

5-2017

## An Exploratory Study of "The Right Days Game:" A Decision-Making Communication Game for Couples

David R. Cohen  
*The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF “THE RIGHT DAYS GAME:”

A DECISION-MAKING COMMUNICATION

GAME FOR COUPLES

A Thesis

by

DAVID R. COHEN

Submitted to the Graduate College of  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2017

Major Subject: Communication



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF “THE RIGHT DAYS GAME:”

A DECISION-MAKING COMMUNICATION

GAME FOR COUPLES

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DAVID R. COHEN

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Dora E. Saavedra  
Chair of Committee

Dr. Yanrong Chang  
Committee Member

Dr. Bin Wang  
Committee Member

Dr. Jennifer Lemanski  
Committee Member

May 2017



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## ABSTRACT

Cohen, David R., An Exploratory Study of The Right Days Game: A Decision-Making Communication Game For Couples. Master of Arts (MA), May, 2017, 75 pp., 7 tables, 9 figures, references, 81 titles.

An exploratory study was conducted using “The Right Days Game,” a decision making communication game in which couples take turns making decisions. for the couple on alternating days for four weeks. Several scales were used as well as an interview to obtain the data. Numerous obstacles were encountered that prevented addressing the original hypotheses.

Approximately 1,000 people clicked on the introduction survey; 81% of these were women. Approximately 50% dropped out when they were asked for their email. An email was sent to the participant’s partner inviting them to join the research. The response rate was 20% with a dropout rate of 25% once they logged on. 10 couples played the game and returned for the six-week follow-up questionnaire. The game had very little effect on couples who were rated very positively in the beginning. The remaining couples’ changes are discussed on a couple by couple basis.





## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to each and every student that I had the honor to teach during the unusual number of years it has taken me to complete my Master's degree. They have taught me to be myself, to never apologize for who I am and to take the extra step to follow an inspired thought when I see the opportunity to try it.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Dora E. Saavedra was the perfect chair for me. Her editing challenged me. I often read her suggestions and thought, “That’s nuts.” But then I tried it: *Viola*. Perhaps the most valuable part of her help as a chair was in the leadership that helped me through some difficult situations during this adventure. Her patience and constant encouragement were invaluable.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Jessica Raley, Dr. Eric Wiley and Alyssa Cerroni. Dr. Raley and Dr. Wiley were my professors in my first semester. Had it not been for their inspiration, I may not have continued my academic pursuits. Ms. Cerroni helped me on a number of levels negotiate the ups and downs of teaching and my philanthropic endeavors. Each of these three, I will always consider a friend.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Yanrong Chang, who taught me to “put meat on the bones.” Dr. Bin Wang who pushed me to try to make this statistically bullet proof (I didn’t make it, but with her guidance, I tried), and Dr. Jennifer Lemanski for spending the time to support my paper.

Finally, I would like to thank my long-time fiancé Dr. Lei Wang. There is nothing better at two in the morning than to ask a pro, “How do I do this?” We didn’t always agree, but she was always inevitably right.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The current study examined a gap in the literature on relationships. *The Right Days Game* (TRDG) is a unique pop-culture treatment. The research on relationships in academia has been cognitive/behavioral in nature (Blanchard, et al., 2009). The Right Days Game (TRDG) is entirely behavioral. This exploratory study was undertaken to both explain its effectiveness and to identify which dimensions of a couple's relationship is effected. Shining a scientific light on this pop-treatment may encourage other non-academic treatments to be studied.

The current study used both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to analyze the pop-culture game, TRDG. Bob and Mallie Mandel developed this game in the 1980s as an offshoot of the New Age Movement called Loving Relationships Training. They used this game in their six-month intensive couples' workshops. By couching the analysis in the theory developed in both psychology and communication, this study quantified with academic based scales the results that the Mandels reported about their hundreds of couple participants.

The nature of the relationship between couples has been discussed in literature from the earliest times (Confucius, (500 BC); Bible, (57 AD); Koran, (609 AD)). It was a focus of Renaissance writers such as Shakespeare (1599) or Molière (1650) and the discussion of these relationships continued into modern pop-culture music, television and movies. Although formal couples therapy began in the late 1930s in the United States (Stone, & Stone, 1935), the Fraenkel, 2002). This timeline was mirrored in the discipline of communication (Murphy &



Mendelson, 1973). Since this relatively recent academic beginning, researchers have identified quantifiable variables that make up the basic structure of couples' relationships and specific qualities and skills that affect each of these significant dimensions (Butler & Wampler, 1999). The major dimensions used in this study were the power structure in a relationship (Gray-Little, 1996), positive or negative valence (Miller, Corrales, & Wackman, 1975) and communication skills, which included conflict resolution and decision-making (Markman, & Renick, 1993).

The majority of the research about relational intervention and therapy has been focused on cognitive/behavioral training techniques in therapeutic situations (Owen, Manthos, & Quirk, 2013; Hartmann, Gilles, Shattuck, Kerner, & Guest, 2012; Baucom, Eldridge, Sevier, Doss, & Christensen, 2011; Karahan, 2007; Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009; Halford, & Wilson, 2009; Halford, & Bodenmann, 2013; Cleaver, 1987; Markman, & Renick, 1993; Stith, Rosen, & McCollum, 2003). The bulk of the studies focused on couples in distress, high-risk or in therapy at the time (Gottman, 1999). There have been various regional and longitudinal studies (Baucom, 2011; Blanchard, et al., 2009; Halford, & Wilson, 2009). The research has varied between qualitative and quantitative research with the latter being the most common. The goal of these studies has generally been to identify trends in relationships that affect specific dimensions and provide evidence for the effectiveness of a given treatment on those qualities.

The current study attempts to academically both quantify the effectiveness of TRDG and explain why this has occurred.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature explains the significance behind the four dimensions of couples' relationships that has been chosen to be measured, the theory that explains the nature of the forces behind of the treatment TRDG, and the relationship between a pop-culture behavioral game and academic theory.

#### **Marital Satisfaction as a Measure**

Successful couples relationships are positively correlated with physical health (Paat, 2013; Ditzen, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, & Baucom, 2011), more adjusted offspring (Repetti, Taylor, S., Seeman, T., 2002), higher self-esteem (Demo, & Acock, 1996), and general happiness (Ruvolo, 1998). Most people who are in a relationship live longer. This phenomenon is enhanced further by the greater success of the relationship (Choi, & Marks, 2011). Happy couples enjoy a fuller quality of life and overall individual well-being (Waite & Lehrer, 2003).

Satisfaction in a marriage was first academically described as successful marital adjustment. Locke & Wallace (1959) consolidated the measurement of marital wellbeing when they developed the Marital Adjustment and Prediction Test . This test was devised to simplify the tests developed by researchers up to that time who depended upon extensive testing to determine the condition of a marriage (p. 251). The scale they developed was designed to measure both the adjustment of the marriage at that moment in time and measure the prediction for success of the relationship going forward. Both adjustment and prediction were equally

important to the researchers. Locke and Wallace (1959) settled on 15 adjustment items and 35 prediction items that were reliable from past studies to be the significant identifiers for the current health and the future promise of the relationships they were studying. Their scales which were used extensively, were titled The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) and The Marital Prediction Test. MAT was more useful to future researchers as it was a current snapshot of the relationship that would change with a fundamental change in a significant dimension of the relationship. Pertinent to the current study are the questions #2 through #9. They are inspecting how often the couple agreed or disagreed on subjects ranging from sex to finance or to how to deal with in-laws. The last few questions concerned common interests. Question 10 scoring is an indicator for which conflict resolution is healthier: “When disagreements arise, they usually result in: husband giving in (0pts), wife giving in (2pts), agreement by mutual give and take (10pts)” (p 252). This scoring may have foreshadowed the direction academic understanding would take concerning power, conflict resolution.

Spanier’s (1976) work attempted to consolidate both Locke and Wallace’s (1959) tests and the multitude of alternative scales that had been used in previous studies. The result of this consolidation was his Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Spanier (1973) more accurately defined marital adjustment by questioning whether research questions were identifying the happiness within a relationship or how a person feels about the relationship as an individual. He noted that women often feel happier in a relationship than men and by defining marital adjustment as the individuals’ feelings about the relationship, the disparity of scores between men and women could be made acceptable (Spanier, 1973) He responded to the changing times by redefining the concept of relationships from marital to dyadic to include those cohabitating for over a year and same sex partnerships. He defined dyadic adjustment as a process that must take into account

that relationships change and any test can only give a snapshot of the continuum. In developing his test, Spanier (1976) started with roughly the 300 research questions previously used. By culling repetition and statistically finding the most reliable questions, he found 32 questions, which measured four dynamics of the dyadic relationship; dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction and affectional-expression noting that agreeing on a trivial item is much less significant than finding agreement on an issue that is very important. The DAS became the standard measure for researchers for many years to come. It gave them the opportunity to apply pretest posttest surveys with confidence that if an independent variable or treatment had an effect, the change would be reflected along the continuum of the dyadic adjustment score.

Finally, Funk and Rogge (2007) modernized the measurement of the satisfaction of a relationship with the creation of the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI). Couples' satisfaction being defined as individuals' feelings of happiness about their relationship (Spanier, 1973). They were motivated by the issues raised by Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach (2000) which mapped the failings of the MAT and DAS to effectively measure marital satisfaction. The key flaws mentioned were that positive and negative affect, circumstances and relationship types were not accurately considered nor appropriate adjustments used. They posited that a couple that has negative communication habits or are high in conflict, but are highly compatible, might score lower on couple satisfaction. However while, because they are a complimentary in type, they may be relatively happy within the relationship (Bradbury, 2000). Funk and Rogge (2007) attempted to isolate satisfaction (happiness) from other dimensions that may correlate with satisfaction. By doing this researchers could depend on the score despite the multitude of ancillary circumstances. This was an important improvement for the use of marital satisfaction as the key measurement in a variety of research projects. The preceding two scales and their

immediate variations are cited in over 8,000 academic papers and articles (Google Scholar, 2014). Because the current study is relatively short in length, conducted online and open to couples of all types, without any knowledge of the couples' histories, Funk and Rogge's (2007) 16-item scale is used to measure *couple's satisfaction*.

### **Relationship Typologies**

During the same period of time that researchers were developing the measure of a good relationship, there was a tremendous amount of theory generated to more fully understand the varied natures of relationships. Two questions needed to be answered: What measurable elements make up a relationship and what measurable treatments affect them. The first important theory was developed by Fitzpatrick (1977) and later expanded by Gottman (1993). Their theories tried to identify what types of relationships included the continuums of the various key dimensions. Just as Locke and Wallace (1959) were concerned with both adjustment and prediction, with adjustment being a score that could change over time depending on the perception of happiness in a relationship and prediction being the basic set of characteristics that remain constant such as "have a good job" that contribute to a happy relationship. Fitzpatrick (1977) identified couple types that were more constant. In other words, there were predictive elements, characteristics that correlate with what is considered a successful marriage. She originally categorized relationships into *Traditional, Separate, Independent* and *Mixed* (Fitzpatrick, 1977). Later she wrote, while developing an empirical measure for relationship types, "The goal is to develop types of couples who cluster, simultaneously, at distinct points on many conceptually important dimensions." (p. 4). These dimensions included both more constant/permanent dimensions such as Ideology of traditionalism and dimensions that may change over time as attitude or awareness change such as conflict avoidance or communication

skills (Fitzpatrick, 1984).

Fitzpatrick's (1984) work spurred researchers to be more specific about relational dimensions that affected a relationship, and importantly, the construct of *marital satisfaction*, soon evolved into *couple's satisfaction*. Two of the important researchers that extended Fitzpatrick's (1984) work and are significant for the current study are Gottman and Gray-Little. In 1993, Gottman used video observation to analyze and code persuasion attempts by couples and then followed up with a longitudinal study 4 years later. Theoretically, he was interested in the balance point between positive and negative affect, stable and unstable marriages, hostile and hostile detached communications. Hostile detached is defined as hostile couples that "are far less engaged in listening" (p 9). Ultimately, he created his version of couple types and directly correlated them with Fitzpatrick's (1984) even though his procedures to arrive at them were substantially different. Gottman (1993) discusses the positive and negative aspects of what he calls the volatile marriage. He notes that it has the potential to be extremely passionate and romantic, but has the risk of deteriorating into negative behaviors. One of his main tests for measuring the marriage at different points in time was marital satisfaction. The current study included an 8 item test to measure *volatility/conflict in a relationship* to measure the negative affect and potential volatility of couples studied by Gottman (1993).

