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## Strategies of influence in close relationships

M. Minda Oriña, Wendy Wood, and Jeffry A. Simpson\*

*Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4235, USA*

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### Abstract

In this study, we examined how close relationship partners spontaneously influence each other while they discussed an existing problem in their relationship. According to theories of social influence, people in important, self-defining relationships should experience the relationship itself as a potent source of influence. Thus, they are likely to rely on the relationship as a source of power and to use influence strategies that reference relationship norms and values. Consistent with this reasoning, dating partners who were subjectively closer to their partners/relationships were more likely to reference the relationship in their influence attempts than those who were less subjectively close. Furthermore, referencing the relationship was an effective influence strategy. Greater referencing was associated with opinion shifts during discussions for both agents and targets of influence, with each compromising toward the other's position. In contrast, greater use of negative coercion as an influence strategy (e.g., derogation of the partner or punishment) was associated with less compromise. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA). All rights reserved.

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### Strategies of influence in close relationships

Traditionally, the study of social influence has focused on standardized, impersonal influence attempts that transpire between strangers during brief encounters. In daily life, however, some of the most important persuasion attempts occur between intimate relationship partners, as they resolve problems or disagreements in their ongoing relationships. Less than two percent of married couples report never having had a disagreement and the vast majority of married couples acknowledge that they have problems on a regular basis (McGonagle, Kessler, & Schilling, 1992). Researchers are recognizing that interactions involving conflict resolution and negotiation provide opportune contexts in which to study persuasion, social influence, and attitude change (see Chaiken, Gruenfeld, & Judd, 2000; Koslowsky & Schwarzwald, 2001). Understanding how relationship partners attempt to change each other's attitudes and behaviors when resolving problems should be an important component of any theory of social influence.

Yet, only a few studies have investigated how people exert influence in established relationships and most

have relied on retrospective reports of influence tactics. In the standard persuasion paradigm, participants have been asked to remember a particular interaction in which they tried to influence another person (e.g., their father, a close friend, or a romantic partner) and then to report on the specific influence strategies and tactics they used (e.g., Bui, Raven, & Schwarzwald, 1994; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967; Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1977; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998; Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997). Marital researchers have recently used similar methods to study social influence, focusing on specific influence domains such as health behaviors (e.g., Cohen & Lichtenstein, 1990; Tucker & Mueller, 2000) and purchasing decisions (e.g., Kirchler, 1993). Although this body of research has provided important insights into the different influence tactics people claim to use, it has not appreciably advanced our theoretical understanding of influence processes. As a rule, past studies have identified unique sets of acts or behaviors that comprise the influence tactics or styles that people report using in particular relationships or with particular issues. Many people, however, may not be able to report accurately on which influence strategies they use—and which ones tend to “work best”—in most interactions. To compound matters, most of the past research has treated influence as an individual-level

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\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* jas@psyc.tamu.edu (J.A. Simpson).

phenomenon rather than a dyadic one. A purely individual-level approach provides a limited understanding of influence between two people in a relationship, who may often possess very different motivations, attitudes, and goals.

To provide a new approach to the study of influence styles, we conducted an observational study of dyadic social influence. Because we wanted to examine the expression and use of spontaneous, naturally occurring influence strategies, we videotaped dating partners while they tried to negotiate and resolve a current problem in their relationship. In particular, couples discussed a problem in which one partner disagreed with or disapproved of the other partner's opinions or behaviors and wanted to change the offending attitude or behavior (i.e., wanted to exert influence). To evaluate the intrinsically reciprocal nature of influence, each partner was treated as both a potential *agent* of influence (when he or she made requests of his or her partner) and a potential *target* of influence (when he or she responded to his or her partner's requests).

The theoretical perspective that guided this research is grounded in Kelman's (1958, 1961) three processes of social influence and related notions contained in French & Raven's, 1959; French (1956) work on bases of power (see also Raven et al., 1998). Although these typologies were not originally developed to explain influence in romantic relationships per se, they are well suited to doing so because they take into account the motivational significance of an influence agent's relationship with the target of influence.

