is marginally significantly and is positively related to retrospective partner-benefiting voice ( $\beta = .30, p = .134$ ). A summary of results of the analyses is contained in Table 13.1, however the partner effects are presented in the Appendix F.

Table 14.1: Relational Variables, Actor Associations with Retrospective Partner-benefiting voice (Pre-test)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Communal Strength (Actor)	-0.13	0.17	-0.78	0.437
P. Communal Strength (Actor)	-0.03	0.13	-0.20	0.845
Commitment (Actor)	0.12	0.21	0.58	0.562
P. Commitment (Actor)	0.30	0.19	1.52	0.134

Similar analyses were performed to look at retrospective self-benefiting voice and the relational variables. These results aligned more closely with those identified in Study 1 & 2 with perceived communal strength ( $\beta = 0.10, p = .258$ ), perceived commitment ( $\beta = 0.17, p = .251$ ), and commitment ( $\beta = 0.16, p = .275$ ) all trending towards but not approaching a significant positive relationship with retrospective partner-benefiting voice. Also, there is no connection, or trending connection, between communal strength and retrospective partner-benefiting voice ( $\beta = -0.03, p = .774$ ). Although I take note of the fact that, across all studies the retrospective connections fall in a direction consistent with my

original hypotheses, it is striking that they are all weak and that they strongly contrast with the daily diary results obtained in Study 2. A summary of these results is provided in table 13.2 with the partner effects provided in the Appendix F.

Table 14.2: Relational Variables, Actor Effects on Self-benefiting voice (Pre-survey)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Communal Strength (Actor)	-0.03	0.12	-0.29	0.775
P. Communal Strength (Actor)	0.10	0.09	1.14	0.258
Commitment (Actor)	0.16	0.15	1.10	0.275
P. Commitment (Actor)	0.17	0.14	1.16	0.251

Next, I assessed whether the perceived communal strength manipulation had an effect on expressions of partner-benefiting voice in the notes to the speech-givers. An independent t-test was conducted and it revealed that, on average, participants in the high-communal strength condition did not engage in significantly more partner-benefiting voice ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SE = 0.50$ ), than those in the low-communal strength condition ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SE = 0.47$ ). This difference,  $-0.225$ , BCa 95% CI  $[-1.642, 1.1921]$ , did not come close to being statistically significant  $t(29) = -0.32$ ,  $p = .748$ .

Although the manipulation had no effect on partner-benefiting voice, I explored the relationships between communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment, perceived commitment and other aspects of the notes (Support: emotional support, appraisal support, informational support, and Emotion Regulation: attentional deployment, and cognitive change). The zero-order correlational analyses indicate a non-significant but trending negative relationship between the relational variables and expression of partner-benefiting voice within the notes, a negative and significant relationship between commitment and informational support ( $r = -.36$ ,  $p = .031$ ), as well as a negative and significant relationships between perceived commitment and informational support ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p = .047$ ). The correlations also indicate a positive relationship between communal strength and the

emotional support within the notes ( $r = .46, p = .011$ ), as well as with the overall warmth of the note ( $r = .66, p = .001$ ). See Table 14 for correlation matrix.

Due to the smaller than desired sample size for sufficiently powered null hypothesis significance testing (NHST), I followed up a few of the key correlations with Bayesian correlation analyses using JASP Team (2020). These analyses quantify the degree of support for both the null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis based on the current data (they also help to determine the likelihood of observing significant results with the appropriate power), and they are broken down into three general strengths of evidence for each: anecdotal (weak), moderate, and strong. Anecdotal/weak evidence has Bayesian factors (BF) between 1.00 and 3.00, while moderate evidence has a BF between 3.00 and 10.00, and strong evidence has a BF greater than 10.00.

The results indicate that perceived communal strength and actual partner-benefiting voice (aPBV) has anecdotal evidence ( $BF = 1.03, k = 0.004$ ) for the observed negative relationship, moderate evidence for the negative relationship between perceived commitment and aPBV effect ( $BF = 5.55, k = 0.2574$ ), weak evidence for the negative relationship between communal strength and aPBV ( $BF = 1.404, k = 0.050$ ), and moderate evidence for the negative correlation between commitment and aPBV ( $BF = 6.702, k = 0.289$ ). Thus, the commitment correlation and the perceived commitment correlation would likely reach traditional levels of significance in NHST with a larger sample size. In contrast, the evidence is inconclusive for perceived communal strength and communal strength such that more data are needed to determine whether or not a relationship is present.

Performing these follow up analyses helped me to assess how strong the evidence is for key relationships, despite the fact that Study 3 was underpowered for traditional statistical testing. They further suggest where additional evidence is needed and they provide support for (or against) recruiting more participants to finish the study when I feel comfortable to conduct in-laboratory studies again. The

data, as is, are informative for the correlation between communal strength and emotional support. The results indicate that there is strong evidence for the correlation. In contrast, the results indicate only anecdotal evidence for the correlations between perceived communal strength and note warmth, between communal strength and informational support, and between perceived communal strength and informational support. In other words, more participants are needed in order to have a better sense of whether these currently significant correlational relationships will hold up with a sufficiently powered test. For additional information about JASP analyses, read Marsman & Wagenmakers (2016) or Gross-Sampson's Statistical analysis in JASP: a guide for students (2019).

Table 15: Correlation matrix between pre-test measures and note ratings

Pre-test measures	Note Ratings						
	PBV	ES	AS	IS	AD	CC	Warmth
Self-benefiting voice	0.14	0.11	0.32	-0.11	0.01	0.07	0.07
Partner-benefiting voice	0.14	-0.09	0.22	-0.02	-0.18	0.05	-0.12
Communal Strength	-0.05	0.06	0.16	-0.05	0.08	-0.19	0.30
P. Communal Strength	-0.19	0.46*	0.04	-0.27	0.26	-0.01	0.66**
Commitment	-0.28	0.22	0.18	-0.39*	0.22	-0.04	0.42*
P. Commitment	-0.29	0.22	0.10	-0.36*	0.16	-0.12	0.35

\*<.05, \*\*<.01

PBV	Partner-benefiting voice	AD	Attentional Deployment
ES	Emotional Support	CC	Cognitive Change
AS	Appraisal Support	Warmth	Overall warmth
IS	Informational Support		

## DISCUSSION

First and foremost, it is important to reiterate that this study is under-powered and therefore the findings need to be interpreted cautiously. However, one thing is clear, the experimental manipulations designed to raise or lower perceived partner communal responsiveness had no effect on the primary outcome variable, partner-benefiting voice. There are at least four possible reasons for this: 1) the manipulation was ineffective, 2) the hypothesis was wrong, 3) there was too much error variance,

and 4) the measure of partner-benefiting voice was flawed. To the first possibility, it is certainly possible that the manipulation failed to create substantial change in actual perceived communal strength, or in other words the manipulation may not have been strong enough. Whereas the manipulation method is one that has been used in the past (Lemay, et al., 2007), it has not been widely used and remains a relatively novel way of altering one's perspective of their partner or relationship. Unfortunately, this study did not include a manipulation check to verify the effectiveness of this manipulation. To the second point, it may be that perceived communal strength influences one's self-reported retrospective use of partner-benefiting voice but that perceived communal strength did not influence actual behavior in expressing partner-benefiting voice. The third explanation, that there was too much error variance, is certainly possible but knowing what caused the high error variance is challenging—possibly the participants demographics, the amount of time between filling out the pre-survey and coming into the lab, or even the time of day that participants came into the lab.

The fourth explanation, that there was an issue with my dependent variable, the measurement of partner-benefiting voice, is certainly possible. Either the note-writing did not pick up on partner-benefiting voice or it did pick up on partner-benefiting voice but also picked up on differences between subjects that I did not intend to assess. I am confident that the note-writing did, in fact, pick up on partner-benefiting voice as nearly 60% of the notes included moderate to high levels of partner-benefiting voice. A few examples of partner-benefiting voice that participants wrote are, “feel free to use your hands to gesture and try to have more fun with it” and “Stand straight and stop wiggling.” Although the study was not originally designed to assess for other forms of support, I also identified the presence of alternative forms of support in the notes and assessed them appropriately. For instance, one participant wrote, “My love, you are an amazing person! I love how dynamic you are when you're talking about anything related to science and anything related to pets. I love what a beautiful person you are. I love you for so many reasons...” and another wrote, “Good job. I'm so proud 😊😊,” and

they were coded as forms of emotional support provision. Therefore, I do not believe that the reason I did not see an effect of the manipulation is because of the dependent variable failing to capture what I intended it to capture. However, it is clear that the dependent measure captured differences beyond what was coded for in the notes. One possible difference may arise from the manner of support provision in this study. Specifically, I gave one partner a task on which it was hard to perform really well -- the speech giving task with little preparation, and I measured support in terms of feedback given by the participant in a hand-written note. This method of expressing support through written notes may have been awkward or uncomfortable to some participants, but not others, thereby impacting the effects of the manipulation. Some participants in the high perceived communal strength condition may not have been very comfortable with expressing emotional support in writing and therefore chose to provide partner-benefiting voice, or merely provide informational support. So, it may be that part of what this study picked up on is one's comfort with providing different forms of support in a written format.

Although in this study I failed to find a significant relationship between experimentally manipulated perceived communal strength and partner benefiting voice or between retrospectively measured communal strength and partner-benefiting voice, I find it hard to cleanly interpret just what this lack of significance means. The Bayesian correlations provide only weak support for a negative relationship between retrospectively measured communal strength and the use of partner-benefiting voice, meaning additional participants are needed before speculating on this key prediction. However, the Bayesian correlations do provide moderate support for negative relationships between commitment and partner-benefiting voice and between perceived commitment and partner-benefiting voice. Thus, it may be that couples who are less committed to the relationship use more extreme forms of partner-benefiting voice where there is little pretense of affection, compared to couples in more satisfied relationships. These findings do fit well with the findings that emerged in Study 2.