The next typology that emerged was a significant theory crafted by Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby (1996). Gray-Little et al., (1996) were concerned about how marital power affected the distress level of a relationship. The final measure they analyzed was what they defined as *marital adjustment*. This phrase is redefined from Fitzpatrick's (1977) use of the same words. They determined it was both marital satisfaction and the balance of positive and negative communication. They discuss the strong relationship between negative communication

behaviors in the decision making process and marital satisfaction. Using similar procedures as Gottman (1986) 10 years earlier, Gray-Little (1996) created a decision making situation, recorded the transactions and used observation and coding to determine their typology for couples' relationships (Gray-Little, et al., 1996). They determined there are four basic power structures that describe most marriages: egalitarian (balanced), husband dominant, wife dominant and anarchic (confused or unstructured). Marital satisfaction was highest to lowest in the same order. Gray-Little et al., included a treatment and pre-test, posttest measurements. They also used a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to come to their conclusions. Quantitatively they measured satisfaction, areas of desired change, and negative behaviors. Qualitatively they determined the power patterns. To summarize their findings: Men were rated higher in satisfaction in both pre-test and posttest measurements even though they responded neutral to negative to the treatment. Egalitarians and anarchists were both more balanced in power, but behaved very differently making decisions: Egalitarians used their balanced power to share decision making, whereas anarchists found themselves in a stalemate. (p. 299). Their study correlated many dimensions that became important in the direction of research in the next few decades to follow. Knudson-Martin summarized the Gray-Little et al. (1996) research in her 2013 paper. "(T)he ability of couples to withstand stress, respond to change, and enhance each partner's health and well-being depends on their having a relatively equal power balance" (Knudson-Martin, 2013). She goes on to discuss the difficulties in gender/social influences while citing the importance of power as a function of giving/receiving validation within the relationship. The third dimension measured in the current study is the *personal sense of power* developed by Anderson, John, & Keltner in 2012.

The final building block of relationships that is integral to the current study is referred to

as the negative/positive valence of a relationship. There have been a number of theories developed from the investigation of the positive or negative valence of a relationship. Miller et al. (1975) identified the positive communication and intent as either problematic or active in creating solutions. This line of investigation eventually led to the Interaction Dimensions Coding System (IDCS) developed by Julien, Markman, & Lindhal, (1989). They coded thousands of communications events to reach nine both positive and negative communication dimensions. Subsequent researches used this system or variations of this system to measure valence. Gottman (2005) measured the number of positive to negative communication ratios in couples with differing happiness and stability coefficients. He found that for each (1) negative communication, happy stable couples displayed five positive communications. He used this ratio to quantify the positive or negative valence of a relationship. From there, a number of researchers quantified valence as an independent variable. This allowed them to measure and validate its sweeping effect on many outcomes within a relationship (Mitnick, Heyman, Malik, & Slep, 2009; Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001; Caughlin, & Vangelisti, 1999; Newton, & Burgoon, 1990; Canary, & Cupach, 1988; Aune, Metts, & Hubbard, 1998). These studies varied from recovering from hurtful communication (Feeney, 2005) to improving relational satisfaction in newlyweds (Ruvolo, 1998). Ultimately, in all reviewed cases the more positive the valence, the stronger the correlation to positive results and increased marital satisfaction. This ratio or need for positive valence has been particularly useful when looking at conflict resolution or decision-making (Markman, & Renick, (1993); Larsen, Gray, & Eckstein, (2014); Houlihan, Jackson, & Rogers, (1990). TRDG changes the basic structure of decision-making. It restructures many of the dimensions previously researched around conflict resolution. One of the stated intentions of TRDG is: “it gives each person an opportunity to put yourself in his partner's shoes, seeing



things from his or her POV” (Mandel, 2014). “Become aware of the other partners position” (Gottman, Ryan, Swanson, & Swanson, (2005) is one of the significant indicator for positive affect and an increased ratio of negative to positive communications. The end result is eventually a happier, more stable relationship. The current study will utilize The Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (PANQIMS) developed by Fincham and Linfield (1997) to measure both positive and negative affect.

### **Symmetry**

Miller (1975) wrote an assessment of how couples communication research had progressed in the years leading up to 1975. Although the paper contained no new research it identified many of the topics that later proved to be predictive of research over the next several decades. Their forward thinking identified that relationships must grow in present time by two people empowered to do so. The elements required to do this included communication skills, problem solving, disclosure, esteem building respect, and a high level of understanding. One primary observation was that when a relationship is not *symmetrical* in these categories, the relationship suffers (Miller, et al., 1975).

Since 1975 until the present, a number of studies have identified specific dimensions that are positively affected by balance in the relationship: *The egalitarian power structure* discussed above (Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996). *Equity when making decisions* (Houlihan, et al., 1990). By analyzing the decision making process by satisfied and unsatisfied couples, Houlihan et al., found equity was confirmed as consistent in satisfied couples and missing with unsatisfied couples. *Awareness of your partner* was labeled an essential skill (Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith, & McKinney, 2013). When polling 2,200 participants to determine which relationship skills count the most in predicting a healthy overall relationship and particularly marital

satisfaction, Epstein et al. rated communication most important, partner awareness as second, conflict resolution and life skills as third and fourth. The first three skills reflect a balance or give/take in the use of the skills: Communication, “(K)nowing how to listen, sharing one’s thoughts...”. Conflict “(R)eady to forgive or apologize”. Knowledge of partner “(K)nowing about his/her preference”. Life skills fall closer to the predictive traits tested by Locke & Wallace and include qualities such as having a good job and being fit. In 2009, Mitnick, et al., when studying 465 couples success or lack of success when making change requests, noted that couples that spoke using “We” compared to “You” when making the requests were received more positively and more successfully (p 42). “(T)he ability of couples to withstand stress, respond to change, and enhance each partner’s health and well-being depends on their having a relatively equal power balance” (Knudson-Martin, 2013).

### **Treatments/Therapy for Relationships**

It is generally accepted that living in a relationship is good. Living in a healthy, positive valence relationship that is balanced is even better. To this end research in communication, social sciences and psychology have strived to illuminate the keys to identifying and improving elements that can teach or train couples to permanently improve the variables within their relationships that will result in higher marital satisfaction and a better life. Many researchers have focused on *what is*; what constitutes a relationship. While others have focused on *what can be changed*. Of those that have focused on what can change, the bulk of the treatments and training have been developed to help the relationships at the highest risk (Blanchard, et al., 2009) or distressed. This is a result of research looking to help therapists. The majority of couples studied came from references provided by therapists working with couples seeking help. Gottman (1999) disqualified couples inquiry if at least one of the individuals in the couple did

not have a score at least one standard deviation below an average on his marital satisfaction score.

Academics and therapists have focused on developing skills, particularly couple's communication skills (Brooks, Guerney Jr., & Mazza, 2001; Markman, & Renick, 1993; Owen, et al., 2013; Rosenthal, & Eckstein, 2013; Parr, Boyle, & Tejada, 2008; Blanchard, et al., 2009). The bulk of the treatments developed have been cognitive behavioral (Gray-Little, , 1996). Therapist and researchers alike have turned to information they can teach with the hopes that learning will create success that will continue to affect the relationship over time (Baucom, et al, 2011) and empower the couple to deal with any new problems by having the ability to create their own system for solving their situation (Miller, 1975). According to several meta-analysis of couples' therapy/treatments/skills training, interventions help (Blanchard, et al., 2009; Halford, & Bodenmann, 2013; Bischoff, 2008). Several specific treatments have proven effective in longitudinal studies (Halford, & Wilson, 2009; Baucom, et al., 2011). Interventions have had positive effects on both genders (Gray-Little, et al., 1996), have been effective for relationships of various lengths (Hahlweg, & Richter, 2009; Ruvolo, 1998), and do not have negative repercussions, even with relationships that are abusive (Stith, et al., 2003).

In contrast, in chapter two of Gottman's book *The Marriage Clinic*, Gottman discredits common interventions and accepted therapeutic norms in order to facilitate a new sense of scientific direction when helping couples (Gottman, 1999). He pointed out that cognitive treatments such as active listening training may actually backfire and send couples further from a happy marriage or adjusted behaviors (p. 11). He acknowledged that healthy couples may utilize active listening, but to ask a couple who is uncomfortable with change, to learn to listen actively may be unnatural and may actually distance the couple from interventions and therapists in

general.

Whereas the majority of treatments have been designed for high-risk marriages, a number of programs have been designed to enrich couples communication. They are based on a range of sources; academic criteria, religious beliefs, individual therapy techniques, authors' opinions, government programs and sociological norms (Bradley & Duncan, 2012). Often the couples' enrichment programs are commercially driven. Their marketing is based on their unique therapy characteristics. They sometimes claim a proprietary *secret to happiness* and often challenge the established theories as a sales technique (Baucom, 2014). Some depend on cognitive understanding while others prescribe specific steps and rules to follow to achieve a healthier marriage. Gottman (1993) wrote a book that was aimed at the public pop-culture while basing the principles on learned typologies discovered during his academic research.

There have been a number of therapy/treatments designed to create emotional realizations through physical actions. Perhaps the most prevalent of this type of pop-culture antidote is the "Trust Fall". A person crosses their arms and leans back to allow a spotter to keep them from falling to the ground. Google reports 390 million results when searching "Trust Fall" (Google, 2014) and YouTube shows 485,000 results for "Trust Fall" with 47,400 videos tagged when searching "Trust Fall Fail" (YouTube.com, 2014). There are websites that have entire pages dedicated to teaching the trust fall technique (Neill, 2004). There are popular offshoots. "The Surprise Trust Fall" being the most popular, made famous on Comedy Central's "Tosh, O" show, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (Comedycentral.com, 2014). The "Trust Fall" has been promoted as a healing activity in web-articles dedicated to rebuilding trust when trust has been betrayed (Fitzgerald, 2014; Borkar, 2012). What hasn't happened is an empirical study that helps understand the what/how/why of the trust fall effect. This is the category of the gap in literature that the current study strives to fill.

*TRDG* comes from this genre of pop-culture couples' enhancement programs/training. Although the word game is typically defined as "a physical or mental activity or contest that has rules and that people do for pleasure" (merriam-webster.com, 2014), in academic papers, "game" generally refers to the negative aspect of how people strategize with each other in a negative way (McCurdy, 2007). "Play", academically, is more closely defined as a layman might define game. Vanderbleek, Robinson, Casado-Kehoe, & Young defined "play" closely to the Merriam-Webster definition: "any activity that was pleasurable for both partners, involved a suspension of self-consciousness, released emotions, was done only for the process, and resulted in positive feelings about self and the partner" (Vanderbleek, et al., 2011). The Vanderbleek et al., study hypothesized that couples that participated in couple play would correlate with higher marital satisfaction and the ability to resolve conflicts. Building on the work of Betcher (1977), Lutz (1982), & Baxter (1992), they noted, "positive emotions produced through play may have an influence on the ability of the couple to solve practical conflicts." (p 131). Vanderbleek et al. measured the amount of couple play defined as "any activity that was pleasurable for both partners, involved a suspension of self-consciousness, released emotions, was done only for the process, and resulted in positive feelings about self and the partner" (p 134). With their new scale they analyzed with a Pearson correlation the relationship of play with other wellness measures aimed at nurturing relationships, communication, couple happiness and leisure, marital satisfaction and couple stability. They found increased play correlated with the tested scales. Thus both of their hypotheses were supported. One significant result is that Men in general correlated well. Many studies until this point had noted that treatments were less effective with men than women. This combined with Johnson's 2003 observation that most treatments that have met empirical studies requirements are behavioral or emotionally based caused

Vanderbleek et al. to note, “play may be useful in behavioral models, which focus on teaching communication and conflict resolution skills” (p 137).