#### *A tripartite model of influence*

Kelman (1958, 1961) claimed that observed attitude change can be brought about by three qualitatively different processes that he labeled compliance, identification, and internalization. *Compliance* occurs when people agree with others to gain a favorable reaction from them or to avoid an unfavorable one. This form of influence arises from concerns about the social consequences of agreeing or disagreeing with powerful others who can offer rewards and punishments. *Identification* is evident when people agree with valued others to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with them. Consequently, identification-based influence promotes goals associated with forming or maintaining relationships and corresponding social identities. *Internalization* occurs when people agree with others because the attitude position itself (i.e., its content) is intrinsically logical, reasonable, or compelling. Internalization originates from people's concerns about how well agreement or disagreement with a particular issue fits with their broader values and goals.

In an empirical demonstration, Kelman (1958) presented participants with an influence appeal and varied

the apparent power of the influence agent in ways designed to elicit the three forms of influence. When the agent could deliver social consequences in the form of rewards and punishments, participants' agreement took the form of compliance and emerged primarily when the agent knew their opinions. When the agent was described as an attractive role model, attitude change took the form of identification and emerged primarily when the identity of the agent was salient. When the agent was described as credible, attitude change reflected internalization and did not vary with contextual factors such as the salience of the influence agent or whether he or she would know their responses. Thus, Kelman's (1958) study revealed how the three forms of influence emerge from the kinds of power wielded by the influence agent.

To apply these ideas to close relationships, we assumed that couples attempting to influence each other about relationship problems potentially could use each of these types of influence. Prior research revealed that the selection of influence strategies can be affected by relation maintenance concerns (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997). Consequently, the use of each form of influence should depend on the nature of the agent's power in the relationship. Because the relationship itself is likely to be salient to both partners in many close relationships, influence often should take the form of identification. That is, partners typically should agree to please one another, maintain their own identities with regard to the relationship, and establish shared perspectives and goals to facilitate smooth relationship functioning. According to Kelman (1958), this base of power originates from the influence agent's attractiveness (i.e., his or her social value; see also French & Raven's, 1959, concept of referent power). Furthermore, identification should be seen in the strategies through which people try to exert influence. Strategies are the general means by which influence agents frame their positions and emphasize their power bases so that the desired (advocated) response becomes the best choice among alternative responses for targets to accept (called the "prepotency" of the response; Kelman, 1958).

The content of identification-based influence strategies focuses on the personal experiences, norms, and rules that characterize a given relationship. A central feature of such strategies is mentioning the relationship during influence attempts and emphasizing its importance. Influence agents who use identification-based strategies therefore should couch their influence appeals around "ideal" or normatively "expected" behaviors that support and promote the relationship. This can be done by simply stating the beliefs, evaluations, feelings, or behaviors expected of the partner, or by explaining why the desired response is appropriate given the value both partners place on the relationship (e.g., "You should do this for the good of the relationship"). We call this strategy *relationship referencing*.

Identification-based agreement is not likely to be invoked to the same extent in all relationships. Close relationship partners should be most likely to use this strategy and most likely to find it successful in achieving influence, when they value the relationship, feel subjectively close to their partners, and adopt the identity of a couple. The best indicator of whether people view a relationship as self-defining is their degree of subjective closeness to their current relationship. This construct is measured by the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), a highly reliable and valid scale that assesses the degree to which people include their romantic partners in their self-concepts. According to self-expansion theory (see Aron & Fraley, 1999), the amount of overlap between self and partner reflects feelings of subjective closeness to the relationship. Thus, individuals who score higher on the IOS (i.e., those who define themselves in terms of their relationship) should be more likely to frame their influence attempts around existing relationship norms and expectations. Additionally, because influence in close relationships is a dyadic phenomenon, the subjective closeness of the target should affect the use of relationship referencing. Assuming that influence appeals are tailored to the specific needs and motives of relationship partners, individuals whose *partners* score higher on the IOS should also be more inclined to use relationship referencing.