Whereas, the zero-order correlations may be underpowered, they highlight trends that align with the understanding of voice as identified in Study 1 and Study 2. That is, the correlations indicate a possible negative relationship between the relational variables and actual expressions of partner-benefiting voice identified within the notes. Similar to what was shown in Study 2, it appears that the closer couples are to one another (meaning the more communal and committed they are), the less they choose to express partner-benefiting voice and in this case, the more they support their partner through positive, emotional support. The interesting thing about observing this relationship is that the situation participants were placed in was one in which expressing partner-benefiting voice might be expected and yet people in stronger relationship still choose to support their partners in other ways (i.e., not through partner-benefiting voice).

In addition to the trending negative relationship between relationship strength and expressing partner-benefiting voice in this study, there appears to be less use of partner-benefiting voice across all participants. As previously states, this study was designed to encourage the use of partner-benefiting voice and yet nearly 40% of the participants expressed little to no partner-benefiting voice in their notes. This may have something to do with the context of the support provision. For this task, the speech givers may have been under a bit of stress, as giving speeches often induces stress (Kirschbaum, Pirke, & Hellhammer, 1993; Kotlyar, Donahue, Thuras, Kushner, O’Gorman, Smith, & Adson, 2008), the listeners may have felt that the speech givers already were well-aware of the general criteria that make up a good speech, and this was the first instance in which the listener was observing the partner behave in a way that is counterproductive to the end goal (giving a perfect speech). It is possible that these conditions encourage alternative ways of providing support other than expressing voice. Instead of expressing partner-benefiting voice, it appears that people in closer relationships leverage emotional support in these times.

The use of emotional support among couples in satisfied relationships is not new, in fact many researchers have chronicled the positive relationship between the use of emotional support and relationship strength (Cramer, 2006; Kaul & Lakey, 2003; Schokker et al., 2010). Emotional support provisions by caregivers leads to increased well-being among the caregivers (Morelli, Lee, Arnn & Zaki, 2015), providing emotional support leads to reduced negative mood and increased positive mood (Gleason, Lida, Bolger, & Shrout, 2003), greater emotional support from a partner leads to greater commitment by partners in the relationship (Wang, Kraut, & Levine, 2012), and emotional support is also positively associated with relationship satisfaction in close relationships (Flora & Segrin, 1999). Perhaps, in this speech scenario it was unclear to partners as to how helpful it would be to express voice and therefore those in stronger relationships choose to provide emotional support over a more critical judgement of the partner's performance.

Perhaps constructs such as communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment drive compassionate expressions of love for partners who might well benefit from partner-benefiting voice but might benefit more, especially in the moment, by supportive expressions of love. The fact that in this new study the pretest communal strength and commitment measures did not predict more partner-benefiting voice as we had defined it and did predict the warmth in the notes (which seemed to override inclinations to give suggestions for some of our participants) actually fits quite well with what I observed in Study 2. In other words, it is possible (although purely speculative at this point) that for people with high quality, satisfied relationships, critiquing and correcting minor issues in partner behaviors takes a backseat to letting things go so that relationships flow smoothly and partner feelings are not hurt (Study 2) and to providing messages that, overall, are warm and supportive (Study 3).

It will be interesting in future work to explore the trade-offs people make between trying to solve a partner's problems and providing emotional support to partners in the moments in which those



partner's experience difficulty with tasks such as giving a speech or resisting ice cream when they wish to diet.

If we assume that with enough power the analyses looking at the presurvey measures of voice, and the relational variables, would show similar results to those found in Study 1 and Study 2, then this study is another example of the mismatch between stated behavior and actual behavior. As previously mentioned, individuals are poor predictors of their own behavior (Morwitz, 1997; Manski, 1990) and when presented with the non-specific situations in the partner-benefiting voice measure they may focus on the benefits of expressing these types of concerns while ignoring the challenges associated with doing so. But, once presented with an actual situation to express partner-benefiting voice the reality of those challenges, and the potential consequences, are more apparent thereby reducing the likelihood of actually expressing partner-benefiting voice.

#### CHAPTER 4. GENERAL DISCUSSION

These studies on interpersonal voice began with the intent of filling a gap in the literature by addressing two important questions, 1) How voice operates in close romantic relationships, and 2) How relational factors are related to the expression of voice. In fact, the work reported here does begin to address those questions but it also addresses an additional, more basic questions as well, 3) What is the nature of interpersonal voice in close romantic relationships?

As I stated in the beginning of this dissertation, the concept of voice has been around for at least 40 years and a wide array of researchers have conducted studies to investigate voice. Yet, these lines of research have grounded voice within a business setting, and have largely focused on individual differences in employees who might give voice to concerns and on the target persons who might receive those messages, as determinants of voice. From the original discussions of voice where customers are telling companies what needs to change, to the more modern usage wherein employees are expressing

concerns about the company's culture or operating practices, voice has been largely seen as a means to create positive change within a corporation. Whereas there has been an attempt by a handful of researchers to take voice beyond the business setting (Rusbult, 1987), Rusbult and her colleagues did so in a way that is both broader in certain areas, and narrower in others, compared to the ways in which I believe voice should be conceptualized outside of the business setting. It is also the case that, with the exception of considering power differentials in relationships, relational variables (such as communal strength, perceived communal strength, commitment and perceived commitment) have not been considered by prior researchers as potential determinants of exercising voice.

I bring these points back up to remind the reader about the gap that is beginning to be filled by this line of research. Throughout this dissertation, my conceptualization of voice – speaking up about a concern regarding a partner's behavior/attitudes in order to support one's own or one's partner's goals—has been applied to close romantic relationships while assessing certain aspects of the relationship (communal strength and commitment) as possible determinants of such voice.

I measured communal strength and commitment using standard and validated measures of those constructs and measured voice in three distinct ways throughout the three studies reported here. First, in the survey work, I asked participants to report on how often they exercised voice. This required participants to reflect upon their use of interpersonal voice in the past and to report on it using new four-item scales that were developed specifically for this research. Second, in the daily diary work I kept my conceptualization of interpersonal voice the same but asked participants to report on instances of voice as they occurred that day. Finally, in the one in-lab study, participants watched their partners give a speech with little preparation and were able to send that partner a note, the contents of which we used to tap interpersonal voice behaviorally as it occurred in real time. I thought that each measure would tap speaking up to get one's partners to attend to one's own need (self-benefiting) or speaking up in order to benefit one's partner (partner-benefiting). However, to my surprise, the measures of

retrospective voice and concurrent voice were not positively correlated in Study 2. Indeed, they were significantly negatively correlated with one another. Moreover, the results on the retrospective measure sharply contrasted with those on the more contemporaneous (daily diary) measures. Thus, I discuss them separately here.

### **Findings on the retrospective measures of voice.**

The results from the three studies presented in this dissertation, when using the retrospective measures of voice, generally supported the idea that members of romantic couples at least believe that they do and would express partner- and self-benefiting voice in a manner that aligns with my initial hypotheses. My hypotheses were this: greater communal strength, perceived communal strength, and perceived commitment would be associated with more frequent expressions of partner-benefiting voice; greater communal strength, and commitment would be associated with fewer instances of expressing self-benefiting voice and; perceived commitment, and perceived communal strength would be associated with more frequent expressions of self-benefiting voice. In Studies 1 and 2 I found that communal strength, perceived communal strength and commitment, indeed, were positively associated with retrospective reports of partner-benefiting voice while perceived commitment consistently trended towards an inverse relationship with partner-benefiting voice. In line with our hypotheses for self-benefiting voice, I found a positive relationship with perceived communal strength, and mixed (though slightly positive) results for perceived commitment. Contrary to my predictions I also found a positive relationship between self-benefiting voice and commitment, and communal strength. Overall, it appears that persons with stronger relationships (higher scores on the relational variables) retrospectively reported expressing more interpersonal voice. Thus, it appears that, as I did, people with stronger relationships (in terms of communal strength and commitment) may see interpersonal voice as an overall positive form of communication and support within their relationships. Participants may be focusing in on the supportive nature that is intended with expressing partner-benefiting voice and

projected expectations of the same from their partners. From these results, especially as they emerged in my first work on voice (Study 1), I expected to see a similar pattern when participants reported instances of voice on a daily basis and when observing partner-benefiting voice in the laboratory.

### **Results on the more contemporaneous measures of voice.**

Despite the somewhat supportive results for my hypotheses in Study 1, and on my retrospective measures of voice generally, the results of Study 2 and Study 3 show that people's ideas about how they would behave regarding expressing interpersonal voice, do not align with their actual behavior when faced with real-life opportunities to express interpersonal voice. Indeed, these two studies show consistent *negative* and *significant* relationships between the relational variables and the amount of interpersonal voice actually expressed. More specifically, participants who had higher scores on the relational variables also reported fewer instances of expressing self- and partner-benefiting voice in the daily diary, and they trended towards expressing less partner-benefiting voice in their notes to their speech-giving partners. Study 3 is particularly interesting in this regard because participants were placed in a situation that should (I hoped) encourage the use of partner-benefiting voice and yet the trend is clearly the opposite. Instead of expressing partner-benefiting voice, participants in stronger relationships are leveraging alternative forms of support, particularly providing emotional support. This use of other forms of support is useful to keep in mind as I re-explore why the studies show a relative difference between retrospective reports of expressing interpersonal voice and actual use of interpersonal voice.

### **(Re) Addressing the contrasting retrospective and proximal behavior results**

In addition to observing results that flip in directionality between the relational variables and partner-benefiting voice, there is also a clear negative relationship between retrospective reports of interpersonal voice and daily reports of expressing interpersonal voice in Study 2. Meaning, those who

stated they expressed more partner-benefiting voice in the retrospective measures of interpersonal voice, subsequently executed fewer instances of partner-benefiting voice in the daily diary (compared to those who stated expressing fewer instances of partner-benefiting voice in the retrospective measures).