Generally the word “play” in the academic setting is reserved for children in therapeutic or instructional situations (EBSCO, 2014) and is reported to be an effective approach in many situations (Smirnova, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Robinson, 2011) or in reference to “playing” video games (VerBruggen, 2012). Although *TRDG* is called a game, and considering the negative academic interpretation of *games*, The Right Days Game should be conceived more as *TRDG Play*. The significance to the current study is that couples that partook in couple play enjoyed more intimacy and scored higher on a number of other marital evaluations (Vanderbleek et al., 2011).

It has long been accepted that athletes perform better and may even increase skills when they practice and use mental visualization (Van Meer, & Theunissen, 2009). Van Meer & Theunissen reviewed 630 studies, which support mental visualization or practice. The authors even equate Mental Simulation and practice. Their study strives to find the common ground of 630 studies that researched the effect of mental simulation or practice on performance. The two most common explanations they found are that practice physiologically strengthens the neuro-connections from the brain to the muscles or that it strengthens the cognitive portions of the physical exercise or skill without any physiological event. In either case, practice increases the subjects’ proficiency or consistency in performing a task. They noted various studies that found that practicing a skill wrong would in fact reinforce doing the action wrong. The authors suggested that the answer to why practice works may lie in one or a combination of the following theories: *Motivational theory*, by increasing your instinct, drive, arousal or incentive through practice/visualization you increase your motivation to sustain the action in reality (Cherry,

2014). *Symbolic learning theory* purports that by imagining an event before you try to execute it, you would be more precise or accurate to the imagined version of the event (Psychology Dictionary, 2014). *Attention-arousal theory* is a neurological explanation for how giving attention creates increased arousal and actually strengthens the neurological connection of a given thought or recognition (Coull, 1998; Uka, & DeAngelis, 2004) Bioinformational theory which states that if an individual uses strong emotion and vivid imagery they will strengthen the neurological connection to the imagined action (Lang, 1979), Psychoneuromuscular theory postulates that strong vivid imagined physical actions create the neuro-connections between the brain and muscles that are the same or similar to the impulses when actually performing the same action (Kent, 2006).

When updating B. F. Skinner's theories of behaviorism with current psychological study, Goddard quotes Wegener's 2002 work that supports the concept that actions/environment may be more effective supporting psychological changes than understanding. The unconscious will create behavior even when an individual has no perception of the influence. External input connects directly with the neurological connections in the brain, which support a given behavior (Goddard, 2012). TRDG creates an activity, which may support a positive neurological connection with the behavior of shared decision-making without the understanding of why it works. Both the positive emotion response to *play* and the practice/visualization created during the game may connect with the path that Skinner would describe as the unknown sub-conscious. Thus creating new communication behavior without cognitive understanding.

## **TRDG Potential Effect**

Epstein et al. conducted a meta-analysis of therapeutic treatments and research to determine what skills would have a direct effect on three main measurable variables in relationships: (a) increased the longevity of relationships, (b) increased satisfaction in relationships, or (c) reduced conflict in relationships (Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith, & McKinney, 2013). After review of all the relevant studies they revealed the “competencies that have the potential to contribute to the success of romantic relationships: (a) communication, (b) conflict resolution, (c) knowledge of partner, (d) life skills, (e) self-management, (f) sex and romance, and (g) stress management” (p 99). After attracting 2202 online participants to take the Epstein Love Competencies Inventory (ELCI) they found training increased all the skills other than life skills. They determined that communication, knowledge of other and life skills were most predictive of marital happiness. They noted that knowledge of other and life skills were the least taught skills in therapeutic environments. *TRDG* has a potential to positively affect the key three skills described by Epstein: 1) The playing of *TRDG* causes communication that involves both asserting one’s self and accepting the choice of the partner. It is essentially active listening training without the instructions. 2) The game creates the need to keep your partner’s wellbeing in mind while making decisions that may directly affect their happiness (knowledge of other). 3) Finally, *TRDG* may increase life skills such as understanding, listening, other awareness, increased trust and responsibility. By creating a dyadic balance while making decisions, each partner’s sense of personal power and importance may increase, giving the individuals a new sense of confidence, which may positively affect the relationship as a whole.



## **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Because TRDG changes a couples decision power dimension to balanced, removes argument, encourages trust, contains couples play, employs a we vs. you commitment, includes practice, and should reduce stress the following is posited:

H1: TRDG will raise the couples' combined perceived marital satisfaction.

H2: TRDG will change the sense of personal power closer to equal between each individual in the couple.

H3: TRDG will decrease the conflict within relationships.

H4: TRDG will cause the positive to negative affect scores for couples to become more positive.

The current study hoped to identify which couples would benefit more or less from TRDG. The following questions were posed. As noted in the results and discussion sections, sufficient numbers to address these questions were not generated.

RQ1: Is TRDG effect related to the length of time in the relationship?

RQ2: How does TRDG affect couples with different levels of initial distress?

RQ3: How does TRDG affect couples with different levels of personal sense of power?

RQ4: Is TRDG effect related to the initial couples' satisfaction score?

RQ5: Does TRDG have a positive/negative effect on men and women differently?

RQ6: Is there a correlation between various demographics and the TRDG effect?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to attract and select participants, explain the scales that were used, the research structure and safeguards that were employed, the statistics that were generated, and the qualitative portion of the study. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research, which were used in the current study, have been considered the most insightful format for this genre of study. (Brooks, Guerney, & Mazza, 2001).

#### **Participant Marketing**

Potential participants were initially solicited through Facebook, Craig's List, and backpage. The invitational message asked couples to participate in a *Couple's Communication Research Project* that sought to measure communication over a six-week period of time. They were offered a 1 in 10 chance to receive a \$50 gift card upon both members of the couple completing the study that consisted of 44 questions to be completed at the time of agreeing to participate, and again in six weeks. They were given a link to start the survey process and asked to please pass the invitation to other couples (snowball approach). They were informed that to participate they must be 18 years old, must have cohabitated with their partner for a minimum of 1 year, that both individuals in the couple must participate and finally, that participation is open to all couples no matter what their ethnicity or sexual orientation.

## Online Participants

Upon logging onto the web site listed on the initial online invitation, the inquiring partner answered 3 qualifying questions:

- 1) Are you 18 years of age?
- 2) Have you cohabitated with your partner for at least one year?
- 3) Are both of you willing to honestly answer 44 questions about your relationship now and again in 6 weeks?

All three answers must have been checked “Yes” to continue. The participant was next asked to agree to the consent form (Appendix A), which included the rules for the gift card giveaway. He/she must *agree* to the consent to move forward to the 6 demographic questions. After completing the demographic section, 18% were randomly selected to become *Participants in Control Group 1*. This group was sent immediately to the registration page of the survey to take the initial questionnaire. An automatic email was sent to their partner inviting them to join the survey. The partner had to agree to the consent form and give their demographic information before taking the initial survey. After 43 individuals had been selected, no more were transferred to the *Control Group 1* path.

The remaining 82% of the inquiring participants were invited to play TRDG. They were informed that by playing the game they will have an additional 1 in 5 chance to win a \$25 bonus gift card. They were shown the instructions provided by Bob Mandel (Appendix B). The first 60 participants that answered, “not interested” were transferred to the *Control Group 2* path. 85% of the participants chose to play TRDG. After 27 individuals selected “not interested” the choice was removed from the study. The entire “yes” group was directed to the registration page of *TRDG* path. This continued until 162 individuals had volunteered, with 122 finishing the survey.

Each group had a specific path with its own protocol. Email copies of the consent form and the instruction for the game (if appropriate) were automatically sent. Encouraging notes from Bob Mandel was sent to game participants and a reminder email for those who are approaching six-weeks were sent with the URL to finish the survey. Game playing couples were asked 15 questions to assess their participation playing the game.

Once completed, the participants were asked if they would like to register for the gift card sweepstakes. They are asked if they would like a copy of the finished research paper and asked if they would be willing to be contacted one year from then to answer the questionnaire one more time. For those who have played the game, couples were invited to participate in a live interview on Skype, Face time, email chat or telephone. They were guaranteed a \$25 gift card for their cooperation, but with no guarantee of being selected for the interview.

Note: Control Group 1 was advised that they had been a *Control Group* and given the opportunity to play TRDG. Approximately 10 participants stated they would like to play.

### **Research Design**

The current study was designed as a true experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The invitation was available to virtually anyone on the Internet and the control group was selected randomly. The instructions were identical for all those that participate and it is highly unlikely that participants will have had interactions with each other reducing the risk of internal validity problems. The survey occurred over a year, which reduces the chance that history will not affect all couples equally. Maturation should not have been an issue, as only those that completed the study were evaluated.

## **Scales/Questionnaire**

There are four relationship dimensions/scales that were used:

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)

Personal Sense of Power Scale (PSPS)

Marital Satisfaction Scale sub group 2 (MSS2)

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANQIMS)

In 2007 Funk and Rogge developed the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) to accomplish several goals. The first goal was to streamline the test isolating the qualities that reflect couples satisfaction. Second, was to remove the bias, towards communication skills, which has been historically correlated with satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007). They believed their scale eliminated the noise from earlier tests. In correlations with the top 9 existing couples satisfaction tests their 32 and 16 questionnaire demonstrated a much more sensitive accurate result (p 579). With less than a 5% variance between the 16 and 32 questionnaire, the CSI(16) questionnaire was used to streamline the overall number of questions for the current study.

Anderson, John & Keltner developed the scale Personal Sense of Power Scale (PSPS) in order to better understand the various correlations between personal power in the variety of situations where power affects an individuals relationship or attitude (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). First, they defined personal sense of power as “the perception of one’s ability to influence another person or other people” (p 5). They conducted a series of studies including significant relationships (parents, friends, romantic partners and supervisors), groups, and strangers and tested it against personal power trait theories. They found a degree of consistency between the variety of relationships and importantly for the current study, no gender bias in their scale. The coefficient alpha reliability over their 5 studies ranged from .82 to .85 (p 26). The

scale asks for 8 responses of items where the respondent has influence. The authors interchanged the set-up question by changing the target “in my relationship with my” X, Y or Z (p 41). For the current study the introduction to the questions were: *In my relationship with my partner...*

Recently Canel followed a similar process of Funk and Rogge to distill the myriad marital satisfaction tests to create a more concise test (Canel, 2013). Canal’s goal was differed in that the goal of the research was to find efficient measure for specific sub-dimensions of couples relationships. She applied factor analysis to determine specific items within each dimension that reflect the highest levels of responsibility for variance. These dimensions were marital harmony, conflict and closeness with a fourth, but separate dimension for parenting. She found an internal consistency of her conflict sub-scale used in the current study at .88 (p 110). The bulk of the studies in the past have focused on couple in distress. That was not the goal of the current study. Determining a base line for conflict with couples was important to differentiate TRDG from treatments normally reserved for distressed couples.

Fincham and Linfield developed The Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (PANQIMS) in 1997 in response to research that determined that the positive and negative affect continuum in a relationship were not specifically related (Watson & Tellegen, 1985). In other words, for every positive affect, it did not mean that a negative affect was removed. There is not a number such as 5 that can represent 50/50 positive to negative. Couples may measure high on both positive and negative affect, 80/80, or low on both, 30/30. If one dimension goes up it does not necessarily bring the other down. The PANQIMS scale offers six statements of positive or negative feelings about the participant’s partner and then asks the respondent to rate the statement from *Not at all* to *Extremely*. The creators found high correlations between their

marital positive or negative scores with that of Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark & Tellegen in 1987, a widely accepted measure of positive and negative affect of individuals. They found the scale's internal consistency between .87 and .91 (Fincham and Linfield, 1997). The authors suggested that by measuring the positive and negative as two dimensions a more accurate level of satisfaction could be ascertained. A couple who rates "high" in both positive and negative affect might score similarly on an aggregate satisfaction scale as a couple with both low positive and low negative reporting. However, the "both high" couple could be classified as ambivalent while two low scores might reflect indifference (p 491).

These four dimensions were measured with 44 questions. The items were randomized in the online questionnaire to prevent the participants from guessing what the function of each section of questions is. Some were positive in tenor; others were negative such as "Our relationship is strong" compared to "My idea and opinions are often ignored."

### **Statistics to Test Hypotheses**

The statistics calculated to test the pertinent information used to support or disqualify the Hypotheses and Research Questions are as follows:

H1: TRDG will raise the couples' combined perceived marital satisfaction.

Paired T-test for individual partners pre-test to posttest CSI score.

Paired T-test for combined couples' pre-test to posttest CSI score.