The two other types of influence identified by Kelman (1958) can also be used in close relationships and they too should be associated with specific influence strategies. Compliance stems from concerns about the short-term consequences of agreement and therefore compliance-based strategies are likely to include positive rewards or threats of punishment to induce desired attitudes and behaviors. Although coercive tactics can include both positive inducements and punishments (French & Raven, 1959; Kelman, 1958, 1961), our preliminary investigations of dyadic influence revealed that dating partners rarely displayed positive compliance-based behaviors when attempting to exert influence on each other. Thus, the present study focused only on negative strategies, including the use of punishment, derogation of the partner, and the expression of negative affect directed at the partner to generate influence. We call this strategy *coercion*. We were uncertain about how relationship factors like subjective closeness would affect the use of coercion. On the one hand, subjectively close individuals may be reluctant to use this strategy because it could have detrimental effects on the relationship. Alternatively, because close individuals may be confident that temporary use of coercion will not harm the relationship, they may be willing to use this strategy when necessary.

Strategies associated with Kelman's (1958) third type of influence, internalization, involve the presentation of factual, logical, and rational arguments. Influence

agents use *logic and reasoning* strategies to explain how the behavior they want to induce is consistent with the target's own personal values and beliefs. Because value systems tend to be based on "psycho-logic" rather than objective logic, the arguments that agents present need not be rational or logical in an objective sense. We did not derive any formal predictions for the use of internalization-based strategies because it was not clear how various relationship factors might affect the deployment of logic and reasoning.

An additional factor included in our design is the specific role assumed by relationship partners in the videotaped discussion. When we initially viewed these discussions, it was evident that one person in the relationship was seeking to change his or her partner's attitudes or behaviors and the other was either resisting change or contending that change was not necessary. Although we had no formal predictions about how these roles might influence strategy use, we nonetheless decided to include them in our analyses and to evaluate whether they were systematically related to strategy use.

We also examined the overall effectiveness of each strategy for achieving influence during the discussions. Before participating in the study, all couples had previously discussed the problem they attempted to resolve. Hence, we did not expect that a brief discussion in the laboratory would generate large changes in partners' opinions. The laboratory discussion, however, should provide each partner with an opportunity to clarify and refine his or her position and perhaps to raise new arguments for why his/her position was correct. Given the salience and implied importance of relationship goals in these discussions, we predicted that relationship referencing would be associated with opinion shifts toward agents' advocated positions. In other words, relationship referencing should be especially effective when the recipient of the appeal is high rather than low in subjective closeness. Though the use of logic and reasoning should also lead to opinion change in partners, we were less confident about the effectiveness of coercion. In response to coercion, influence targets could either adopt the desired change (to avoid negative consequences) or become more defensive and entrenched in their initial position (to combat future coercion by their partners). Consequently, we did not make any predictions for the effectiveness for coercion.

#### *The dyadic nature of influence*

In close relationships, the behavior of one partner is often dependent on the behavior of the other. Because psychologists have rarely conceptualized influence as a dyadic process, we had only the most general bases for generating predictions concerning relations between partners' influence attempts and responses to influence during the discussions.

As a rule, we anticipated that partners would respond in kind to the nature of their partner's influence attempts. Reciprocity in influence style should stem in part from the tendency of people to respond in complementary fashion to the affective tone expressed by their interaction partners (Kiesler, 1983; Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1982). Empirical observations of participants interacting with trained confederates (Tracey, 1994), individuals participating in experiential training groups (Wright & Loring, 1986), and participants in clinical therapy (Orford, 1986) have all shown correspondence in affective responses during interactions. Accordingly, we anticipated that the negative tone established when one partner used coercive strategies would engender similar negatively toned behavior from the other. And when the partner responded with further attempts at influence, positively toned relationship referencing should be bypassed in favor of negative coercion. Distressed couples often become locked into "negative reciprocity" cycles when trying to resolve problems (Gottman, 1979; Gottman & Levenson, 1986).

We also anticipated reciprocity in the amount of observed attitude change within dyads. Similar levels of agreement could emerge as part of a reciprocity norm in which targets of influence yield to influence agents if the agents have yielded to them in past interactions (Cialdini, Green, & Rusch, 1992). The reciprocity norm should be especially potent in the present paradigm, given that influence exchanges emerged within a particular discussion rather than across separate exchanges on different topics. Additional reason to expect reciprocity comes from research on behavioral matching, in which people appear to adjust automatically their behavior and reactions to interaction partners (Dijksterhuis, 2001). Thus, we anticipated that opinion shifts displayed by one relationship partner would be met by similar levels of change from the other partner.