Whereas this discrepancy between retrospective and more contemporaneous use of voice, came as a surprise to me, similar splits between what people say they have done or would do and what they actually do is not an uncommon phenomenon in the broader social psychological literature (Tracey, Arroll, Richmond, & Barham, 1997; Slovic, Fischhoff, & Lichtenstein, 1977; Oksam, Kingma, & Klasen, 2000). For instance, LaFrance & Woodzicka (2001) find that people report a greater willingness to act against sexual harassment than they demonstrate when actually confronted with a similar situation. These researchers surveyed participants about how they would respond to a given situation involving sexual harassment and then researchers actually re-created that scenario in the laboratory and found that women thought they would respond by directly challenging the sexist treatment but in reality, women tended to simply ignore the harassment. Also, people tend to be overconfident in their judgements about predicting the future (Slovic, Fischhoff, & Lichtenstein, 1977; Oksam, Kingma, & Klasen, 2000). Finally, there is only a minimal relationship between people's beliefs about ability to detect lying among others and their actual ability to detect lying (correlation  $\sim .04$ ) (DePaulo, Charlton, Cooper, Lindsay, & Mulenbruck, 1997). Thus, it is not abnormal for participants behavior to seemingly contradict their beliefs, as they appear to do across my three studies.

This still begs the questions, why? Why did my hypotheses receive some support in the retrospective reports but in the contemporaneous reports just the opposite relationships were found? Fortunately, prior research provides a few possible explanations: A) The interpretation of interpersonal voice differs from the presurvey scale to the daily diary. B) Participants differ in their recall of prior instances of interpersonal voice when completing the pre-survey scale, or C) Situational factors influence behavior more than is realized when filling out the retrospective surveys.

## **Interpretation Issues**

To the first point, when participants completed the retrospective interpersonal voice scale, the questions are broad and generalized which leaves room for variations in interpretation (Clark & Watson, 1995; DeVellis, 2016; Nadler, Weston, & Voyles, 2015). For instance, “Did not express concerns with [*insert partner’s name*]’s behavior even though I wanted to” in order to “benefit your partner’s welfare” (which is reverse scored) could lead people to think about situations where they failed to express a concern regarding something that could improve the partner’s welfare OR where they held back from expressing the concern in order to benefit the partner. This ambiguity in how they interpreted the questions leaves room for unexpected patterns to emerge. Although, I see this as the least likely of the three possibilities laid out above, it is possible that it explains why people with stronger relationships report expressing partner-benefiting voice with greater frequency compared to those lower in the relational variables. Persons with higher perceived communal strength (compared to lower perceived communal strength) may be more likely to think about the former option, where they failed to speak up when they felt they should have, and they see that as a missed opportunity to supporting their partners. Certainly, there are other additional combinations of how potential interpretations may result in the positive relationship between partner-benefiting voice and relational strengths but the consistently high alphas found in both the partner-benefiting and self-benefiting interpersonal voice scales lead me to believe that other explanations might better explain the discrepancy identified and therefore I won’t belabor this point.

### **Issues with Retrospective Reporting**

Researchers have previously identified issues with retrospective reporting (Schwarz, 2007; Anglin, Hser, & Choi, 1993; Mackenzie, Byles, & D’Este, 2006). Specifically, when filling out scales such as the interpersonal voice scales, participants are prone to reflecting on overly extreme examples of the

questions being asked. This bias was observed by Sato & Kawahara (2010) when participants completed a mood diary for two weeks and then at the end were told to recall their average mood over the past two weeks. The researchers found that participants who had higher peak negative scores overestimated the negativity of their mood over the past two weeks, compared to participants with lower peak negative scores (even though the averages were not statistically different). They surmised that this was because of the clear, extreme, example from which they had to draw upon when completing the final survey. For the interpersonal voice scales participants may be focusing on overtly strong examples of partner- or self-benefiting voice such as reminding one's partner of the need to study rather than watch television so that she can pass her test and get into med school. If this is occurring, when filling out the interpersonal voice scales, persons with greater commitment, communal strength, perceived commitment, and perceived communal strength may have clearer examples to refer back to and therefore think that the occurrence of such behavior occurs more frequently compared to persons who reported lower scores on the relational variables (and less clear examples of partner-benefiting voice to refer to).

Researchers also have found that the easier it is to recall an example, the more frequently that person reports that behavior, or event, occurs (Aarts, & Dijksterhuis, 1999). The reason that certain people may have more vivid examples to draw on are two-fold: a) expressions of interpersonal voice occur more often, b) when expressions of partner-benefiting voice do occur they are about more important topics (Schwarz & Sudman, 2012). If the former explanation were true, more closely connected participants would indicate actually expressing more partner-benefiting voice in the daily diary study but that is not what I see. Indeed, the results from Study 2 indicate the opposite occurs. This then may indicate that more closely connected couples see the value in expressing concerns in order to benefit the partner's welfare (which would be why there is a positive relationship between the relational variables and the partner-benefiting voice scales) but they reserve voicing those concerns for

situations of greater importance (which would be why there is a negative relationship between the relational variables and the number of times people actually expressed partner-benefiting voice in Study 2). This certainly feels like a reasonable explanation for the patterns observed throughout these studies, however additional research is required in order to determine if this is the case.

### **Situational Factors Change Frequency of Expressing**

The third explanation states that people in more closely connected relationships see the value in expressing interpersonal voice and think that they exercise it more but when the actual moment to potentially express a concern comes, other factors come into play that make expressing the concern no longer attractive. The discrepancy comes from the challenges associated with taking into account situational subtleties when filling out a survey, that are natural to account for when facing the actual situation (Cote, McCullough, & Reilly, 1985; Norberg, Horne, & Horne, 2007). Indeed, many researchers have noted the influence a situation has on an individual's behavior (for review see Snyder & Monson, 1975). For instance, a now well-known study by Darley and Batson (1973) altered the situation that seminary students were in by making some of them late for delivering a practice sermon while allowing others plenty of time to get to their practice session. Those seminary students who thought they were late for the practice sermon were far less likely to help a man who was slumped by the side of the road (on their path from one building to the next) than were the seminary students who were not in a hurry. Certainly, these students, when asked, might say that they would help a man in such a dire state and yet the situation resulted in only a small fraction (10%) of the "late" students actually helping the man. Another example, and perhaps an even more famous study, is that of Zimbardo, Haney, Banks, and Jaffe (1971) where participants were assigned roles as either prison guard or prisoner and then inserted into a fake prison scenario. The situation had dramatic effects on participants' behavior. The prison guards exhibited cruel and ruthless behavior while the prisoners displayed overt helplessness, characteristics that were abnormal for both groups of participants. Certainly, the actual situation a person finds oneself



in may present a number of factors that alter one's desire to express partner-benefiting voice. These factors can be thought of in two ways, 1) factors that change the activated goal, and 2) factors that alter the risk/benefit ratio.

Situations commonly influence the goal that is activated in an individual (Bargh, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, Gollwitzer, & Trotschel, 2001) or group (Loersch, Aarts, Payne, & Jefferis, 2008). Often, these goals are activated outside of one's awareness and nonconsciously guide self-regulation (Bargh, 1990). For instance, Bargh and colleagues (2001) demonstrate that priming students with high-performance words such as "win", "compete", and "strive" caused them to perform better on an intellectual task than students who were not primed with high-performance words. Importantly, these words were hidden within a separate task the students were completing, which shows the power of subtle changes in one's environment on goal activation and how hard it is to predict how the environment is going to influence one's decision/actions. The ease with which priming can occur in a given situation and the variety of ways in which priming can occur makes it very difficult for participants to anticipate how they will behave in future situations. In addition to nonconscious choices and guidance of behavior, people are also influenced by conscious goals on a moment-to-moment basis (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996). Conscious goals can impact behavior in a number of ways, one of which is in performance. Those who set specific, yet challenging goals often perform better than people who simply set "do your best" goals, as people who set specific goals have more focused attention, try harder, persist for longer, and have better strategy development (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). Although it is not clear how the specificity and/or difficulty of goals would change as a result of differing relationship strength, it provides another example of the challenges with predicting actual behavior, even from the target person.

**Explaining the negative relationship between interpersonal voice and relational constructs.**

In addition to dissecting the contrasting results of retrospective reports and proximal reports of interpersonal voice, focusing on the negative relationship identified between the relational constructs and interpersonal voice is also valuable. Although I have hinted at, or directly mentioned, possible explanations for this relationship, I consolidate those interpretations and add to them here. My explanations are this: a) My construct of interpersonal voice actually captures complaints and criticism more than true goal support (of either the self or partner). b) The risks associated with expressing interpersonal voice are greater than the expresser anticipated. c) Expressing interpersonal voice as a means of supporting oneself or one's partner is a less sophisticated form of support, compared to alternatives such as emotional support.

As I have mentioned previously, it may be that instead of using interpersonal voice, specifically partner-benefiting voice, to build each other up, partners may be criticizing and complaining about their partners and masking it as support. This masking may or may not be intentional. In other words, partners may have negative thoughts about their partners' behavior and express those concerns in a way that is intentionally, and deceptively, framed as being partner-benefiting voice. Alternatively, they may see a behavior that is annoying to them (but not enough so to bring it up to their partners) and then also see that same behavior negatively impacting their partner in another domain and the added benefit of supporting their goal in that other domain raises the issue to a level high enough that they are willing to express the concern to their partner. Thus, it may be a fully selfish motivation that leads one to express the concern, or a mixture of both self and other focused motivation, (with a significant portion coming from the self-focused motivation) that leads one to express the concern. In either case, the expression of concern is not truly, or even primarily, partner-benefiting but is just pretending to be. This self-benefiting motivation masked as partner-benefiting motivation does not demonstrate care for the partner nor does it demonstrate a strong desire to maintain the relationship, and therefore might

explain why I observe a negative relationship between interpersonal voice and the positive relational constructs.