H2: TRDG will change the sense of personal power closer to equal between each individual in the couple.

Paired T-test for each partners PSPS pre-test to posttest scores.

Paired T-test for difference between each partners PSPS pretest to difference of PSPS posttest.

H3: TRDG will decrease the conflict within relationships.

Paired T-test for individual partners pre-test to posttest differential MSS2 score.

Paired T-test for combined couples' pre-test to posttest differential MSS2 score.

H4: TRDG will cause the positive to negative affect scores for couples to become more positive.

Paired T-test for individual partners pre-test to posttest net PANQIMS score.

(Net PANQIMS = total positive score (-) minus total negative score)

Paired T-test for combined couples' pre-test to posttest net PANQIMS score.

RQ1: Is TRDG effect related to the "length of the relationship"?

Pearson Correlation between length of relationship with Couple's net CSI  
PANQIMS, MSS2 & PSPS.

RQ2: How does TRDG affect couples with different levels of initial distress?

Pearson Correlation between pre-test MSS2 with Couple's net CSI, PANQIMS &  
PSPS.

RQ3: How does TRDG affect couples with different levels of personal sense of  
power?

Pearson Correlation between individual pre-test PSPS with individuals pre-test to  
posttest CSI, PANQIMS & MSS2 differentials.

Pearson Correlation between couples net pre-test PSPS with Couple's net CSI,  
PANQIMS & MSS2 differentials.

RQ4: Is TRDG effect related to the initial couples' satisfaction score?

Pearson Correlation between individual pre-test CSI with individuals pre-test to  
posttest PSPS, PANQIMS & MSS2 differentials.

Pearson Correlation between couples combined pre-test CSI with Couple's PSPS,  
PANQIMS & MSS2 pre-test/posttest differential scores.

RQ5: Does TRDG have a positive/negative effect on men and women differently?

T-test men's to women's differential scores for pre-test to posttest CSI, PSPS,  
PANQIMS & MSS2.



RQ6: Is there a correlation between various demographics and the TRDG effect?

Regression analysis of net changes in CSI, PSPS, PANQIMS & MSS2 to various demographics.

There were not enough participants to conduct these analyses.

### **Online Survey Navigation**

The online survey consisted of 13 separate surveys that were linked together to take the three groups of participants through all the options from introduction through live interviews. The target for total participants was 140 TRDG player couples, 60 Control Group 1 couples and 60 couples that decline to play TRDG (Control Group 2). These quantities anticipated a 33 percent dropout rate to end up with 100/40/40 completed participant couples. These benchmarks were not met.

Upon responding to the online invitations a potential participant is directed to the survey Couple's Communication Intro. This survey welcomed the inquiry, described the process including the \$50 gift card. It asks 3 qualifying questions. If any of the answers are *No*, the participant was thanked and participation was terminated. Qualified participants were shown the consent statement and asked if they agreed. If they checked *Disagree*, they are disqualified if *Agree* the survey asked for demographic information and collected email addresses of both the inquiring participant and their partner. They were informed that an automatic email was sent to their partner inviting them to participate. At this point 18% of the qualified respondents were diverted to the survey Couple's Communication CG1-1 and became Control Group 1. This group was limited to 60 initial couple participants. The remaining couples were invited to participate in The Right Days Game, including another level of Gift Cards with a 1 in 5 chance to win a \$25 gift card. They were shown the rules of the game and were asked if they would both like to

participate. Those who answered *No* were forwarded to the survey Couple's Communication CG2-1 and became Control Group 2. This group was limited to 60 initial couple participants.

### **Control Group 1 Path**

Survey Couple's Communication CG1-1 confirmed the initial participants email, informed them that they could pause the survey at any time and survey asked them to answer the 44 randomized questions. Once they submitted their answers, they were sent an automatic thank you email, which included a copy of the consent/confidentiality statement. Another email was sent after 39 days, which gave them the URL address to Couple's Communication CG1-6, which was the 6-week follow-up questionnaire. If for any reason one of the participants in a couple did not respond a reminder email was sent to both partners to encourage them to complete their participation and qualify them for the gift card.

Once the original partner had been randomly selected for Control Group 1, an invitational email was automatically sent to the original inquirer's partner. The email described the process. It provided the URL link to the survey Control Group 1 Partner Intro. It also requested that if the partner was not interested in participating that they "reply" to the email with their reservations. Once the partner logged onto the survey Control Group 1 Partner Intro, the questions covered all the registration information and permitted them through to the first 44 items.

When both partners were invited back after 6 weeks, they were sent to the same survey Couples Communication C1-6. This survey asked them the 44 questions, registered them for a gift card and asked if they would like a copy of the research paper when the study was completed. Once completed, the survey informed them that they had been placed in a control group for TRDG and given them the opportunity to play the game. If they chose to play the game it forwarded them to the survey Couple's Communication C1RD which thanked them for

choosing the game, gave them a few instructions and the automatically sent them the emails that supported TRDG described below in the survey Couple's Communication RD1.

### **Control Group 2 Path**

From the intro survey, participants had their demographic information collected and then they were offered TRDG. Once denied, the inquiring partner was forwarded to Couple's Communication CG2-1, an email with the consent form was sent and an email invitation was sent to their partner. Group 2 answered the questionnaires at that time, and then were automatically sent an email in 6 weeks with the URL for the survey Couple's Communication C2a-6. The partners were invited to the survey Control Group 2 Partner Intro and then follow the same path. Once completed the couple was entered in the gift card sweepstakes and asked if they would like a copy of the thesis once it was completed.

### **Right Days Participants Path**

For those that choose to play TRDG they were moved to Couple's Communication RD1 - This survey confirmed their email and asked them to answer the 44 randomized questions in the questionnaire. It then immediately sent them a thank you email, which included a copy of the consent/confidentiality statement and the rules of TRDG with additional comments from Bob Mandel about playing the Game. An invitation was sent to their partner asking them to join the survey/game at the URL for the survey TRDG Partner Intro. Once the couple had started the game, they were sent encouraging emails with fun couple exercises developed by the Mandels at 10 and 20 days. They then received another email after 39 days, which gave them the URL address to Couple's Communication RD-6, which contained the 6-week follow-up questionnaire. After answering the base 44 questions they were asked 11 statistical questions and asked 4 short answer questions about their experience playing TRDG. They were then asked

if they would like to receive a link to the final paper, if they would be willing to answer the same question a year from now and if they were they willing to participate in a live interview for \$25 with no guarantee that they would be chosen. If they answered yes, they were asked if they would prefer Skype, FaceTime, Online chat or a telephone interview.

**Follow-up survey and interview.** Once the study was closed, gift cards were awarded to TRDG participating couples and Control Group 1 couples. All participants were notified whether they had won a gift card or not. If they had agreed to the 1 year follow-up survey they were sent the URL. Four couples were identified as worthwhile to be invited to participate in an interview. Two couples had not checked *yes* to that question a year earlier, but they were offered the chance to change their mind an earn a gift card.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Over a period of two years, three marketing approaches were attempted to secure a sufficient number of couples that completed the entire process. In order to achieve statistically reliable findings, the target was between 100 and 200 couples with a minimum of 40 couples in the control group. This was not achieved.

#### **Marketing**

##### **First Marketing Strategy**

The first attempt followed the survey paths described above. The offer was:

##### Couple's Communication Research

I am doing research for my Masters on Couples Communication. I am offering all couple participants a 1 in 10 chance to receive a \$50 gift card once both have finished the process. This consists of 44 questions now and 44 questions in 6 weeks....

This advertisement was posted to all the researcher's FaceBook (FB) Friends and a FB group. One out of ten of the *friends* either "liked" or "shared" the post. The *group* was 6,321 people associated with South Padre Island. These two sources triggered 150 initial clicks that resulted in 50 completed surveys while sending 20 people into the Control Group 1 (CG-1). A small percentage of the attrition was due to participants not meeting the initial three question requirements, objections to the consent form and once they began the survey and their reaction to the nature of the questions. The bulk of the drop-outs occurred when asked to enter their email

addresses. It became obvious that FaceBook was limited geographically and the snowball effect was slowing down.

The next and primary marketing tool was Craig's List, which has a separate exchange for each city or region throughout the United States. After overcoming several circumstances that would cause Craig's List computer protocol to delete the listing, a system for posting emerged. The final protocol was to only list in only 5 – 7 areas per week under the heading of Community/Volunteers. A local zip code from the area marketed was listed as the location. The initial pitch lines were:

Be a part of a Great Couples Communication Research Project

Join a Great Communication Research Project

Couples Communication Research - 1 in 10 chance for \$50 card

Be a part of a Great Couples Communication Research Project. (On-line)

These ran in 158 Craig's list areas for five months and generated 368 clicks with 170 completed surveys, while sending 26 individuals into CG-1. The demographics of the participants generated by the *First Marketing Strategy* very closely reflected the nation in terms of location, ethnicity, neighborhood, sexuality, married/cohabitating, age, and children or not. The one demographic that was greatly skewed was gender: 81% female.