## Method

### *Participants*

One hundred and twenty-three dating couples (123 women and 123 men) served as participants. At least one partner in each dyad was enrolled in an introductory psychology class at Texas A&M University. To ensure that participants were involved in relatively stable, serious relationships, couples were required to have been dating for at least six months ( $M = 21$  months, range = 6 months to 5.5 years). The mean ages of men and women were 19.6 and 18.9 years, respectively (range = 17–23 years).

### *Procedure and measures*

*Phase 1.* When the couples arrived at the laboratory, each partner was taken to a separate room to complete

questionnaires in private. Participants were assured that their responses would be confidential and would *not* be seen by their dating partners. The questionnaire packet contained the IOS Scale (Aron et al., 1992) and several other measures collected for a different project.<sup>1</sup> As expected, dating partners' scores on the IOS were moderately correlated,  $r = .37, p < .01$ .

*Phase 2.* Approximately five days later, each couple returned to the lab for Phase 2. Before they arrived, half the couples were randomly assigned to jointly identify and discuss a major existing, unresolved problem in their relationship, and half were assigned to identify and discuss a minor problem. Before the discussion, dating partners were led to separate rooms where they were told: "In all relationships, there are times at which both partners do not necessarily agree or see eye-to-eye. Your partner may have a habit, attitude, or behavior that you find troublesome. In this study, we are investigating how dating couples discuss problems and disagreements in their relationship." After receiving these instructions, each partner generated 3–5 (major or minor) issues that had been a recent source of disagreement in their relationship, issues for which one or both partners sought change.<sup>2</sup>

Dating partners were then reunited. They were asked to jointly agree on one of the (major or minor) problems to discuss, which all couples did easily. They were then asked to think about the last argument or disagreement they had concerning that issue and what it was about their partner's habits, attitudes, or behaviors they wanted to change. Specifically, they were instructed to: "Remember what you were arguing about and why you were upset with your partner. Remember what you were thinking about and how you felt during the argument. After remembering these things, we would like you to discuss this issue with each other. We'd like each of you to tell the other what it is about his or her attitudes, habits, or behaviors that bothers you. Please discuss the issue in detail." Couples were told they had 7–10 min to discuss their issue. All couples were reminded to discuss ongoing problems rather than reiterate problems they had resolved. These instructions were adapted from Gottman's (1979) dyadic interaction paradigm.

Immediately before the discussion, the experimenter reconfirmed that both partners were focusing on the

<sup>1</sup> This study was designed to examine how perceptions of current dating partners and relationships change after people with different attachment orientations attempt to resolve a problem in their relationship (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Because problem resolution involves a situation in which persuasive appeals are constructed and delivered, we recoded and reanalyzed the behavioral data to address our hypotheses.

<sup>2</sup> Because the manipulation (i.e., major versus minor problems) did not work as planned, this variable is not discussed further. Ratings of the discussions revealed that most couples viewed even minor problems as relatively serious issues.

same issue or topic. Couples were then told that, although no one would watch their interaction while it took place, the discussion would be videotaped and coded at a later time by trained raters. All discussions (which lasted 7–10 min) were videotaped via a camera mounted in the corner of the room. After completing the discussion, both dating partners completed manipulation checks on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*) that assessed: (a) how stressful they found the discussion, (b) how upset they felt during the discussion, (c) how anxious they felt during the discussion, (d) the extent to which the discussed topic was a major problem in their relationship, (e) how aroused they felt during the discussion, (f) the extent to which they had now resolved the problem, and (g) how productive the discussion was toward resolving the problem. Dating partners were then asked to sign videotape release forms and all of them agreed to do so.

After the discussion, participants were fully debriefed. The experimenter emphasized that all relationships have problems and disagreements from time to time and that points of contention can be a healthy feature of strong, committed relationships. No couple was allowed to leave until the experimenter was convinced that both dating partners felt good about their experience in the study.

*Phase 3.* After all couples had completed the experiment, the experimenter watched all of the videotaped interactions to determine which partner in each couple (the female or the male) wanted more change in his or her partner's attitudes or behavior. The partner seeking the most change was obvious in virtually all discussions. Three different groups of independent raters then viewed each couple's discussion for coding. All raters were blind to the hypotheses and other data provided by the partners. Raters were trained with detailed definitions and instructions for each rated construct (see below).