Alternatively, persons in relationships characterized by low commitment and low communal strength may not be as good at accurately assessing the risks involved with expressing interpersonal voice (compared to persons who are in relationships with self-reported higher levels of commitment and communal strength). Perhaps these persons are less concerned about the risks, because they care less about the relationship anyway, and therefore they do not appropriately weigh the risks of expressing concerns. Previously I have mentioned that these risks can include offending the partner, aggravating the partner, or making the partner feel unloved, and when a partner feels any of these feelings as a result of the other's expression of interpersonal voice they may react with damaging words in kind. In addition to responding negatively, they may be less likely to actually change their behavior/attitude in the direction the other person desired, making the expression of interpersonal voice ineffective. The lack of changed behavior/attitude and the counter attack by the recipient of the expression of concern, could lead to even lower levels of care and commitment towards the partner, compounding the negative relationship between interpersonal voice and the relational constructs.

Finally, it may be that persons in relationships with higher commitment and/or higher communal strength may be utilizing other forms of support more frequently than persons in relationships characterized by lower levels of commitment and communal strength. People in stronger relationships may choose to use other forms of support *instead* of expressing interpersonal voice, while those persons in weaker relationships choose interpersonal voice over the other forms of support. It may be that couples in weaker relationships are not as comfortable using the other forms of support. It is also possible that they simply believe that expressing interpersonal voice provides benefits that the other forms do not provide and therefore opt for exercising interpersonal voice.

Considering the mediation analyses which found that more frequent expressions of interpersonal voice was positively related to how cold and critical the delivery of interpersonal voice was, and the results from the exploratory analyses which found that perceiving oneself to have greater power in the relationship is also positively related to frequency of expressing interpersonal voice, I think that the first explanation best fits the findings. That is, people who express interpersonal voice are doing so as a means of criticizing their partners. However, it is possible that all of these explanations are operating to produce the results found in the studies presented in this dissertation. Whereas the relational variables studied in this dissertation are closely related to relationship satisfaction, it is interesting to zoom in on how interpersonal voice relates to relationship satisfaction and the implications of that relationship, both of which are explored next.

### **The implications for relationship satisfaction**

In the beginning, I perceived expressing voice as a positive for the relationship and therefore assumed that partner-benefiting interpersonal voice also would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction. While I anticipated that voice would be a good thing for the relationship, I expected self-benefiting voice to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction because it represents more frequent attempts to change the partner for one's own benefit. After observing the negative relationship between daily interpersonal voice and the relational variables, I no longer held onto the assumption regarding partner-benefiting voice and instead anticipated both forms of interpersonal voice to be bad for the relationship. Indeed, the results for Study 2 presented no relationship between retrospective interpersonal voice and relationship satisfaction, and a negative association between daily expressions of interpersonal voice and daily relationship satisfaction. Although failing to reach traditional significance, Study 3 also provides results where the connection between relationship satisfaction and use of interpersonal voice (specifically, partner-benefiting) is negative. Taken together, it appears to be pretty clear that interpersonal voice, as it is identified and used by participants is not a

positive thing for the well-being of the relationship. This could be due to any one (or multiple) of the reasons I proposed as reasons for the mismatch between retrospective reporting and more proximal reporting of interpersonal voice. However, as indicated in that prior discussion, I lean towards the assumption that the mismatch is likely due to the result of two things, 1) partners with score lower on the relational scales are including instances of merely complaining about their partner's actions/attitudes when stated frequency of expressing interpersonal voice, and 2) individuals in stronger relationships are more particular about when they express interpersonal voice and therefore express voice less frequently.

While the over-reporting associated with including complaints and opinions in the reporting of interpersonal voice is an issue that warrants addressing in future work, I am primarily interested in the consequences (positive and negative) of being more selective about when to express voice. In focusing on this, assumed, selectivity associated with couples in stronger relationships, it is useful to consider how this selectivity impacts the relationship. Although there appears to be a positive relationship between expressing less voice and greater relationship satisfaction, it is possible that being more selective about when to express voice can have both positive and negative consequences. For instance, on the positive side, fewer expressions of interpersonal voice may reduce the number of arguments between the couple, it may increase ownership of the goal for the person with the goal, and it may demonstrate flexibility in foci of attention. On the negative side, expressing voice less frequently may lead to a build-up of frustration around an issue that creates more tension when the concern is verbalized, or it may be a representation of (or be perceived as) reduced overall partner support.

Turning, first to the positive side. Due to the nature of interpersonal voice, there is a risk involved with verbalizing the concern and often this risk is that one, or both, of the partners will feel hurt or offended in some way. When Kareem asked his partner to leave him alone so that he could study, Diane may very-well have felt rejected and hurt. If Diane then responds to this feeling of hurt and rejection by

verbally lashing-out at Kareem, the two of them are likely to have a back-and-forth conversation that creates tension, stress, and additional hurt feelings (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Markman, 1991). Thus, to avoid the risk of entering into such a discussion, couples in stronger relationship may opt to just let the little things go, while those in less strong relationships more frequently choose to pursue attempts at correcting the little things which in turn leads to more arguments and a less satisfied relationship (Bradbury & Fincham, 1991). It may come as no surprise that couples with more satisfying relationships actively choose to let the little things go, and engage in fewer destructive behaviors (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik & Lipkus, 1991). This willingness to refrain from reacting to perceived slights and instead respond warmly is known as accommodation and although I did not assess participants' willingness to accommodate, I suspect that there is a negative relationship between expressing interpersonal voice and the tendency to accommodate. Refraining from expressing a concern about a partner's attitude or behavior appears to have a clear parallel with refraining to respond to an affront with a counterattack but instead responding with warmth. They both demonstrate a desire to place the long-term over the short term, the relationship over the individual. Study 3 may be tapping into a form of accommodation with the partner's tendency (in closer relationships) to write notes of warmth and encouragement instead of expressing criticism and fault. It would be interesting and potentially insightful to run a future study that looks at interpersonal voice and accommodation together, to identify if there are similarities in who accommodates and who forgoes expressing voice when minor problems arise in the relationship for self or partner. Similar to accommodation but less active is Rusbult's concept of loyalty. She defines loyalty as "waiting and hoping things will improve" (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982, p2), and perhaps participants in closer relationships are simply waiting for change rather than speaking up to create change. This does not mean that participants in closer relationships are not exercising voice, rather they are more willing to wait and see if the partner changes on his/her own before choosing to exercise

voice. Similar to loyalty as a response to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982), giving the partner time to change on their own may be a positive thing for the relationship.

Another potential positive that comes from expressing less interpersonal voice is that it may allow for greater ownership of one's goals. The rationale is that if an individual is feeling pressure from someone else to achieve a certain goal (due to the other person exercising partner-benefiting voice), they may no longer see that goal as an autonomous one and lose interest in striving for that goal (Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996; Sheldon & Elliott, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Many researchers have identified low goal motivation as a barrier to goal achievement (Okun & Karoly, 2007; Montani, Battistelli, & Odoardi, 2017; Rader, 2005). For instance, a group of researchers conducted a study on weight-loss interventions and found that goal-ownership prior to the interventions significantly predicted participant drop-out from the weight-loss intervention (Huisman, Maes, De Gucht, Chatrou, & Haak, 2009). As an example of how this may occur with frequent expressions of partner-benefiting voice, allow me to return to the diet scenario with Kareem and Diane. If Diane is on a diet that does not allow her to eat ice cream but if Kareem continuously reminds her of the need to refrain from eating ice cream, she may begin to perceive the goal for her to lose-weight as Kareem's goal for her to lose weight. This partial (or whole) transfer of goal motivation on Kareem may reduce her sense of control (Gosnell & Gable, 2017), her flexibility in how she achieves the goal (Resnick, 2018), and/or her sense of self-esteem (Canevello & Crocker, 2011). If, on the other hand, Kareem holds back from speaking up every single time Diane reaches for the ice-cream, Diane may become more motivated to control the desire on her own and gain an increased sense of life-satisfaction (Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2005), which is positively related to one's relationship satisfaction (Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, & Cummins, 2008). Although I do not see this as being a primary benefit of fewer expression of interpersonal voice for most people, it is useful to explore the nuanced ways in which expressing interpersonal voice more or less frequently may impact the relationship.

Turning now to the potential negative consequences of fewer instances of expressing interpersonal voice within close romantic relationships. A lack of interpersonal voice may actually lead to larger, more heated, arguments when a build-up of concern finally comes out as harsh criticism (Fincham, 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2009; Holmes & Murray, 1996). Turning back to Kareem and Diane to illustrate an example. Assume that Kareem, instead of expressing his concern about Diane's talking on the phone while he is trying to watch television, refrains from speaking up and simply remains frustrated about not being able to hear his show, and this situation plays out again and again, every time increasing Kareem's frustration with Diane. Then, after three or four instances of this happening, he blurts out that he is annoyed with Diane and, out of his heightened frustration, yells at her for being inconsiderate of others. The likelihood that this conversation turns into an argument filled with criticism, contempt, and defensiveness is greater (Gottman, 2008; Holman, & Jarvis, 2003).

Restraint from expressing interpersonal voice may also lead to negative consequences down the road. One such consequence is failed behavioral change when the behavioral change was important to longer-term goals. In other words, if the partner needs the verbal support from the actor in order to successfully accomplish his/her goal but does not receive that support, s/he may fail to achieve the goal. For example, if Kareem does not speak up and say something about Diane's ice cream eating, she may struggle to stop the activity on her own, leading to her failure to lose the weight she wanted to lose, and possibly to a reduced personal sense of control and lowered self-esteem (Crocker, 2006). Certainly, this path I just laid out may not occur for everyone, and failing to lose the desired weight may have little-to-no impact on a person's longer-term wellbeing, but it may for some. It is therefore possible that being too concerned about the potential risks of offending one's partner may do more harm than good. Recently, researchers have explored a similar phenomenon, where doing something that is supposedly positive, can have lasting negative effects (Lemay, Ryan, Fehr, & Gelfand, 2020). Specifically, Lemay and colleagues explored the dark side of responsiveness. They found that when persons were responsive to



their partners' conflicts with other people (outside of the relationship), the partner was less motivated to forgive the adversary, and more motivated to avoid them or seek revenge (2019). While the actors thought they were being good, supportive partners, they were actually promoting greater issues for the partner in the long-term.