## Demographics.

Figure 1: Ethnicity

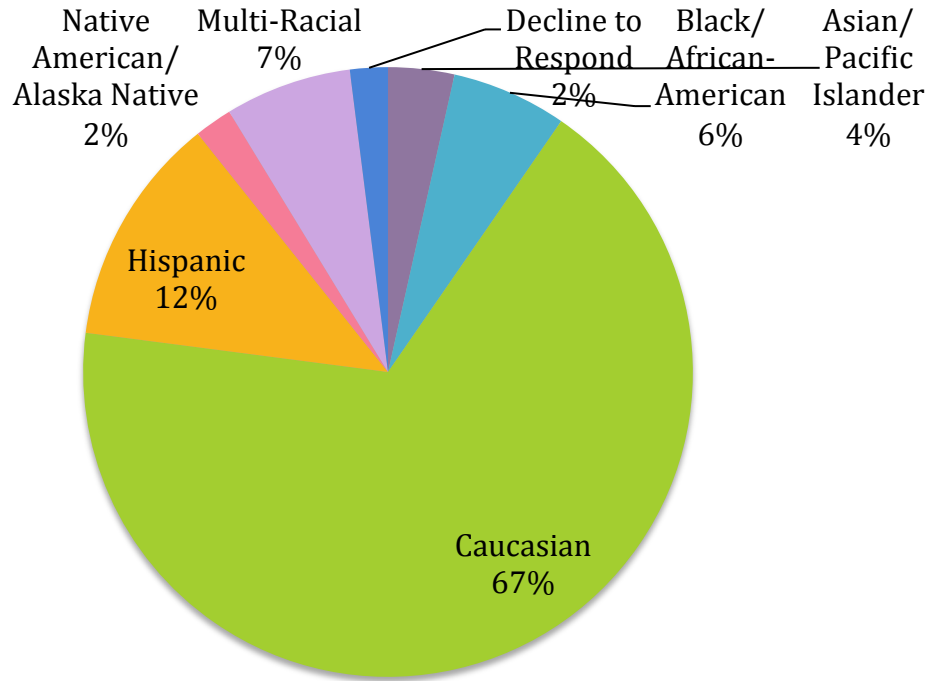


Figure 2: Neighborhood

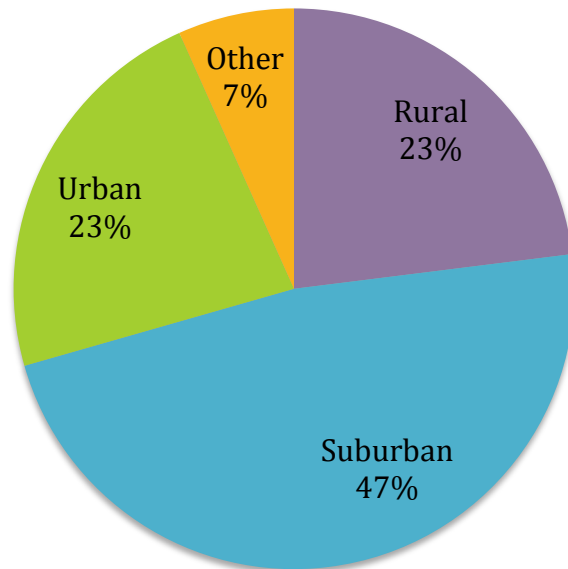


Figure 3: Age

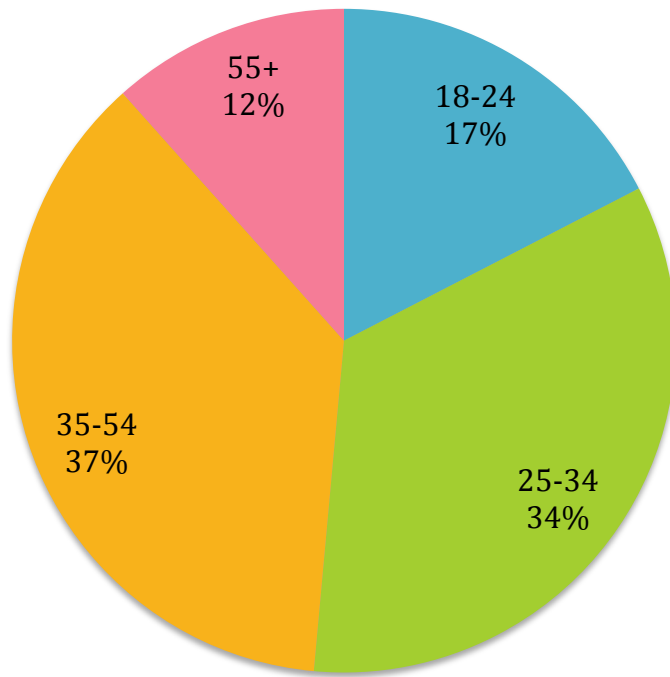


Figure 4: Relationship Status

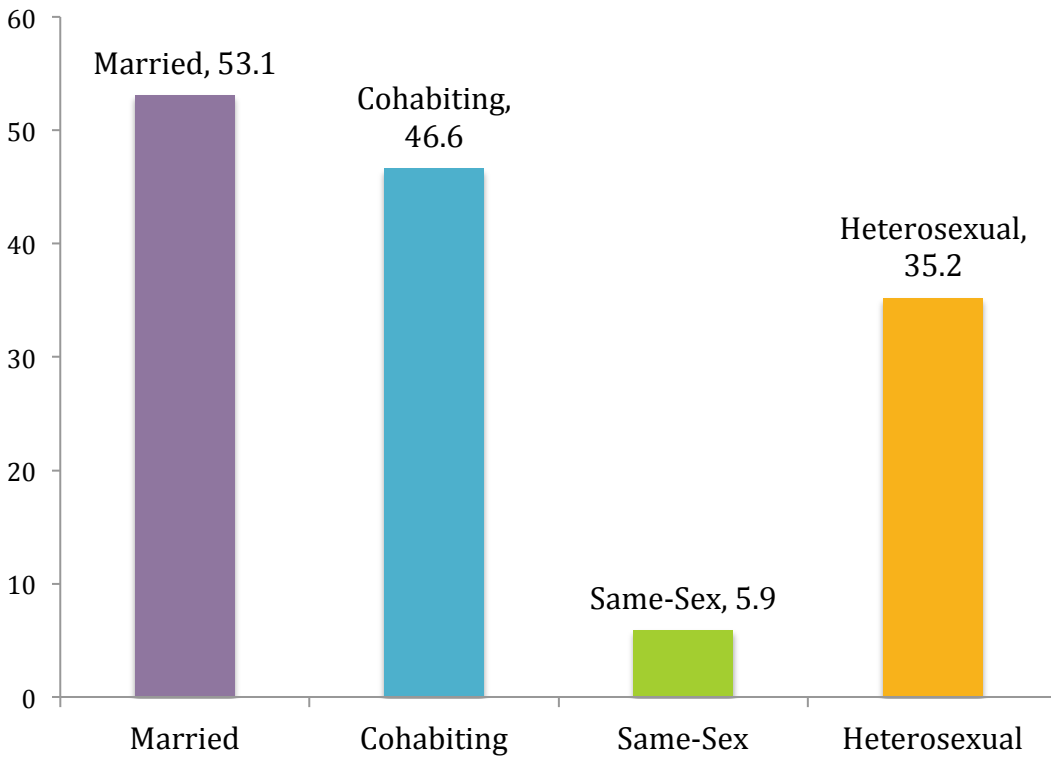




Figure 5: Distribution Map

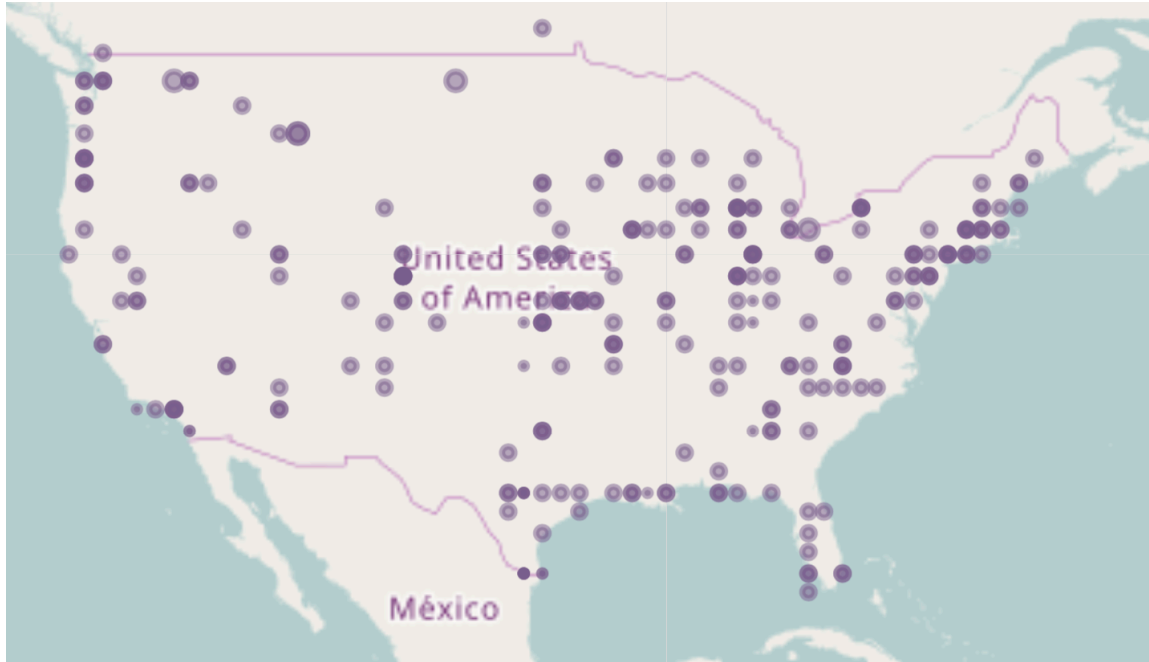


Figure 6: Responsible for Children

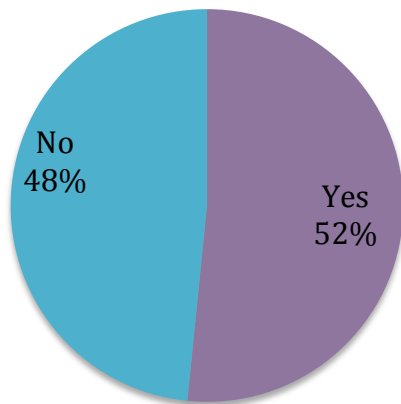
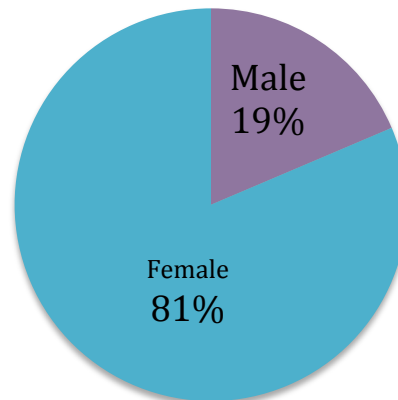


Figure 7: Gender



**The Right Days Game option.** The most attrition was identified as stemming from the percentage of partners who did not sign on to start the process. 162 people started TRDG survey, 122 participants completed it. The vast number of them stopped once they saw the nature of the questions. Only 49 partners of the initial participants signed on to the *Partner Survey*; 39 completed it.

The second attrition source was how many participants returned after 6 weeks to finish the process. 60 people returned for the six week follow up; 54 finished the survey. This was approximately a 50% drop between those who signed on to play TRDG, but never came back. They had been sent two emails during the first four weeks with encouraging pages from Bob and Malley Mandel's new book and a reminder at 39 days to come back for the final survey. It also encouraged them that, "if you have not started the game it is not too late." If the initial participant had come back at six weeks, but the partner did not emails were sent to both the participant and the partner as a reminder that both of them must finish the process in order to qualify for the gift card.

**Control group 2.** During the initial survey after the Control Group 1 was redirected the remaining participants were offered the opportunity to play TRDG with an additional bonus of a 1 in 5 chance for a \$25 gift certificate. Fourteen percent of those who were offered the opportunity to play TRDG chose not to play. Of the 27 redirected 20 completed the questionnaire, 6 of their partners completed the survey and a total of 12 out of the 26 returned to complete the six-week follow-up.

**Control group 1.** Of this group 46 were referred to the survey; 43 completed it. Nineteen partners came to the survey; 17 completed the questionnaire. 26 out of 26 finished the six-week survey, which reflected 10 couples completing the process and 6 outliers.

## Second Marketing Strategy

Once there were enough control group couples to create a baseline, the focus became how to solicit more participants to complete TRDG. There were three issues to overcome. The first issue was giving people confidence to supply their email address. The second issue was arming the participants with an argument to encourage their partners (81% men) to participate. The third issue was attracting couples that were not overly happy and encouraging them to play the game. Up until this time, over 50% of the people who had participated had indicated they were in overwhelmingly good relationships. The indication is they had few problems, good communication and were cooperative. These qualities are the combination that caused them to finish the process.

After applying for and receiving approval from IRB, the pitch changed to sell TRDG:

All you have to do is play a game. It's fun – AND you could win \$50.

I played this game when I was in my 20's. It taught me stuff that has helped with every relationship I have had since then. Now I'm conducting University approved research on its effect with other couples.

This is your chance play *The Right Days Game*.

The email sent to the partners was an option to the initial participant with a 24-hour delay (to allow them time to talk – no email surprises) and targeted to make men feel more comfortable and included a personal testimonial:

Imagine waking up today and saying, "I don't have to make a single decision today." Wouldn't that feel great? Or saying, "I will get everything I want today." That's pretty good, too. That's how the game works. For four weeks you and your partner take turns making the decisions for the day... Pretty Simple, Right?

For those who think, "I do not want to play this game." Try it. It may be finish. It can be very fun to play.

I played this game when I was in my 20's. It taught me stuff that has helped me with every relationship after that.

The incentive was changed from a 1-in-10 to a 1-in-5 chance to win a \$50 gift card. The surveys were changed to no longer include control groups 1 or 2. The second marketing pitches on Crag's List were:

The Right Days Game - Finding Balance for Couples

Finding Balance for Couples

Finding Balance

Find Your Balance

Three pictures were added to the *First Marketing* pictures and included a happy couple playing a game, balancing rocks, and a woman with her arms raised that represented freedom.

Figure 8: Marketing Photos



These pitches were posted on Craig's List in approximately 67 locations. This resulted in 149 clicks with 40 completions. The partners were sent to the same URL so if they chose "not to

send email”, the first participant could simply share the URL with their partner. The two could be linked by their email addresses. Once again requesting the email address (despite stronger claims that, by University rules, it could not be shared) was the point at which most visitors stopped the survey.

Once the participant had signed up, an additional email was sent that included a refrigerator calendar with a contract at the bottom to encourage both players to play and let their partner fully play the game. This calendar was provided to solve problems experienced by earlier participants who complained of being confused by whose day it was or by their partner not participating.

Figure 9: The Right Days Game Calendar

The Right Days Game Calendar – Mark an X on the day you start - Play for 4 weeks

Sunday    Monday    Tuesday    Wednesday    Thursday    Friday    Saturday

A	B	A	B	A	B	A
B	A	B	A	B	A	B
A	B	A	B	A	B	A
B	A	B	A	B	A	B
A	B	A	B	A	B	A

**Rules of the Game:** The "Right Day Game" is, first of all, not a "You're Wrong Day Game". In fact, the word "wrong" should not be used when playing the game.