In the first wave of coding, seven raters evaluated the positive and negative affect of the male and female partners, separately. This coding of affect during the discussion enabled us to evaluate whether the different influence strategies were associated with different patterns of affect. Coercion, for example, should entail negative affect; relationship referencing should involve positive affect (since reminders about positive features and positive norms in the relationship should be accompanied by displays of affection); and logic and reasoning should not necessarily involve the expression of either positive or negative affect. We also conducted statistical analyses that controlled for positive and negative affect to ensure that any effects for strategy use or for agreement during the discussion were not simply a function of the general affective tone associated with the different influence strategies.

Using 9-point scales (anchored 1 = *not at all*; 9 = *extremely*), raters first evaluated the degree to which each

dating partner appeared stressed, anxious, upset, aroused, emotionally hurt, supportive, warm, hostile (reverse-keyed), and cold (reverse-keyed) during the discussion. A principal-axis factor analysis followed by varimax rotation conducted on these ratings within each sex revealed that, for both women and men, all nine items loaded highly (.60 or greater) on two separate factors: stress–anxiety and warmth–supportiveness (see also Simpson et al., 1996).

Ratings of stress, anxiety, upset, arousal, and emotional hurt indexed stress and anxiety, which is reflective of negative affect. The interrater reliability of each adjective was good (the mean  $\alpha$ s were .72 for women and .75 for men, across the five adjectives). Thus, for each participant, we generated a single score for each adjective by summing the ratings of all the raters. Since the summed ratings for all five adjectives were internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .90 for men and .93 for women), the five adjectives were aggregated to form a global observer-rated *stress–anxiety index*. Scores on this index could range from 7 to 63; higher scores indicate greater stress and anxiety. Dating partners' scores on this index were not correlated,  $r = -.02$ , ns.

The degree to which each dating partner appeared supportive, warm, hostile (reverse-keyed), and cold (reverse-keyed) indexed warmth and supportiveness, which is reflective of positive affect. The interrater reliability of each item was good (the mean  $\alpha$ s across the four items was .68 for women and .77 for men). Therefore, we aggregated raters' scores for each item to create a single score for each adjective. Because the summed ratings across all four items were internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .93 for men and .90 for women), we summed the adjectives to create an observer-rated *warmth–supportiveness index*. Scores on this index could range from 9 to 81; higher scores reflect greater warmth and supportiveness. Warmth and supportiveness were reciprocated within dyads, with dating partners' scores on this index being highly correlated,  $r = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In the second wave of coding, a new set of six raters evaluated the extent to which each individual used particular tactics to influence his or her dating partner. Raters first rated the behaviors of all the women, after which they rated all men. In the first phase of this coding, therefore, women were rated as influence agents and their male partners were evaluated as targets of influence. In the second phase, men were rated as influence agents and their female partners were evaluated as targets. Each individual's influence attempts were rated in terms of the extent to which they involved the use of: (a) coercion, (b) referencing the relationship, and (c) logic and reasoning. Raters coded the use of a single strategy (e.g., coercion) for the *entire* sample before assessing a different strategy (e.g., relationship referencing or logic/reasoning).

Relationship referencing tactics were assessed with four items: (a) "How much did the male/female em-

phasize the importance of the relationship to influence his/her partner?"; (b) "How much did the male/female stress his/her shared outcomes/future as a couple to influence his/her partner?"; (c) "How much did the male/female appeal to his/her partner's love/concern for him/her to influence his/her partner?"; and (d) "How much did the male/female use inclusive terms (e.g., we, us, our) in the conversation?" Each item was rated on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*). The interrater reliability across raters for each item was good (the mean  $\alpha$ s across all four items were .75 and .71, for men and women, respectively). Therefore, we averaged raters' scores for each item. Principal-axis factor analyses revealed that the four items loaded on a single factor within each sex. Therefore, we aggregated the items to form a global observer-rated *relationship referencing index*, which was reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .83 and .85, for men and women, respectively). Scores on this index could range from 4 (signifying that relationship referencing tactics were not used) to 28 (signifying that relationship referencing tactics were used often). Mean scores for this index were 9.96 ( $SD = 2.69$ ) and 10.14 ( $SD = 2.69$ ), for men and women, respectively. The scores ranged from 5.67 to 18.17 and from 5.17 to 17.83, for men and women, respectively.