While the above consequence is focused on fewer instances of *partner-benefiting* voice, a similar issue may arise for *self-benefiting* voice. By not voicing concerns the person may not see a change in his/her partner's behavior which could inhibit his/her ability to achieve a desired goal, which, in turn, could result in lower life satisfaction in the long term (Locke & Latham, 1990; Judge, et al., 2005). Perhaps a more tangible example; the actor needs to study for an exam but the partner is watching television and talking on the phone, both of which are major distractions for the actor. The actor does not speak up and ask the partner to give him quiet, s/he then is unable to study effectively for the exam and fails the exam. While not as drawn out at the first example, this too exemplifies how not expressing a concern can lead to issues later on. Addressing potential long-term consequences of expressing, or failing to express, interpersonal voice is vital to developing research on this topic to an extent where professional couples' counselors can use the information to improve the lives of their clients.

Another interesting issue worth disentangling, is true motivation, particularly with partner-benefiting voice. Whereas, I take an optimistic view of a person's motivation behind interpersonal voice, it is likely that what may seem, on the surface, to be partner-voice is not solely motivated by a desire to benefit one's partner. Indeed, selfish motivations may contribute to one's expression or lack of expression of partner-benefiting interpersonal voice and, importantly, partners may also interpret partner voice as having been motivated as concern for the self and is their partners' concerns for themselves disguised as concern for the other. It is also possible that a person expresses voice in order to improve the relationship, but masks it as partner-benefiting. This is an issue that scientists and philosophers have been dealing with regarding altruism (Batson, 1987). Carlson & Zaki (2018)

investigated how laypeople responded to prosocial acts. They found that when observers saw the prosocial action as having self-oriented motives, they penalized that person more harshly than persons who acted in non-prosocial ways. Thus, expressing a concern that is masked as partner-benefiting but resulted in benefits to the self, may actually have deleterious effects on the relationship. For instance, an individual may think that his/her partner needs to communicate more frequently and a situation comes up in which s/he is struggling to accomplish a goal at work because of his/her communication skills. The individual may express concerns to the partner about his/her communication skills and encourage him/her to practice empathic listening (for example). Certainly, improving his/her communication skills will help the partner accomplish the desired goal at work but the primary reason the person expressed the concern was to enhance the relationship. This may be a useful strategy if done so without being exposed, but if the partner sees through the scheme it will likely backfire as the partner feels manipulated.

### **How Motivation Factors in**

Throughout this discussion I have mentioned that true motivation plays a vital role in the application and success of interpersonal voice, it therefore warrants a deeper analysis—something I will attempt to do here. Whereas self-benefiting voice is unlikely to have significant ulterior motives, beyond benefiting the self, partner-benefiting voice is, likely, much more complex. Expressing a concern in the form of partner-benefiting voice may help the actor alleviate some of the risks associated with expressing self-benefiting voice or expressing straight criticism and therefore people may leverage verbiage that mimics partner-benefiting voice for reasons that are beyond the scope of true concern for the partner. Indeed, there are at least three motivations for expressions that appear to be partner-benefiting voice which that are, instead, alternatives to truly wanting to benefit one's partner: 1) self-benefiting, 2) third-party benefiting, and 3) to express criticism.

The daily diary portion of Study 2 asked participants to report on how much each expression of partner-benefiting voice was motivated for partner-benefiting reasons and for self-benefiting reasons. Specifically, for the first instance of self- and partner-benefiting voice expressed each day, the participants were asked to report “To what extent was this concern driven by self-benefiting motives?” and “To what extent was this concern driven by partner-benefiting motives?” on a 7-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). In looking at these scores, it becomes clear that nearly every instance of partner-benefiting voice was partially motivated by self-benefiting concerns. Perhaps, an element of benefiting the self helps to increase the benefits of expressing partner-benefiting voice to a level that exceeds the potential risks and that, simply supporting the partner is not enough motivation. While a cynic may see this as an accurate explanation, perhaps a more realistic explanation is that the issues about which people were choosing to express partner-benefiting voice were small concerns that, on their own, did not exceed the threshold necessary to overcome the risks of expressing the concern but when adding in the benefit to the self, this issue exceeds that threshold. Another reason why a self-benefiting issue may be expressed as partner-benefiting voice is for strategic reasons. Expressing a concern in such a way that it appears to be for the benefit of the partner may minimize certain potential consequences such as the partner feeling as if the actor does not care about the partner’s wellbeing. For example, Kareem may want Diane to pick up her clutter around the house because he hates clutter but instead of expressing this as a self-benefiting concern, he waits for an opportunity where this concern can be stated in a partner-benefiting manner, such as when Diane complains that she just feels unproductive and distracted today. He may suggest she pick up her clutter as a way to feel productive and remove distractions. Although this tactic may have the desired effect, it also may be easy to see through and for partners to see (or at least consider) the true, selfish, motivation which could have deleterious effects on the relationship. People do not like to feel like they are being manipulated and identifying an expression of partner-benefiting voice that is truly self-benefiting could illicit a feeling of

being manipulated. Since people think that they are better at lying than they actually are, this may be an unanticipated negative consequence of expressing a concern.

Turning to the second reason partner-benefiting voice may not be purely for the benefit of the partner is that behavior that has the surface appearance of being partner benefiting voice also may be intended to benefit a third party. Perhaps the clearest example of this is a parent-child relationship wherein one parent expresses a concern about the other parent's behavior in a partner-benefiting manner but with the intended outcome of benefiting their child. For instance, a woman may say to his husband the he should work less because it stresses him out and his energy will fade quickly if he keeps up the current pace, but her true desire is for him to be home more so that he can spend time with their daughter. I anticipate that this type of ulterior motive would have fewer negative consequences, if identified, than the self-benefiting motive would have. It is likely harder to detect expressions of partner-benefiting voice that are focused on bringing benefit to a third party, and if the deception is detected it may lead to feelings of guilt, rather than anger, in the person being expressed to. Here too an expression of partner-benefiting voice may have a mixture of true partner-benefiting concern and third-party benefiting concern. Another example of a common reason someone might express partner-benefiting voice but with the intent of benefiting a third-party is when the third-party is the relationship between the one expressing the concern and the one receiving the expression of concern. This, perhaps, teeters on being a self-benefiting reason to express partner-benefiting voice (as one personally desires a better relationship with one's partner) but it may be perceived as a separate entity, making it a third-party. In this case, the risks to expressing the concern in a partner-benefiting manner are likely lower than if expressed as self-benefiting voice but may be worse than if expressed as third-party benefiting voice. I have yet to discuss the risks and benefits of speaking up on behalf of a third party, and I will not go into much detail here, but it is likely received in a manner similar to partner-benefiting voice, depending on how close the partner is to the third-party. The closer the partner is connected to the

third party in such cases, the lower the risks as the partner likely desires to change in a way to benefit the third party. This is certainly a topic that should be addressed in future work on interpersonal voice as I imagine there is a great deal of nuance associated with it.

The third ulterior motivation when expressing partner-benefiting voice is that behavior with the surface appearance of being partner benefiting voice is being used to simply express criticism. Certainly, this could be viewed as self-benefiting voice that is being masked as partner-benefiting voice but criticism is unique in that it does not necessarily have to be about an issue that can be changed. For example, Diane may say to Kareem, “You were really annoying at the party last night.” which is clearly a criticism about Kareem’s behavior but it is not something that Kareem can now change. This criticism can be reframed to look like partner-benefiting voice, “I know you care about Devon’s opinion of you so you might want to be less annoying at parties when Devon’s there. You were obnoxious at last night’s party.” Although this example does present an opportunity for changing the future, the sentiment revolves around a frustration with the past and is meant to be a criticism rather than an agent of change. It is also possible that some of the participants in our Study 2 were interpreting. “You were really annoying at the part last night” as a form of partner-benefiting voice and reporting it as such, even those the behavior was, more clearly, a straight criticism. These criticisms, framed as partner-benefiting voice, are likely seen as cold and unkind. Unlike with self-benefiting issues, criticism does not expect change to actually occur but rather express the criticism as a means of letting the partner know they were upset by something they did. When a person simply wants to vent and disguises their frustration as partner-benefiting voice, they likely do so in a manner that is much colder and harsher than they do with other ulterior motives for voice, which in turn likely leads to worse outcomes in the relationship.

### **How My Findings Align with Past Work on Voice**

As this work was inspired by the extensive literature on voice in the business setting, I now want to return to the research on voice in the business literature and compare prior findings from that field, many of which were mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, to the relationships with voice identified throughout this paper. The business literature that addresses voice primarily focuses on individual characteristics that lead someone to be more or less likely to express voice, and while this paper emphasized relational characteristics, Study 2 did include individual measures difference measure some of which are the same as those previously examined in the business literature on voice for exploratory reasons. Analyses in the present work showed an inverse relationship between self-esteem and interpersonal voice, and between optimism and interpersonal voice and, intriguingly, by-and-large, these results are contradictory to what is found in the business literature. In the context of employees and supervisors, self-esteem has been shown to be positively related to one's willingness to express voice, and greater optimism was linked to more frequent expressions of voice throughout multiple business settings. These differences likely highlight the difference between speaking up in a workplace versus speaking up in close relationships.

In close relationships, higher self-esteem (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and higher optimism are associated with higher relationship satisfaction and it is possible that the negative relationship between self-esteem (and optimism) and frequency of expressing interpersonal voice is a by-product of being in a stronger relationship. Alternatively, people may project their own self-esteem or optimism onto their partners and view their partners as more capable of managing their own goals and objectives thereby expressing fewer instances of partner-benefiting voice. Similarly, greater self-esteem and optimism may lead a person to be more confident in their ability to adapt to their circumstances without impacting their partner. For instance, if Kareem is trying to study in the living room and Diane comes in and turns

on the television, he might simply adapt to the new situation and find a new location to study, rather than risk offending Diane.