One person becomes *right* whenever there is a decision to be made, not arbitrarily to exercise power over the other. The partner simply goes into agreement with the person who is having their *Right Day*.

One must be careful not to seek revenge the second day by bringing up decisions from the previous day. The idea of *The Right Day Game* is: **It is supposed to be fun to play**, not to create arbitrary disagreements. It gives each person an opportunity to put himself/herself in their partner's shoes, seeing things from his or her POV.

We agree to play the game fully and allow our partner to play fully as well:

**A** \_\_\_\_\_ sign here

**B** \_\_\_\_\_ sign here

## Scale Measurements/Couple Score

### Positive and Negative Scoring

**CSI (marital/couple happiness).** The CSI scale is divided into two parts. The first is 10 items are a six point Likert type scale that is scored from 0 to 5 from negative to positive. The second six are sliders between a negative and positive attribute of your partner or relationship. The sliders are scored from 0 to 50 negative to positive. Each set of questions is delineated by CSI(1) and CSI(2) respectively.

**PSP (personal sense of power).** The PSP scale contains 8 questions using a seven point Likert scale that is scored from 1 to 7 less to more sense of power.

**MSS (negative attributes of a relationship).** The MSS scale consists of 14 six-point Likert type scale measurements that are scored from 0 to 5 from positive to negative. The higher the score the more negative the relationship.

**PNS (positive and negative feelings).** The PNS has two sets of three questions to measure each the positive, PNS(P), and negative, PNS(N), feelings within a relationship.

### Aggregate Percentage Score

Each individual and couple was given a positive and negative score by averaging the percentage score for each question (See Table 1). The positive score consisted of the average of the converted CSI(1), CSI(2), PSP and PNS (P) numbers. The negative score consisted of the average of the converted MSS and PNS (N) numbers.

## Statistics

### Group Statistics

The only other group that had enough participants to demonstrate any statistical interest is the original group attracted to the first marketing attempt and their original partners. The other

groups did not have enough participants to be considered. Statistics were calculated on both the TRDG and Control Group 1. These were not a reliable quantitative finding, but did help identify trends to investigate once considering the participants on an individual/couple basis.

**TRDG participants.** The first statistic calculated was the positive and negative of all the initial 119 respondents (RD1) to the first marketing attempt. Their ratings were: positive 66.141 (P%), negative 35.870 (N%). The range of Positive % scores varied from a high of 97.115 to a low of 26.000. The range of Negative % scores varied from a high of 88.286 to a low of 0.333.

The second group was the 37 TRDG partners that responded (RDP). Their ratings were; P% - 78.598, N% - 35.653. The range of Positive % scores varied from a high of 99.583 to a low of 31.332. The range of Negative % scores varied from a high of 97.667 to a low of 0.000.

The third group tested was the initial survey of the respondents and their partners for the 11 couples who had finished the entire process for their RDC1 scores. Their ratings were: positive 74.869, negative 32.348. The range of Positive % scores varied from a high of 94.614 to a low of 25.851. The range of Negative % scores varied from a high of 93.571 to a low, other than 0 (an individual who is unwilling to say anything negative about their relationship) of 6.429. This group's scores for the final survey, RDC6, were; positive 79.427, negative 26.282. . The range of Positive % scores varied from a high of 94.614 to a low of 25.851. The range of Negative % scores varied from a high of 98.583 to a low, other than 0 (an individual who is unwilling to say anything negative about their relationship) of 2.762.

**Control Group 1 participants.** The first statistic calculated was the positive and negative of all the initial 41 respondents (CG1) who were diverted during the first marketing attempt. Their ratings were; positive 77.241, negative 29.136. The second group was all the 18 CG1 partners who responded (CG1P). Their ratings were; positive 78.549, negative 27.327.



The third group tested was the initial survey of the respondents and their partners for the 9 couples who finished the entire process CG1C. Their ratings were; positive 74.869, negative 12.5. The final group statistic was for all 18 members of the couples that finished the entire process (CG1C 6). Their ratings were; positive 75.489, negative 15.555.

**Other groups.** The only other group statistic calculated was the original response to the second marketing attempt. This was a combined total of initial participants and their partners, which resulted in 38 completed surveys. Six participants were removed as a result of a new *Administrative Question*, which asked them to answer a question with a specific answer. If they missed, it suggested that they were simply filling out the survey for the gift card drawing and not reading the questions. Only 5 (questionable) participants returned for the six-week survey. The group positive score was 66.874 the negative score was 45.409. All other groups did not have enough participants to warrant statistical analysis.

**Scores.**

Table 1: TRDG Participants

RIGHT DAYS GROUP AND COMPLETED COUPLES COMBINED SCORE									
		RD1	RD1 %	RDP	RDP %	RDC1	RDC1 %	RDC6	RDC6 %
	Max Points								
CSI (1)	5	3.29	<b>65.860</b>	3.786	<b>75.720</b>	3.583	<b>71.660</b>	3.743	<b>74.860</b>
CSI (2)	50	25.306	<b>50.612</b>	39.545	<b>79.090</b>	36.770	<b>73.540</b>	39.945	<b>79.890</b>
PSP	7	4.64	<b>66.286</b>	5.256	<b>75.086</b>	5.186	<b>74.086</b>	5.275	<b>75.357</b>
PNS (P)	50	40.904	<b>81.808</b>	42.248	<b>84.496</b>	40.096	<b>80.192</b>	43.800	<b>87.600</b>
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>66.141</b>		<b>78.598</b>		<b>74.869</b>		<b>79.427</b>
MSS	5	1.574	<b>31.480</b>	1.518	<b>30.360</b>	1.376	<b>27.520</b>	0.934	<b>18.680</b>
PNS (N)	50	20.13	<b>40.260</b>	20.473	<b>40.946</b>	18.588	<b>37.176</b>	16.942	<b>33.884</b>
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>35.870</b>		<b>35.653</b>		<b>32.348</b>		<b>26.282</b>

Table 2: Control Group 1 Participants

CONTOL GROUP 1 AND COMPLETED COUPLES COMBINED SCORE									
		CGI	CGI %	CG1P	CG1P %	CG1C	CG1C %	CG1C 6	CG1C 6%
	Max Points								
CSI (1)	5	3.519	<b>70.380</b>	3.706	<b>74.120</b>	4.02	<b>80.400</b>	4.193	<b>83.860</b>
CSI (2)	50	39.03	<b>78.060</b>	38.331	<b>76.662</b>	42.309	<b>84.618</b>	45.217	<b>90.434</b>
PSP	7	5.146	<b>73.514</b>	5.301	<b>75.729</b>	5.292	<b>75.600</b>	5.679	<b>81.129</b>
PNS (P)	50	43.504	<b>87.008</b>	43.843	<b>87.686</b>	43.567	<b>87.134</b>	45.738	<b>91.476</b>
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>77.241</b>		<b>78.549</b>		<b>81.938</b>		<b>86.725</b>
MSS	5	1.199	<b>23.980</b>	1.068	<b>21.360</b>	0.493	<b>9.860</b>	0.61	<b>12.200</b>
PNS (N)	50	17.146	<b>34.292</b>	16.647	<b>33.294</b>	7.578	<b>15.156</b>	8.19	<b>16.380</b>
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>29.136</b>		<b>27.327</b>		<b>12.508</b>		<b>14.290</b>

Table 3: BP First Survey Participants

SECOND MARKETING FIRST SURVEY (BPINTRO) GROUP 1				
			BPINTRO	BPINTRO %
	Max Points			
CSI (1)	5		2.988	<b>59.760</b>
CSI (2)	50		32.885	<b>65.770</b>
PSP	7		4.364	<b>62.343</b>
PNS (P)	50		39.807	<b>79.614</b>
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>				<b>66.872</b>
MSS	5		2.065	<b>41.300</b>
PNS (N)	50		24.759	<b>49.518</b>
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>				<b>45.409</b>

## Participant Feedback

There were three avenues for the participants to provide feedback. After completion, the participants were asked if they were willing to answer 15 questions. Four short answer written questions and eleven-item slider type questions were asked. Their participation was entirely voluntary. The questions varied from: “How fully did you play the game?”, to, “Did this change the way you make decisions?” The participants were then asked if they would like to participate in a live interview for a \$25 gift card with no guarantee that they would be selected. Four couples indicated they would like to be interviewed, but only one followed through.

### Questionnaire

The data collected from the 11 slider questions were designed to help choose subjects to question during the face to face interviews. When asked, how fully did they play the game, as a group they averaged 37%. The couples were split between couples who played the game over 50% and those that didn't. The group of couples who didn't participate were titled the *Happy Couples*. They had very low negative scores and very high positive scores. They didn't play much and reported very little change. When filling out the short answer questions they replied with comments such as, “we do not argue very much” or “We didn't need it.” The couples that fell in the more normal zone of positive and negative scores had a tendency to play the game more, they noticed changes in trust and decision making. In the short answers questions they replied with answers such as: “We changed the way we made decisions”, “We argue less” and “Our trust increased.”

The four short answer question provided a mouthpiece for the participants to express both what happened in a positive and negative way. The answers varied from highly negative: “I wish this would of helped our relationship but unfortunately I don't think anything will :(“ or “I

don't know how the f#@ I got here,,," to insightfully positive: "Bickering left this house" or "It did help me to stop and consider his feelings or thoughts more often."

**Short answers.**

Was there anything that surprised you about playing the game?

Positive:

(I)t did show how petty our arguments can be.

It seemed to me before like we argued a fair amount, so I thought playing the game would be kind of fun. When those things did come up, it kind of just made whatever we were arguing about funny.

Stopped a small disagreement.

It is very easy to play

(I)t did help me to stop and consider his feelings or thoughts more often.

kids caught on - the kids enjoyed it.

Negative:

Yes, that my partner kept making excuses as to why I couldn't be right on my right days.

Even on the days I was "right", my partner would make me wrong. My fault. I was always wrong.

I think people could manipulate it to only discuss certain issues on their "right" days.

It was harder than we expected.

Is there anything that you liked/disliked about playing the game?

Positive:

No it was long but we liked it.

It helped a lot for me because I am the kind who always has to have the last word whether I am right or wrong And so is he.

I did notice that it stopped smaller arguments slightly sooner than would have happened naturally.

Negative:

It felt a little unnatural.

I'm unhappy so it was hard to enjoy

Not getting my way when the rules dictated that I should have. :)

Didn't completely understand the point of it. It was hard to take it seriously.

We didn't need it.

Would you change any of the instructions or rules?

Positive:

No very well done

Fun

Follow up with participants on a weekly basis to remind them of the game and rules.

Negative:

Answer the questions to each other verbally. Then see in comparison how others answered.

Do you have any stories you would like to me to know?

Positive:

I had to remind myself to shut up and just let him be the winner.

It was true that I ruled my partner and was causing her to be depressed and angry. She moved across country and life is different out here. When we aren't good she pointed out our kids act out. The kids played the game too. Bickering left this house.

We did not fight very often, so mostly the argument turned into one of us remembering we were playing the game, and then focus turned to relying to remember who was supposed to be "right". While this is not actually how the game should be played, it still got us to drop the petty fights quickly.

I realize my husband is more willing to express how he feels quicker than I am.

(O)ur communication is better and we allowing ourselves to be more playful.

We do communicate better and are more like to hash it out and be done with it.  
We have grown extreme close and are getting our love life back in the bedroom.

Negative:

"Whose day is it?" was a frequent refrain.

I don't know how the f#8\* I got here,,,and I have no clue what the f#8\* is going on. I just know that I don't want to participate in the garbage anymore.

These questions were interspersed with ambivalent answers from the "Happy Couples."

We didn't need it.

We only used it once.

(W)e didn't have any arguments/disagreements.

Please pick us to win the raffle.

(N)o not really

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The question is not did this game work for certain couples. It certainly did. The challenges of this research project were; how to attract the couples that the game will help, how to keep them fully playing the game and how to encourage them to learn what is available to be learned.

There were very large obstacles to attaining these goals. First, there was a gender gap between women who demonstrated a strong interest in playing the game and the resistance of men to commit to play. Second, has been the obstacle of using money as a motivation to play. The more incentive that was offered the lower the quality of participants (See *Marketing attempt three*, below.) Third, is the attempt to conduct this type of survey online.