Coercion tactics were assessed with two items: (a) "How much did the male/female derogate (e.g., belittle, make fun of in a hurtful way) his/her partner when he/she disagreed with him/her?"; and (b) "How much did the male/female display negative affect when the partner failed to conform to his/her wishes?" Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*). The interrater reliability was good for each item across the six raters (the mean  $\alpha$ s were .78 and .71 across raters for both items, for men and women, respectively). Therefore, each item was aggregated across raters and a mean score for each item was calculated for each participant. The two aggregated items were summed to form a global observer-rated *coercion index*. This index was reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .74 and .67, for men and women, respectively). The index was scaled from 2 (signifying that negative coercion was rarely used) to 14 (signifying that negative coercion was used often). Mean scores for the coercion index were 5.18 ( $SD = 1.38$ ) and 5.55 ( $SD = 1.34$ ), for men and women, respectively. Actual scores on this index ranged from 2.83 to 9.83 and from 3.00 to 9.00, for men and women, respectively.

Logic and reasoning tactics were assessed by two items: (a) "How much did the male/female use factual information to change his/her partner's mind?"; and (b) "How much did the male/female use logic to persuade his/her partner?" Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*). The interrater reliability across raters for each item was good (the mean  $\alpha$ s across the two items was .67 and .68, for men and women, respectively). Thus, we aggregated raters' scores to form

a single score for each item that were summed to create a *logic and reasoning index*. This index was reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .77 and .85, for men and women, respectively). It ranged from 2 (signifying that logic and reasoning tactics were not used) to 14 (signifying that logic and reasoning tactics were used often). Mean scores for the logic and reasoning index were 8.63 ( $SD = 1.20$ ) and 8.01 ( $SD = 1.34$ ), for men and women, respectively. Actual scores ranged from 5.67 to 11.67 and from 3.50 to 11.17, for men and women, respectively.

In the third wave of coding, another set of six raters evaluated the degree to which each individual moved toward or away from his or her dating partner's initial advocated position over the course of the discussion. The degree of movement was assessed with two items: (a) "How much did the male/female move toward his/her partner's position (by the end of the discussion)?" and (b) "How much did the male/female move away from his/her partner's position (by the end of the discussion)?" Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*). The interrater reliability across raters for each item was good ( $\alpha$ s = .76 and .70, for men and women, respectively, on movement toward the dating partner;  $\alpha$ s = .70 and .65, for men and women, respectively, on movement away from the dating partner). Thus, we aggregated raters' scores to form separate scores representing the extent of movement toward and away from the dating partner's original position. As expected, movement toward and movement away were highly negatively correlated ( $r$ s =  $-.75$  and  $-.82$ , for men and women, respectively, both  $p$ s < .001). Therefore, movement away from the dating partner's opinion was reverse-scored and the two scales were summed to form a single index of observer-rated *movement (opinion change)*. This index was scaled from 1 (signifying no change) to 7 (signifying considerable change toward the dating partners' advocated position). Mean scores were 3.76 for men and 3.51 for women. Actual scores ranged from 2.30 to 5.90 and from 2.10 to 5.90, for men and women, respectively.

## Results

### *Preliminary tests for gender effects*

Before performing the primary analyses, all variables were tested for gender effects. Sixty-eight percent of the women in the sample was identified as the partner seeking more change in the issue being discussed, compared with 32% of the men. Men and women's self-reported subjective closeness scores did not differ ( $t < 1$ , ns). Regarding strategy use, men and women also did not differ in the frequency with which they used relationship referencing ( $t < 1$ , ns). However, women used

significantly more coercion than men,  $t(122) = -2.87$ ,  $p < .005$ , whereas men used significantly more logic and reasoning than women,  $t(122) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . Regarding eventual movement toward their partners' position, men displayed more movement toward their partner than did women,  $t(122) = 3.21$ ,  $p < .01$ .