Additionally, I think that a big barrier to speaking up in the business setting is the fear of being outcast or permanently impacted by the attempt to create change in the company, whereas in close relationships the negative consequences of speaking up are likely to be perceived as short-term consequences. Thus, there may be different factors that take priority when deciding whether or not to express voice in the business setting compared to within close relationships. For instance, if the studies in this paper did capture mere complaints masked as partner-benefiting voice, then greater self-esteem/optimism may also be linked to one's confidence in addressing concerns in alternative ways (i.e., providing emotional support, changing the situation, providing information, etc.), while in the business setting it is more about a concern regarding the validity of one's complaint and having greater self-esteem and/or greater general optimism leads one to be more confident about the validity of one's concern (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

There also were a few similarities between what leads to more voice in the business world and what leads to more voice in the close relationship world. Specifically, dissatisfaction with the relationship/company, and perceived power to the one being expressed to appear to have similar effects on one's willingness to express voice in both situations (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 2003). Keeping in mind that participants in my studies are likely expressing criticisms as a form of voice, it makes sense that dissatisfaction would operate similarly in these two contexts. To express voice a person must first identify an issue that requires voice and for both close relationships and workplace relationships, this inherently increases one's dissatisfaction. Couple that with the barriers to expressing voice and it is clear that greater dissatisfaction with the relationship would lead one to be more willing to express the concerns—they have less to lose and more to gain by expressing these concerns.

Regarding the perceived power differentials, a smaller delta likely leads one to anticipate that one's concern will be better received and attended to compared to relationships with greater power differentials. When the person who is being expressed to is in a position of great power (relative to the expresser), they are able to inflict greater harm on the one expressing the concern. For instance, a boss has the power to not promote, fire, or further punish an employee who speaks up whereas a colleague is far more limited in how they can punish the expresser.

Looking at the findings more broadly, it is worth noting that my findings align with work done by Fiedler back in 1967 wherein he develops his theory on leadership called the "contingency model of leadership effectiveness." In this model he identifies two factors that interact to create effective leaders, a personality factor, and a situational control factor. The factor that might shed light on the differences identified between my findings and the findings from the business literature is the personality factor which he breaks down further into two sub components. According to Fiedler (1967), a person's leadership personality can be task-oriented or relationship-oriented. He goes on to say that increased control leads to better performance for someone who is task-oriented but not so for someone who is relationally-oriented (Daniel, 1976). Although Fiedler did not indicate what percentage of business leaders are task- vs. relationship-oriented, it may be that task-orientation is generally more prevalent in the business world whereas relationally-orientation may be more prevalent in the domain of close romantic relationships. This might easily explain why a greater sense of self-esteem and optimism (indicating a perceived heightened sense of control) relates to enacting significantly more voice in a business setting wherein it helps a person complete task-oriented goals but less voice in the context of a romantic relationships wherein it can interfere with progress toward relationship-oriented goals. While there has been much debate about the accuracy of Fiedler's model (Daniel, 1976), it remains an interesting model that may shed light on why self-esteem and optimism have been shown to increase



the use of voice in business settings whereas we find that it decreases the use of voice in the romantic relationships we studied.

### **Future Directions**

As has become clear, the studies presented in this dissertation are primarily primers for future work to build on and, indeed, require additional work to better interpret the findings in these three studies. Throughout each of the individual study discussions and the general discussion I have presented a handful of possible explanations for results observed in my studies but have yet to talk about how I would design future studies to address these unanswered questions. First, the questions that I believe warrant priority in addressing with future work are: a) Are participants reporting instances of complaining and/or criticism (messages that are outside my definition of interpersonal voice) when reporting how frequently they express interpersonal voice? b) If so, how does accurate use of interpersonal voice relate to commitment, communal strength, and relationship satisfaction?

Although I hoped that requiring participants to read extensive descriptions of what is and is not interpersonal voice and then be tested on the definitions, would be enough to weed out erroneous instances of “voice,” the results have led me to believe otherwise. What, then, would I do differently to more accurately assess interpersonal voice? One possible option would be to interview the participants on a semi-regular basis during a training phase and during these interviews the experimenter could help the participants fine-tune what is and is not interpersonal voice. While this may get the job done, it is certainly a resource intensive approach and therefore may not be feasible. Another option would be to have participants fully describe each situation in which they expressed interpersonal voice and then have experimenters (or another set of participants) rate the degree to which each situation aligns with the definitions of interpersonal voice. This option is much more manageable for the experimenters but requires much more work by the participants, something that could limit the frequency with which

participants report expressing interpersonal voice. A third possibility is to design another in-laboratory study where one, or both, members of a couple are given a task (or series of tasks) to do that is complex and challenging. If one member is only allowed to watch the other member and then the two of them are given time together in a room before completing additional tasks, the recorded conversation may pick up on the various ways that couples support each other, including expressing interpersonal voice. This is similar to the speech task but perhaps better designed to encourage a positive use of voice by providing the voicer with first-hand experience with the task at hand, thereby giving them more confidence in their ability to recommend change.

I lean towards the second option, wherein participants are asked to provide more details about each instance of expressing interpersonal voice. With the right amount of detail, third-party reviewers of the descriptions would be able to determine how closely the expression of concern aligns with the definition of interpersonal voice. Certainly, if participants are masking complaints in language that looks like interpersonal voice than it will continue to be a challenge to differentiate true voice from misconstrued voice. In order to try to alleviate this concern, I would ask participants questions to get at how annoyed (or frustrated) they had been about each behavior with which they expressed interpersonal voice. I imagine that directly asking if they were criticizing or complaining might result in more misleading responses but using questions that are not as loaded as criticism might be, could allow researchers to better discern true interpersonal voice from masked voice (partner-benefiting voice that is actually selfishly motivated). Finally, I think that real interpersonal voice occurs very infrequently, possibly only a once or twice a month, and therefore encourage this future study to be spread-out across more days and asking participants to reflect back on a longer period than just 24 hours.

If the results from this follow up study indicate that interpersonal voice, specifically partner-benefiting interpersonal voice, is still negatively associated with the relational variables and with relationship satisfaction then I would seek to better understand why. To do this, I would focus on two

things, 1) the way that people deliver expressions of interpersonal voice, and 2) the alternative strategies people use when confronted with a behavior of the partner that is limiting his/her ability to accomplish a desired goal.

On a more granular level, do people with high (versus low) communal strength express interpersonal voice differently? Perhaps people higher in communal strength are also more particular about the setting in which they express interpersonal voice, one where the partner is in a position to be more receptive to the concern, so that their concern has a higher probability of being received positively. Indeed, researchers have found that the way in which happy couples communicate plays a big part in the success of the relationship (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). One set of researchers identified three ways in which more satisfied couples differ from less satisfied couples in the way they communicate. More satisfied couples communicate “softly” without being aggressive, contemptuous, or insulting; they communicate safely by creating an environment of mutual care and validation; and they keep it positive by expressing positive affect (Wiley, 2007). Furthermore, happy couples have been found to be congruent between the intended message and the message that is received (Gottman & Porterfield, 1981; Noller, 1980). Interestingly, researchers also find that happy couples are better than unhappy couples at identifying when their intended message is not received in the same way it was intended (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Noller & Venardos, 1986). Therefore, it may be that couples in stronger relationships realize when an expression of interpersonal voice is received poorly and take the necessary steps to clarify their good intentions.

To better understand the how different people deliver messages of interpersonal voice and what alternative strategies of support are used, I might opt for the modified in-lab studied I described above. By creating a task that allows the voicer to feel like they have useful information on how to approach the task, I think that researchers might be able to better solicit interpersonal voice from those who would choose to express it. Possible tasks include complex puzzles with tricks on how to solve it, or

a series of tasks that need to be done in a certain order. Additionally, by videotaping the interaction researchers will be able to better dissect the ways in which participants express interpersonal voice and how that relates to various outcomes, including relationship satisfaction. The problem with this study is that it would take considerably longer than my original in-lab study and therefore be more expensive and potentially limit the type of people who are able to participate. However, these issues may pale in consideration to the potential findings that could come from a study of this nature, outcomes that would help to paint a clearer picture of how interpersonal voice is expressed and what alternative strategies partners use to support their significant others.

### **Final thoughts on Interpersonal Voice**

This topic of expressing voice within close relationships stemmed from the extensive literature on voice in the business world and my goal was two-fold, a) translate voice to close relationships, and b) explore how factors of the relationship relate to voice in close relationships. To the first part, I believe that the research presented in this dissertation has accomplished this goal. I have clearly laid out what my conceptualization of voice looks like in close relationships and how it improves upon prior attempts at decoding business voice into close relationship voice. To the second part, I believe that I have only scratched the surface.

With that being said, I am no longer confident that interpersonal voice is always a positive thing for the relationship. Rather, expressing interpersonal voice may often be a less caring and sensitive way of supporting one's partner, compared to providing instrumental or emotional support. Perhaps the people who choose to exercise voice more frequently believe that it is the best method of supporting their partners or perhaps they are just less comfortable with using the other forms of support. Alternatively, partner-benefiting voice may just be a convenient way to mask one's criticism of one's partner. Either way, choosing to express partner-benefiting voice more frequently appears to be

detrimental to the relationship. Certainly, there remain many aspects of interpersonal voice that need initial examination or further investigation, however, I hope that this dissertation reignites the conversation on voice and provides a lens through which researchers can further explore the topic.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: PRIMARY RELATIONAL SCALES

***Communal Strength Scale***

Mills, J., Clark, M.S., Ford, T., & Johnson, M. (2004). Measurement of communal strength. *Personal Relationships*, 11, 213-230.

Instructions: "For the following survey, please answer each question while thinking about [partner name]."