There was significant drop out rate among couples that played the game. The last step was the final survey. One of the participants would take the survey and the other was not inspired to finish. The short answer, “Follow up with participants on a weekly basis to remind them of the game and rules.” implied a need for a personal connection and encouragement.

#### **Statistics**

##### **Groups**

The macro approach shows trends that affected the overall study and answer questions about the participation. The narrative follows the numbers. The first group tested is the initial participants. These were 85% women with average scores of P - 66.141 and N – 35.870. These

were the lowest (P) and highest (N) scores of all the groups respectively during this marketing campaign. All of their partners were sent an email and invited to participate. Over 50% did not choose to participate. Several female participants answered emails asking, “Why not.” Their replies were simply, “My husband/boyfriend didn’t want to.”

The next group tested was the partners who did participate (81% male). These were the cooperative men who did not object to playing a game with their female partners. Their scores reflect this: P - 78.598 (the highest of all groups) N – 35.653 (about the same). These numbers suggest that the men were more positive than the women and the women have less negativity than the men.

The couples that completed the process as a group tested: P – 74.869 and N – 32.348. The couples were split between the *Happy Couples* and a few more normal couples that experienced benefits from playing the game.

The *Happy Couples* were the predominant type of couple that participated in both TRDG and the Control Group 1. These couples were willing to finish the research project. This was reflected in the initial scores of the couples that finished the control group: P – 81.938 and N – 12.508. These were by far the most extreme of all the groups.

Despite the influence of the positive minded couples, the six-week post-test scores for the TRDG couples, as a group, increased their positive score by 4.6% and decreased their negative score by just over 6%. Statistically, had the sample been larger, these findings could have been supported H1, H3 and H4. However to understand the numbers gathered from participants without the effects that are skewed from the norm (the original respondents), the couples must be considered on a case by case basis.



## **Individual Couples**

When inspecting each of the couples individually, the P & N need to be separated, particularly their Personal Sense of Power.

**Couple #1: dramatic change.** This couple experienced the most dramatic change playing TRDG. They are a mixed race couple over 55 who have only been married for 5 years. They live in a medium size mid-western city. Their opening scores were the lowest of all the couples: For him, P – 31.542, N - 93.571. For her, P – 25.851, N – 88.286. They offered very little insight as to what happened to them beyond one sentence from each person. She wrote, “he has trusted me with personal info that helps me understand him more.” He wrote, “our communication is better and we are allowing ourselves to be more playful.” Their ending scores brought them up and down to almost normal: His, P – 62.946, N – 44.286. Her’s, P – 60.488, N – 37.667. His sense of power dropped while hers rose dramatically. They started with a 1.2 point separation and flip flopped to a .875 difference. Both were considerably more positive and less negative despite the power flip.

**Couple #2: anticipated change.** This couple responded exactly the way the Hypotheses projected: Both participants felt more positive about their relationship. A number of the negative dimensions measured either dropped to zero or ticked down a point. Their overall positive feelings increased. Their negative feelings decreased, while their personal sense of power flip-flopped to a more balanced level.

**Couple #3: TRDG failure.** Unfortunately, this did not work for some couples, while at the same time the scales became a window into their world. She said, “my partner kept making excuses as to why I couldn't be right on my right days.” Her negative number more than doubled while she actually gave a slightly higher positive score. He must have been uncomfortable with

what he imagined she answered in the survey when he wrote, “Answer the questions to each other verbally. Then see in comparison how others answered.” Her PSP (power) score was less than half of his going into the game. Hers rose a little and his dropped, but there was still a large gap between their scores.

**Couple #4: Control Group anomaly.** This couple is from the control group 1. Most of the couples in the control group responded within a minor variance from week one until week six. This couple must have had an event of some type. They were both significantly and equally more negative and less positive in their outlook and feelings towards their relationship.

### **Eighteen-Month Survey**

Two couples and two individuals participated. The individuals varied from one of the unhappiest participants to a borderline *Happy Couple*. The Couples varied from the lowest initial scoring couple to a *Happy Couple*.

#### **Individuals**

The first individual (#4) had written answers that stated they had “forgot that we were playing after a while.” However, both wrote that while playing the game, “it did show how petty our arguments were.” His partner noted, “I did notice that it stopped smaller arguments slightly sooner than would have happened naturally.” Then she added, “It didn’t come up very much for us.” His scores progressed through the initial survey, to the six week and the 18 month surveys: P = 79.816, 81.923, 90.179, N = 19.570, 28.333, 18.000. The only anomaly was his increase in negative score in his six-week score. This may be attributed to his 3.5% decrease in PSP during that period while concurrently his partner reported a 12% increase. His PSP at 18 months surpassed his original score by 2%, which may help to explain his overall positive score climbing from 79.8 to 90 over the period and his negative score dropping 1.6%. Based on their short

answers, without an interview, the key feedback that may illuminate the change over time is his comment, “It seemed to me before like we argued a fair amount, so I thought playing the game would be kind of fun. When those things did come up, it kind of just made whatever we were arguing about funny.” Perhaps this simple change in attitude about arguing had an overall positive influence on their relationship.

Table 4: Individual #4

		IND #4 - FIRST	PERCENTAGE	IND #4 - 6 WK.	PERCENTAGE	IND #4 - 1 YR.	PERCENTAGE
	Max Points						
CSI (1)	5	3.8	76.000	3.7	74.000	4.5	90.000
CSI (2)	50	39.667	79.334	40	80.000	46.5	93.000
PSP	7	5.875	83.929	5.625	80.357	6	85.714
PNS (P)	50	40	80.000	46.667	93.334	46	92.000
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>79.816</b>		<b>81.923</b>		<b>90.179</b>
MSS	5	1.357	27.140	1.5	30.000	1.5	30.000
PNS (N)	50	6	12.000	13.333	26.666	3	6.000
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>19.570</b>		<b>28.333</b>		<b>18.000</b>

The second individual (#29) was the unhappiest with her relationship of all individuals throughout the process. This is perhaps best reflected in her short answer: “my partner kept making excuses as to why I couldn't be right on my right days.” Or, “Not getting my way when the rules dictated that I should have. :).” There was a large disparity between her and her partner’s perception of the relationship. He scored three times higher her on both sections measuring *Marital Satisfaction*. Her 18-month score was less than 20% of the possible positive score. They both scored very strongly on PSP although her score was 15% lower than his. Both lost 15 -20% playing the game. They both scored each other fairly positively, and he reported very few negative feelings towards her. His sense of the negative dimension of their relationship

was close to non-existent (0.462), very much like the *Happy Couples* reported. This couple had a very different perspective: He saw positive and nothing negative. She reported almost no *Marital Satisfaction* yet had a strong sense of power and rates her partner as having strong positive traits.

Table 5: Individual #29

	Max Points	IND #29 - FIRST	PERCENTAGE	IND #29 - 6 WK.	PERCENTAGE	IND #29 - 1 YR.	PERCENTAGE
CSI (1)	5	1.4	28.000	1.4	28.000	0.9	18.000
CSI (2)	50	13.5	27.000	10	20.000	9.167	18.334
PSP	7	5.37	76.714	4.75	67.857	5	71.429
PNS (P)	50	31.667	63.334	45	90.000	44	88.000
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>48.762</b>		<b>51.464</b>		<b>48.941</b>
MSS	5	1.357	27.140	1.5	30.000	1.5	30.000
PNS (N)	50	18.333	36.666	35	70.000	25.667	51.334
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>31.903</b>		<b>50.000</b>		<b>40.667</b>

## Couples

There were two couples that returned for the 18-month survey. *Couple #1* was profiled earlier (p 50) and a *Happy Couple* that will not be discussed. *Couple #1* was the only couple that agreed to an interview. Both partners displayed dramatic growth in their positive scores and a drop in their negative scores. Her PSP took a large step forward at six weeks and then leveled off. His dropped at six weeks and then rebounded. They had not filled out the 18-month survey until after the interview.

**Couple #1 interview.** The Interview consisted of 6 minutes of questions and answers with her, 12 minutes with him, and 6 minutes with both. When asked if they had noticed a change in their relationship, she disclosed that they were divorced, “We are trying to go back to

the basics, just learning how to be friends first.” Later they both disclosed that they had only known each other for two months when they were pressured by outside sources to get married before they were ready. When asked what they thought of the game, she replied, “It was fun and interesting.” He replied, “Different, a little (uncomfortable).” He disclosed his history of being closed off and “not trusting anybody.” But with the *Game* that he had “opened up to somebody more than ever.” He had learned to trust her more than anybody before. She summarized their relationship by stating that, “I am just an open person I say whatever I think.... xxx is more hiding his feelings.”

When asked if TRDG made a difference, she talked about a trip to a salt museum. Based on her past experiences she would have said, “I’m not going in somebodies underground cave.” But her new attitude was that by saying no she was, “taking away something from him that he wants to do with me.” In the end she described the experience, “It was a little bit scary, it was a little bit exciting, going underground... Once we got there and went through it, it was eventually was a lot of fun.” When asked, “If it weren’t for The Right Days Game, do you think you would have said, ‘I’m not going?’” She replied, “Oh Yeah!”

She stated she recognized that she is “overbearing, but not controlling” and he recognized that he has never “dined and wined and I am sure yyy would love it.” He is, “beginning to want to learn different things.” She said, “I had to do a lot of growing up...let’s go for this adventure and when I let myself do that, it ended up being a heck-of-a-lot of fun.” Both continually brought up that their communication was better. He concluded, “If I learned a lot more about it (communication), our relationship would be a lot better.” Finally when asked if they would suggest to other couples to play The Right Days Game, They both replied a resounding, “Yes!”

Table 6: Couple #1 (Male)

	Max Points	CPL 1M - FIRST	PERCENTAGE	CPL 1M - 6 WK.	PERCENTAGE	CPL 1M - 1 YR.	PERCENTAGE
CSI (1)	5	0.5	10.000	2.5	50.000	2.3	46.000
CSI (2)	50	1.667	3.334	28.333	56.666	40	80.000
PSP	7	4	57.143	3.625	51.786	4.875	69.643
PNS (P)	50	27.667	55.334	46.667	93.334	43	86.000
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>31.453</b>		<b>62.946</b>		<b>70.411</b>
MSS	5	4.357	87.140	1.429	28.580	1.134	22.680
PNS (N)	50	50	100.000	30	60.000	20.667	41.334
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>93.570</b>		<b>44.290</b>		<b>32.007</b>

Table 7: Couple #1 (Female)

	Max Points	CPL 1W - FIRST	PERCENTAGE	CPL 1W - 6 WK.	PERCENTAGE	CPL 1W - 1 YR.	PERCENTAGE
CSI (1)	5	0.7	14.000	2.5	50.000	2.4	48.000
CSI (2)	50	0.833	1.666	33.167	66.334	41.333	82.666
PSP	7	2.875	41.071	4.5	64.286	4.5	64.286
PNS (P)	50	27.667	55.334	46.667	93.334	43	86.000
<b>POSITIVE SCORE</b>			<b>28.018</b>		<b>68.488</b>		<b>70.238</b>
MSS	5	3.929	78.580	1	20.000	1.036	20.720
PNS (N)	50	49	98.000	27.667	55.334	10.667	21.334
<b>NEGATIVE SCORE</b>			<b>88.290</b>		<b>37.667</b>		<b>21.027</b>

## Marketing

The first marketing effort seemed too slow to reach statistical minimums. The next attempt was to market TRDG directly, lose the control group, and work to entice their partners that this would be “easy” and “a benefit to their overall happiness.” Then the calendar was added as an attempt to inspire the couple and keep them on track to finish the game.

Advertising TRDG brought in an unhappier initial participant. The P score was similar to the first group, but the N score was 30% higher. The dropout rate increased, fewer partners signed up and the completion rate dropped to a practical zero. Changing the incentive to a 1 in 5 chance to win \$50 did not seem to make a difference.

### **Third Marketing Strategy**

The changes made to the pitch between #1 and #2 had resulted in a lower percentage rate and virtually no viable couples. In an attempt to get more couples to finish, another IRB modification was requested to change some of the language, but primarily the offer: A guaranteed \$50 gift card for couples playing the game and finishing the process. The Craig's List pitch used was:

Earn a \$50 gift card Playing a Game.