#### *Correspondence in use of influence strategies*

To determine whether people who used one strategy to influence their partner also used others, we calculated correlations between the observer ratings of each strategy for each sex. These analyses, which are presented in Table 1, yielded similar associations for men and women. In general, the more individuals used any one influence strategy, the more they used the other two strategies as well. The only exception was the nonsignificant relation for both sexes between the use of negative, punishment-oriented coercion and the more positively toned relationship referencing.

To determine whether the use of influence strategies covaried between relationship partners, we calculated correlations between each partner's strategy use within dating couples (see the results in the boxed area of Table 1). In general, these correlations revealed reciprocity in strategy use. Specifically, greater use of coercion by women correlated significantly with more coercion by their male partners and greater use of relationship referencing by women correlated with greater use of relationship referencing by men. Statistically significant reciprocation, however, was not found for logic and reasoning. In addition, women's use of coercion correlated with men's use of logic and reasoning, such that greater coercion by women was associated with greater use of logic and reasoning by their male partners.

#### *APIM analyses of influence strategy use*

Analyses using the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000) were conducted to test our main hypotheses about the factors governing the use of different influence strategies. The APIM allows one to estimate the extent to which responses are influenced by factors associated with actors (i.e., the individual providing the response) as well as their partners.<sup>3</sup> That is, the APIM estimates both *actor effects* (the effect that an individual's predictor variable score has on his/her *own* outcome score) and *partner effects* (the effect that an individual's predictor score has on his/her *partner's* outcome score). APIM analyses therefore model the statistical interdependence that naturally exists between partners in relationships. Using this ap-

proach, the dyad is treated as the unit of analysis and actor and partner effects are tested with the proper degrees of freedom (based on the number of couples in the study). In the present study, an actor effect would be evident if an individual's own perceptions of subjective closeness to his or her dating partner predicted his/her *own* use of a given influence strategy (controlling for the dating partners' subjective closeness). For instance, the more subjectively close a person feels to his/her dating partner, the more that person should reference the relationship (Path A in Fig. 1). A partner effect would be evident if an individual's own perceptions of subjective closeness predicted his or her *partner's* strategy use (Path B in Fig. 1). In this case, the more subjectively close a person feels toward his or her partner, the more inclined the dating partner should be to reference the relationship.<sup>4</sup>

The primary predictions were tested by treating ratings of strategy use as the dependent variables, subjective closeness as a mixed independent variable, gender as a within independent variable, and which person primarily sought a change in his/her partner's attitudes and behaviors as a between independent variable.<sup>5</sup> The actor and partner effects are presented as regression coefficients. In the analyses, only the independent variables were standardized. All variables were centered using the grand mean. As a result, every one standard unit of change in the independent variables corresponds to one *unstandardized* unit of change in the dependent variables. The degrees of freedom were calculated for each step, using both the degrees of freedom for between couple independent variables and those for within couple variables. Thus, the degrees of freedom vary in different analyses, depending on whether the predictors are between- or within-couple variables.

*Use of relationship referencing.* In support of our hypotheses, the actor main effect for subjective closeness was significant,  $b = .32$ ,  $t(232) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ , indicating that subjectively closer men and women used more

<sup>3</sup> SEM, another useful tool for analyzing dyadic data, was not used to analyze these data because it does not allow for direct tests of interactions.

<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion, it is important to note that “actor” and “partner” effects reflect the dyadic perspective of the data analysis that includes the responses of both members of a couple. The actor/partner distinction is a data analytic convenience to identify the predictor scores of each member of the couple and each of their outcome scores. In contrast, the distinction between influence agent and target of influence reflects the theoretical distinction between the dating partner who delivers an influence appeal (the agent) and the partner who receives it (the target). When discussing the use and effectiveness of influence strategies, both terms are relevant. As can be seen in Fig. 1, when actor effects emerge, the actor and agent are one and the same. However, when partner effects emerge, the actor is not the influence agent. Instead, the partner is the agent delivering the influence appeal.

<sup>5</sup> A between-couple variable is one in which both members of each couple are assigned the same score. A within-couple variable is one in which the averaged score for both partners in each couple is constant across all couples. A mixed variable is one in which the averaged score for the couple is not constant, either within- or between couples.