Not at all												Extremely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	

1. How far would you be willing to go to visit [partner name]?
2. How happy do you feel when doing something that helps [partner name]?
3. How large a benefit would you be likely to give [partner name]?
4. How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of [partner name]?
5. How readily can you put the needs of [partner name] out of your thoughts? (R)
6. How high a priority for you is meeting the needs of [partner name]?
7. How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for [partner name]? (R)
8. How much would you be willing to give up to benefit [partner name]?
9. How far would you go out of your way to do something for [partner name]?
10. How easily could you accept not helping [partner name]? (R)

***Perceived Communal Strength Scale***

Mills, J., Clark, M.S., Ford, T., & Johnson, M. (2004). Measurement of communal strength. *Personal Relationships*, 11, 213-230.

Instructions: "For the following segment, we are interested in your perception of your partner's perspective (do not consult with your partner)."

Not at all												Extremely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	

1. How far would [partner name] be willing to go to visit you?
2. How happy does [partner name] feel when doing something that helps you?
3. How large a benefit would [partner name] be likely to give to you?
4. How large a cost would [partner name] incur to meet a need of yours?
5. How readily can [partner name] put your needs out of his/her thoughts? (R)



6. How high a priority for [partner name] is meeting your needs?
7. How reluctant would [partner name] be to sacrifice for you? (R)
8. How much would [partner name] be willing to give up to benefit you?
9. How far would [partner name] go out of his or her way to do something for you?
10. How easily could [partner name] accept not helping you? (R)

### **Commitment Level Scale**

Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal relationships*, 5(4), 357-387.

Instructions: "Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship with [partner name]."

Do not agree at all				Agree Somewhat				Agree Completely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with [partner name].
3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future. (R)
4. It is likely that I will date someone other than [partner name] within the next year. (R)
5. I feel very attached to our relationship--very strongly linked to my partner.
6. I want our relationship to last forever.
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

### **Perceived Commitment Level Scale**

Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal relationships*, 5(4), 357-387.

Instructions: "For the following segment, we are interested in your perception of your partner's perspective (do not consult with your partner)."

Do not agree at all				Agree Somewhat				Agree Completely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

1. [partner name] wants our relationship to last for a very long time.
2. [partner name] is committed to maintaining his/her relationship with me.

3. [partner name] would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future. (R)
4. It is likely that [partner name] will date someone other than me within the next year. (R)
5. [partner name] feels very attached to our relationship--very strongly linked to me.
6. [partner name] wants our relationship to last forever.
7. [partner name] is oriented toward the long-term future of our relationship (for example, [partner name] imagines being with me several years from now).

## APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL SCALES IN STUDY 2

***Couples Satisfaction Index***

Funk, J. L., & Rogge, R. D. (2007). Testing the ruler with item response theory: increasing precision of measurement for relationship satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology: JFP : Journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43)*, 21(4), 572–583. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.21.4.572>

1. CSI (4) is made up of items 1,12,19, and 22. CSI(16) is made up of items 1, 5, 9, 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32.
  - a. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship. (Extremely unhappy, fairly unhappy, a little unhappy, happy, very happy, extremely happy, Perfect)
2. Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.
  - a. Amount of time spent together
  - b. Making major decisions
  - c. Demonstrations of affection
  - d. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?
  - e. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
  - f. I still feel a strong connection with my partner
  - g. If I had my life to live over, I would marry the same person
  - h. Our relationship is strong
  - i. I sometimes wonder if there is someone else out there for me
  - j. My relationship with my partner makes me happy
  - k. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner
  - l. I can't imagine ending my relationship with my partner
  - m. I feel that I can confide in my partner about virtually anything
  - n. I have had second thoughts about this relationship recently
  - o. For me, my partner is the perfect romantic partner
  - p. I really feel like part of a team with my partner
  - q. I cannot imagine another person making me as happy as my partner does
  - r. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner
  - s. How well does your partner meet your needs
  - t. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations
  - u. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
  - v. How good is your relationship compared to most? (worse than all others, better than all others)
  - w. Do you enjoy your partner's company?
  - x. How often do you and your partner have fun together?
3. For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes how you feel about your relationship. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

- a. Interesting—Boring
- b. Bad---Good
- c. Full—Empty
- d. Lonely—Friendly
- e. Sturdy—Fragile
- f. Discouraging—hopeful
- g. Enjoyable---Miserable

### ***Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994)***

#### Interdependent Items

1. I Have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact
2. It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group
3. My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me
4. I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor
5. I respect people who are modest about themselves
6. I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in
7. I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments
8. I should take into consideration my parents' advice when making education/career plans
9. It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group
10. I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I'm not happy with the group
11. If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible
12. Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument

#### Independent Items

1. I'd rather say "No" directly, than risk being misunderstood
2. Speaking up during a class is not a problem for me
3. Having a lively imagination is important to me
4. I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards
5. I am the same person at home that I am at school
6. Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me
7. I act the same way no matter who I am with
8. I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet them, even when they are much older than I am
9. I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met
10. I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects
11. My personal identity independent of others, is very important to me
12. I value being in good health above everything

### **Experiences in Close Relationships**

Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000)

Scoring Information: The first 18 items listed below comprise the attachment-related anxiety scale. Items 19 – 36 comprise the attachment-related avoidance scale. In real research, the order in which these items are presented should be randomized. Each item is rated on a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. To obtain a score for attachment-related *anxiety*, please average a person's responses to items 1 – 18. However, because items 9 and 11 are "reverse keyed" (i.e., high numbers represent low anxiety rather than high anxiety), you'll need to reverse the answers to those questions before averaging the responses. (If someone answers with a "6" to item 9, you'll need to re-key it as a 2 before averaging.) To obtain a score for attachment-related *avoidance*, please average a person's responses to items 19 – 36. Items 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, and 36 will need to be reverse keyed before you compute this average.

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.
6. I worry a lot about my relationships.
7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.
8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.
9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.
11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.
14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.
16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.
17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.
18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.
19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.
28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
30. I tell my partner just about everything.
31. I talk things over with my partner.
32. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.
35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.

36. My partner really understands me and my needs.

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)**

The scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 High School Juniors and Seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York State.

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. SA A D SD
- 2.\* At times, I think I am no good at all. SA A D SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. SA A D SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD
- 5.\* I feel I do not have much to be proud of. SA A D SD
- 6.\* I certainly feel useless at times. SA A D SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. SA A D SD
- 8.\* I wish I could have more respect for myself. SA A D SD
- 9.\* All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. SA A D SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. SA A D SD

Scoring: SA=3, A=2, D=1, SD=0. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3. Sum the scores for the 10 items. The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem.

### **Power-Over**

Mazurek, B. T. (1999). Rethinking power in interpersonal relationships: The development of the power scale and a test of a model (Doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 1998).

On a scale from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (4) please indicate your agreement to the following statements.

- 1) Being more successful than my partner makes me feel powerful
- 2) Being in a position of authority in my relationship makes me feel powerful
- 3) I feel powerful when I'm more intelligent than my partner
- 4) Being more knowledgeable than my partner makes me feel powerful
- 5) Deceiving my partner makes me feel powerful
- 6) To be able to influence my partner without his/her knowledge makes me feel powerful
- 7) I feel powerful when I do risky things
- 8) I feel powerful when my partner does not use a condom because of my request
- 9) I feel powerful when I'm able to seduce my partner
- 10) I feel powerful when I can dominate my partner

### **Life Orientation Test -Revised**

Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A re-evaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 1063-1078.

Description of Measure: A 10-item measure of optimism versus pessimism. Of the 10 items, 3 items measure optimism, 3 items measure pessimism, and 4 items serve as fillers. Respondents rate each item on a 4-point scale: 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

**Scale:**

Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

A = I agree a lot

B = I agree a little

C = I neither agree nor disagree

D = I disagree a little

E = I disagree a lot

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. It's easy for me to relax.
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will. (R)
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
6. It's important for me to keep busy.
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way. (R)
8. I don't get upset too easily.
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me. (R)
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

**Scoring:**

Items 3, 7, and 9 are reverse scored (or scored separately as a pessimism measure). Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are fillers and should not be scored. Scoring is kept continuous – there is no benchmark for being an optimist/pessimist.

## APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR STUDY 2 EXPLORATORY MEASURES

Table 1.0 Descriptive Statistics for exploratory measures in Study 2

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Power Over	2.73	0.69	1.00	4.00
LOTR Sum	28.45	6.56	11.00	42.00
ECR Avoidance	2.59	1.05	1.00	6.44
ECR Anxiety	3.22	1.36	1.00	6.17
Self Esteem	28.44	4.70	17.00	40.00
Relationship Satisfaction	4.04	1.00	0.31	5.47
Self-Construal Independent	5.75	1.88	3.08	12.91
Self-Construal Interdependent	5.12	1.50	2.08	12.54



## APPENDIX D: INTERACTION EFFECTS FOR INTERPERSONAL VOICE ANALYSES

Table 2.0 Interaction effects for Study 2 analyses

	Communal Strength		P. Communal Strength		Commitment		P. Commitment	
	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value
Retrospective Partner-benefiting voice	-0.01	0.875	0.03	0.303	0.11	0.74	0.31	0.02
Retrospective Self-benefiting voice	-0.02	0.51	0.02	0.50	0.06	0.58	-0.16	0.19
Daily Partner-benefiting voice	0.11	0.66	0.12	0.61	-0.27	0.45	0.30	0.03
Daily Self-benefiting voice	-0.08	0.38	0.02	0.73	-0.05	0.65	0.26	0.12

## APPENDIX E: PARTNER EFFECTS FOR RETROSPECTIVE INTERPERSONAL VOICE ANALYSES

Table 3.0: Partner Estimates for retrospectively reported partner-benefiting voice Study 2