This approach was posted in 15 locations. It brought in 210 responses with 140 completions in fewer than three weeks.

**Participant fraud.** The first indicator that something was wrong was an inordinate amount of same-sex couples 18 to 25, ten couples from the same small town in South Carolina. Each had a unique email and IP address. However when names were checked against FaceBook in the same small town, there were people with identical names to the email accounts that were not 18 – 25, not gay and married with children. Upon further review of the information collected by the SurveyGizmo, 12 couples in one city shared 2 IP addresses, a number of the participants registered directly from the URL and had not been referred from a Craig's List posting. Several of the questionable participants were emailed and asked how they learned about TRDG. Their response was from FaceBook. Apparently the guaranteed \$50 for playing a game went viral. The next key statistic was the time it took to complete the survey. Historically, the entire process

including demographics, reading the consent form and the questionnaire took 13 minutes. The bulk of the surveys were completed in 8 minutes or less. Unfortunately, because there were several seemingly real couples, the Surveys were shut down and the message they saw when they returned was a statement that said:

A number of people had made up fake couples in order to receive multiple gift cards so the survey has been shut down. If you are a real couple, and you played the game, please email me to continue.

One potentially *real couple* responded by asking IRB to remove them from the process. The \$50 gift card was not their motivation.

From the tactics illuminated by the *Third Marketing* perpetrators, the same techniques were used to compare to the earlier participants: The time to complete the survey, IP addresses, email similarities, and data input. These provided the insight to find additional “fake” couples as early as the first offer (a 1 in 10 chance at \$50).

### **Conclusions**

The scales that were used to measure couples were excellent. They were like a looking glass into the workings of the relationships. Measuring couple satisfaction, couple discourse, personal sense of power and positive and negative valence allowed for the complicated nature of relationships to be perceived. *Individual #29* is a perfect example: highly unsatisfied, with a strong sense of power and a positive feeling about her partner. Her mate, on the other hand, had a positive satisfaction index, an even higher sense of power and a very low level of negative feelings about his partner. Perhaps she was not happy, but thought he was worth it. It was very much the ambivalent relationship compared to an indifferent relationship described by Fincham & Linfield (1997, p 490).



The relationship between *Dyadic Satisfaction* (Funk and Rogge, 2007) was strongly correlated with PSPS (Anderson, John & Keltner, 2012) and the sub heading of troubled relationships (MSS2) identified by Canel (2013). If CSI was high, MSS2 was low. If PSPS were changed the results would show up not in MSS2, but may be reflected in CSI. All of the above affected the PNAQIMS scores.

The theories around *play* (Vanderbleek et al., 2011) and *practice* (Van Meer, & Theunissen, 2009) are supported by Individual #4. This couple felt they didn't need TRDG, yet when it did come up, they perceived arguments as "funny" and got over their arguments "quicker." *Couple 1 male's* six-week comment was, "we are more playful." This comment was made after their scores dramatically changed. Another couple stated, "The kids played the game too. Bickering left this house." His wife commented that it "felt silly at first." Perhaps the *play* factor was an important key to changing their behavior.

The therapeutic norm of cognitive training (Gray-Little, , 1996) often has the goal of increasing communication skills (Brooks, Guerney Jr., & Mazza, 2001; Markman, & Renick, 1993; Owen, et al., 2013; Rosenthal, & Eckstein, 2013; Parr, Boyle, & Tejada, 2008; Blanchard, et al. , 2009) which has been identified as perhaps the most important skill a couple can possess if they are to be in a successful relationship (Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith, & McKinney, 2013). TRDG instructions do not contain the word *communication*, however communication was mentioned a multitude of times in the short answer questions. And if the goal of a treatment is to achieve long-term change (Baucom, et al, 2011), loosely based on the few 18-month surveys, TRDG seems to have achieved that end.

The balance of power is essential (Knudson-Martin, 2013). TRDG virtually moved the PSPS scale of all participating couples (excluding *Happy Couples*) closer to equal. This, at times

may have negatively changed the Positive/Negative valence (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1987) of a relationship, at the same time, it increased the overall dyadic satisfaction.

Finally, the current study set out to answer the following question/goal. Did the current study provide evidence that a pop-culture treatment is significant by utilizing academic theory, standards and measurements? The answer is “almost.”

### **Limitations**

Online was a great way to contact people across the country in all demographic categories, but this method of participant recruitment also prevented a sense of personal involvement. It also demanded an inordinate amount of effort to discern the cheaters from the honest participants.

Overall, *Happy Couples* willing to help with the research at times to have a chance to win the gift card, but had no interest in the game, skewed the current study.

The total number of qualified participants needs to be large enough to reach statistical reliability. It did not.

### **Future Research**

Recruitment is the most essential element to give the continuation of this research an opportunity to succeed. Many of studies of this nature originated with referrals from couple counselors. This approach was specifically avoided in an attempt to show that the game will work for the average couple. With the modest participation in the current study a number of drop-out points were identified. These primarily included trust (when asking for an email address) and partner cooperation (men did not want to play this game). Perhaps soliciting participants from couple therapists would mitigate both of these devastating problems: If they are in therapy, the reference would be from a therapist who has already gained their identity

(email) and the man has already agreed to working on the relationship.

Perhaps there is a better marketing approach to attract participants of all persuasions that will honestly play the game, but after several attempts, the current study did not find that formula. More contact and support may help keep participants on track and perhaps can be a tool to convince the reluctant partners to participate.

A longitudinal qualitative study would be a significant tool in providing evidence on the merit of this game.

### **Personal Reflections**

The study of TRDG offered a number of learning opportunities. These varied from marketing to client relationships to specific insights into individuals and couples.

### **The Nature of the Treatment**

When studying a subject as personal as how we make decisions, one must overcome the resistance by couples to change the very nature of how their power structure and communication takes place. Creating a safe space where they can commit completely to the process must occur. Perhaps by giving them more examples of how it works and provide inspiring testimonials may help. This might also be accomplished by reiterating that; *This is a Game*. There is a rule that you cannot make life-changing decisions, it will not upend your life. It's a game that may shed some light on how you are currently managing your relationship.

It does not need to be a game for troubled couples. Even the "Happy Couples" may have found a new understanding had they actually played the game. The insights can be purely positive. It is not necessarily a game to play only when you disagree. By experiencing not making a decision for a day, one may learn; relax, allow yourself to be taken care of. Or perhaps

making all the decisions will teach you: How you can make your partner happy. Let them know; *you want the best for them.*

### **Men's Resistance**

Eighty-five percent of the male partners did not respond. The literature supports this resistance. The literature also implies that they have more to gain by participating. The marketing of this game needs to focus on the men. My experience at parties or in the grocery store is that women immediately say, "I want to do that." So the marketing needs to be tailored to convince the men. Does this mean write an article for Maxim instead of Cosmo or identify the specific changes that men can relate to? This is the most inquisitive conundrums of the study.

### **Greed**

I completely underestimated the effect \$50 could have on people. I had cheaters in the first offer, which was a 1 in 10 chance at \$50. I experienced almost 100% fraudulent entries in my guaranteed \$50 offer. The lesson learned must be to create value without using cash. Ask, how much do they value their relationship? How much would it be worth not to quarrel over insignificant things? How would they like proof that their partner has their best interest at heart? People must feel that there is a pay-off before they will take a risk.

### **It Works**

I spent nearly 3 years and \$5,000 attempting to academically document this game. If the only thing I accomplished by doing this exercise is supporting the change experienced by Couple #1, it was worth it. There may be a few other couples that gained true value from my study and I applaud them. I am sending a copy of this paper to everyone who requested it in the surveys. If the study reaches a couple that can gain value by hearing about the game, I will be thrilled.

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## APPENDIX A

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### INFORMED CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

The purpose of this research project is to investigate changes in communication styles for couples over a six-week period of time. This is a research project being conducted by David Cohen from the University of Texas – Pan American/UTPA. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are in a couples relationship that has been cohabiting for at least one year and you are over the age of 18.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. The procedure involves filling an online questionnaire with 44 items. You and your partner will then play The Right Days Game for four weeks and after 6 weeks you will be asked the same 44 questions plus 15 questions about your Right Days Game participation. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will be about your couple's communication style.

**Payment for Participation:** By completing this 6-week survey, you will be eligible to receive a 1 in 10 chance to win a \$50 Amazon or Visa gift card and an additional 1 in 5 chance to win a \$25 Gift Card as a token of appreciation for your time. Compensation for participation in this study will be provided to you by me, the researcher, not by the University of Texas- Pan American. Please note that any payment(s) you receive for participation in this study is considered income for tax purposes. If you are an international student working under a student visa and are working 20 hours a week, accepting compensation for participation in this study may affect your visa status.

All survey responses that we receive will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in our study, we want you to be aware that certain technologies exist that can be used to monitor or record data that you enter and/or websites that you visit. Any individually identifiable responses will be securely stored and will only be available to those directly involved in this study. De-identified data may be shared with other researchers in the future, but will not contain information about your individual identity.”

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact: Name: David Cohen, Title: Graduate Student  
Dept: Communication, The University of Texas-Pan American, Phone: 956-346-8133, Email: [david.cohen01@utrgv.edu](mailto:david.cohen01@utrgv.edu)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu). You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting [www.utpa.edu/IR](http://www.utpa.edu/IR)

## APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

### THE RIGHT DAYS GAME INVITE

**CONGRATULATIONS:** You have been randomly selected to have the chance to play "The Right Days Game" as part of this research. It is a couples communication game developed by two international authors and seminar leaders for use by couples participating in their extended couples program. The rules of the game are simple:

(from the authors) \_\_\_\_\_

The "Right Day Game" is, first of all, not a "You're Wrong Day Game". In fact, the word "wrong" should not be used when playing the game.

One person becomes right whenever there is a disagreement, not arbitrarily to exercise power over the other. The partner simply goes into agreement with the person who is having the right day.

The game could be called "Agreement Day" if you want to avoid the word "right". The next day, the roles are reversed.

One must be careful not to seek revenge the second day by bringing up disagreements from the previous day. The point is only to use the game when a disagreement occurs in the course of the day.

The game should be played until the issue of right and wrong fades away, God willing.

Good luck with your research and work.

Love,

XXX (the authors)

---

This game has something to teach couples no matter what type of relationship you have. Even if you both get along great, there is something to be learned by letting go of control and trusting your partner to make a good decision, even though it may not be yours. You'll find it actually saves time. "What movie to see?" No debate - One of you chooses.

There are rules, such as, you cannot decide to "I want to sell the house and move to Florida." Major decisions have to put on hold.

I played this game when I was in my 20's and it has had a positive effect on every relationship I have had since then. This is why The Right Days Game is the subject of my Thesis for my Masters in Communication. Couples are asked to answer the original questionnaire now, play *The Right Days Game* for 4-weeks, (pause for 2-weeks) then re-answer the questionnaire and 15 new questions



about playing the game. By choosing to participate in *The Right Days Game*, you will be given the opportunity to enter the **Bonus Sweepstakes** for an additional **\$25 Gift Card** with a **1 in 5 chance** of winning. This would make your overall chance of receiving a gift card **3 out of 10**. Talk this over with your partner. If you choose "No" below, you still have the option to participate in the original survey and retain your 1 in 10 chance at the **\$50 gift card**.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David R Cohen is an older graduate student. He graduated with his BA in Theatre/Communication in 1978 from The University of Puget Sound. Much of the theory referenced in the current study had not even become a concept by that time. Communication was mostly a speech class.

He went on to pursue his passion of acting. He took a seemingly step back by receiving an Associates degree from The American Academy of Dramatic Arts. This is an acting only preparatory school for becoming a professional actor. After 13 years pursuing acting, he succumbed to his constant desire to direct and produce.

The next 30 years were chocked full of successes and failures. The road varied from being nominated for several Emmy's to filing bankruptcy. Each step of the way, the nature of telling stories for a living kept his life full of intrigue and constantly learning a new subject in order to adequately tell the story.

It is not a big surprise, after meeting his long-term fiancé, a tenured professor; he decided to become a student again. He began his pursuit of a degree so he could teach. He began his degree at UTPA, but finally graduated with his Masters in Communication from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in May 2017. davidcohenamigo@gmail.com