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
P. Communal Strength	Partner	0.10	-0.01	0.20	0.083	0.17	0.13
Communal Strength	Partner	-0.05	-0.15	0.05	0.369	-0.09	-0.07
P. Commitment	Partner	0.07	-0.14	0.27	0.532	0.05	0.05
Commitment	Partner	0.00	-0.12	0.11	0.952	-0.01	0.00

Table 4.0: Partner Estimates for retrospectively reported self-benefiting voice Study 2

Variable	Effect	$\beta$	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	p value	Beta	r
P. Communal Strength	Partner	0.06	-0.06	0.17	0.329	0.10	0.08
Communal Strength	Partner	0.00	-0.11	0.10	0.987	0.00	0.00
P. Commitment	Partner	0.09	-0.12	0.30	0.416	0.07	0.06
Commitment	Partner	0.04	-0.08	0.16	0.489	0.07	0.05

## APPENDIX F: PARTNER EFFECTS FOR STUDY 3 INTERPERSONAL VOICE ANALYSES

Table 5.0: Relational Variables, Partner Associations with Partner-benefiting voice (Pre-test)

Variable	Value	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
P. Communal Strength (Partner)	-0.11	0.13	-0.86	0.395
Communal Strength (Partner)	-0.14	0.17	-0.86	0.395
P. Commitment (Partner)	-0.26	0.19	-1.31	0.194
Commitment (Partner)	-0.14	0.20	-0.67	0.507

Table 6.0: Relational Variables, Partner Associations with Self-benefiting voice (Pre-test)

Variable	Value	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
P. Communal Strength (Partner)	-0.05	0.09	-0.55	0.586
Communal Strength (Partner)	-0.01	0.12	-0.12	0.906
P. Commitment (Partner)	-0.03	0.14	-0.21	0.832
Commitment (Partner)	-0.02	0.15	-0.16	0.871

## APPENDIX G: FULL MEDIATION MODEL RESULTS STUDY 2

Table 7.0: Mediation model of coldness mediating the relationship between daily partner-benefiting voice and daily relationship satisfaction

Cause	Effect	Type	$\beta$	p-value	Standardized
Partner-benefiting voice	Cold	Actor	0.954	<.001***	0.479
		Partner	0.502	<.001***	0.252
Cold	Relationship satisfaction	Actor	-0.11	<.001***	-0.211
		Partner	-0.113	<.001***	-0.218
Partner-benefiting voice	Relationship satisfaction	Actor	-0.063	0.338	-0.06
		Partner	0.024	0.719	0.023

Table 7.1: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects

Type	Effect	$\beta$	p value	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	Standardized	Percent Total
Actor	Total	-0.225	<.001**	-0.327	-0.122	-0.216	
	Direct	-0.063	0.338	-0.191	0.065	-0.06	27.89
	Total Indirect	-0.162	<.001***	-0.249	-0.08	-0.156	72.11
	Actor-Actor Indirect	-0.105	0.002**	-0.294	0.063	-0.101	46.74
	Partner-Partner Indirect	-0.057	0.004**	-0.168	0.03	-0.055	25.38
Partner	Total	-0.14	0.007**	-0.242	-0.038	-0.135	
	Direct	0.024	0.719	-0.105	0.152	0.023	-16.79
	Total Indirect	-0.164	<.001***	-0.251	-0.081	-0.202	116.79
	Actor-Partner Indirect	-0.108	0.001**	-0.299	0.057	-0.104	77.36
	Partner-Actor Indirect	-0.055	0.005**	-0.165	0.031	-0.053	39.43

Table 8.0: Mediation model of cold mediating the relationship between daily self-benefiting voice and daily relationship satisfaction

Cause	Effect	Type	Estimate	p-value	Standardized
Self-benefiting voice	Cold	Actor	0.895	<.001	0.536
		Partner	0.28	0.001	0.168
Cold	Relationship satisfaction	Actor	-0.139	<.001	-0.271
		Partner	-0.15	<.001	-0.292
Self-benefiting voice	Relationship satisfaction	Actor	-0.023	0.683	-0.026
		Partner	0.108	0.051	0.126

Table 8.1: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	p value	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	Standardized	Percent Total
Actor	Total	-0.189	<.001	-0.281	-0.097	-0.22	
	Direct	-0.023	0.683	-0.131	0.086	-0.026	11.96
	Total Indirect	-0.167	<.001	-0.239	-0.1	-0.194	88.04
	Actor-Actor Indirect	-0.125	<.001	-0.301	0.025	-0.145	65.85
	Partner-Partner Indirect	-0.042	0.007	-0.121	0.004	-0.049	22.19
Partner	Total	-0.065	0.166	-0.157	0.027	-0.076	
	Direct	0.108	0.051	0	0.217	0.126	-166.88
	Total Indirect	-0.173	<.001	-0.246	-0.105	-0.29	266.88
	Actor-Partner Indirect	-0.134	<.001	-0.311	0.016	-0.156	206.85
	Partner-Actor Indirect	-0.039	0.009	-0.118	0.005	-0.045	60.03

## APPENDIX H: TEST OF PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF INTERPERSONAL VOICE IN STUDY 2

1) The definitions for Self- and partner-benefiting voice were provided first.

1a) Definition: Expressing concerns to your partner about their attitudes or behaviors in order to benefit yourself, even when there is a potential risk in doing so.

Example: Imagine a scenario where you and (partner's name) are discussing where to spend vacation this year. (partner's name) is enthusiastically describing a dream vacation of going skiing in the mountains. However, you really don't want to be on a vacation outside in the cold during the winter, yet you know that (partner's name) rarely takes a vacation and is super enthusiastic about this idea.

If you speak up on your own behalf and say you don't like the cold and would prefer a warm vacation, you risk  $\{q://QID34/ChoiceTextEntryValue\}$ 's disappointment and possibly starting a conflict. You speaking up in this scenario would be an example of a self-benefiting concern.

1b) Definition: Expressing concerns to your partner about their attitudes or behaviors in order to benefit your partner, even when there is a potential risk in doing so.

Example: Imagine the same scenario described previously, but this time, you feel fine about going skiing and you would love to go on this vacation. However, you also know that (partner's name) has been dreaming about retiring early and has recently emphasized to you the importance of saving a certain amount of money to achieve this goal. This ski vacation would be very expensive.

If you speak up on your partner's behalf and say that you shouldn't go on the ski vacation but save the money instead, you risk  $\{q://QID34/ChoiceTextEntryValue\}$ 's disappointment and possibly starting a conflict. You speaking up in this scenario, would be an example of a partner-benefiting concern.

1c) In understanding what we mean by expressing concerns, it is also helpful to think about what it is **not**.

- It is not just expressing an opinion without the intent of changing a partner's future behavior (i.e. merely complaining: "I really dislike my job.").
- It does not include complaining about something that cannot be changed or fixed (e.g. "I really wish you hadn't spent money on the ski trip you took last year").
- It doesn't include expressing a concern for the benefit of a third-party (i.e. suggesting a different vacation because your daughter doesn't like skiing).

2) Participants were then provided instructions for the test:

"Different scenarios will be described. For each one, please select whether it's an example of self-benefiting concern, partner-benefiting concern, or not an example of concern as we define it."

3) Finally, participants were asked the following questions:

3a) Please select the correct definition of an expression of concern

- Speaking up and sharing a complaint you have about something your partner did in the past.

- Alerting your partner to concerns in order to improve your own welfare or your partner's welfare, when there is some risk in doing so.
- Disagreeing with your partner and sharing your own point of view.

3b) Imagine (partner's name) is on a self-imposed strict diet with a goal to lose 10 pounds and has been following this diet for the past few weeks, but one day after work (partner's name) starts to break the diet by digging into a pint of ice cream. You really don't care if (partner's name) loses these 10 pounds or not, but you know (partner's name) really wants to. Speaking up about this might be upsetting for (partner's name) to be reminded that the diet is being broken and initialize some conflict, but you do so anyway. This is:

- An example of expressing a self-benefiting concern
- An example of expressing a partner-benefiting concern
- Not an example of expressing a concern

3c) Imagine you and (partner's name) are eating out at a new restaurant that you both are trying for the first time. (partner's name) really loves the food and atmosphere, but you really don't care for it. You decide to share with (partner's name) that you don't really care for the restaurant. This is:

- An example of expressing a self-benefiting concern
- An example of expressing a partner-benefiting concern
- Not an example of expressing a concern

3d) Imagine you are at home watching a movie you've been waiting all week to see. (partner's name) walks into the room while on a call and the call is really loud and interfering with your ability to hear the movie. You want to ask (partner's name) to take the call from another room, but you also know (partner's name) might be mad if you interrupt. Nonetheless, you ask (partner's name) to take the call from another room so you can hear your movie. This is:

- An example of expressing a self-benefiting concern
- An example of expressing a partner-benefiting concern
- Not an example of expressing a concern

### Abstract

This dissertation deals with people voicing concerns to a romantic partner in an attempt to change that romantic partner's attitudes or behaviors either: a) to support the partner's welfare (partner-benefiting voice) or b) to support the person's own welfare (self-benefiting voice). Existing work on voice is reviewed and it is noted that the majority of prior research on voice has focused on how individual traits influence the use of voice and has ignored how the relational context between the parties might influence the use of voice. It is on this question that this dissertation focuses. Through three studies I assess how four relational factors: communal strength, commitment, perceived communal strength, and perceived commitment influence the exercise of self- and partner-benefiting voice. Additionally, in this dissertation I also investigate the implications of expressing voice within close relationships, on relationship satisfaction. Whereas these studies yielded some evidence for a positive relationship between one's retrospectively reported use of interpersonal voice and the four relational variables, daily diary reports of the use of interpersonal voice and actual behaviors indicative of interpersonal voice observed in the laboratory yielded evidence of the opposite relationship between the four relational variables and use of voice within close relationships. Furthermore, we found a negative relationship between one's use of voice and one's own relationship satisfaction. Through this work, I begin to address how relational context influences the use of voice and hope to ignite additional research into interpersonal voice in close relationships.



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