Table 1  
Correlations between the observer-rated influence strategies

	Male coercion	Male logic and reasoning	Male identification	Female coercion	Female logic and reasoning	Female identification
Male coercion	—					
Male logic/reasoning	.35**	—				
Male identification	.02	.32**	—			
Female coercion	.46**	.20*	-.16	—		
Female logic/reasoning	.13	.14	-.18	.45**	—	
Female identification	-.12	-.07	.35**	.03	.34**	—

Note. All tests of correlations are two-tailed. Higher scores indicated greater correspondence between partners in use of each strategy. The cross-person correlations between male and female partners are shown in the boxed area.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

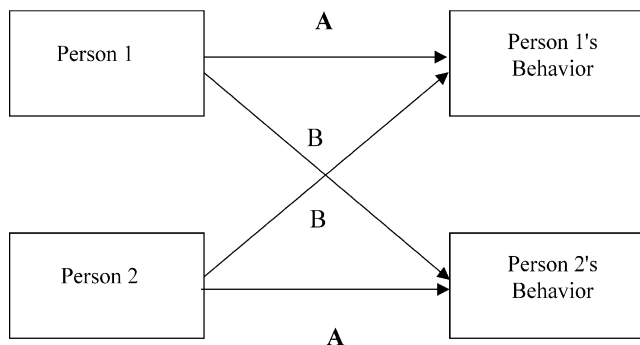


Fig. 1. Actor/partner effects. Paths labeled “A” indicate actor effects. Paths labeled “B” indicate partner effects.

relationship referencing tactics to influence their dating partners than did less close men and women. In predicting the use of relationship referencing by the dating partner, a marginally significant partner effect also emerged for the interaction between which dating partner was seeking change and the subjective closeness of the actor,  $b = -.34$ ,  $t(155) = -1.94$ ,  $p < .06$ . This interaction revealed that if the person seeking more change was higher in subjective closeness, *their dating partners* were more likely to use relationship referencing tactics in their influence attempts.

We then conducted a series of analyses to control for potential confounds by entering the control variables as predictors into the general model (described above) and treated strategy use as the dependent variable. When we entered as predictors the ratings of warmth–supportiveness and stress–anxiety into the equations predicting use of relationship referencing, the actor main effect for subjective closeness remained statistically significant,  $b = .43$ ,  $t(222) = 2.66$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the partner interaction remained marginally significant,  $b = -.35$ ,  $t(157) = -1.93$ ,  $p < .06$ . When we controlled for the overlap in participants’ use of each influence strategy by including as predictors the frequency with which participants used each of the other two strategies, the actor main effect for subjective closeness remained significant,  $b = .61$ ,  $t(206) = 2.34$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the partner inter-

action was significant,  $b = -.65$ ,  $t(209) = -2.18$ ,  $p < .05$ . Finally, when we entered into the predictive models the degree to which each person rated the topic as a major problem in their relationship, and thus controlled for severity of the problem discussed, statistically significant effects remained for the actor main effect for subjective closeness,  $b = .26$ ,  $t(232) = 2.03$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the partner interaction,  $b = -.37$ ,  $t(209) = -2.44$ ,  $p < .05$ .<sup>6</sup> These results therefore appear to be robust.

*Use of coercion.* Contrary to expectations, a marginally significant actor main effect for subjective closeness revealed that closer individuals were somewhat *more* likely to use coercive tactics,  $b = .15$ ,  $t(232) = 1.92$ ,  $p < .06$ . This effect remained marginally significant when we controlled for ratings of stress–anxiety and warmth–supportiveness,  $b = .13$ ,  $t(232) = 1.66$ ,  $p < .10$ , the use of the other influence strategies,  $b = .25$ ,  $t(217) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .07$ , and problem severity,  $b = .11$ ,  $t(172) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .09$ . We elaborate on this unexpected marginal result in the discussion.

*Use of logic and reasoning.* A significant actor main effect emerged for subjective closeness predicting the use of logic and reasoning,  $b = .18$ ,  $t(223) = 2.68$ ,  $p < .01$ , such that subjectively closer individuals were more likely to use logic and reasoning to influence their dating partners. A marginally significant actor effect also emerged for the interaction involving which dating partner sought more change and the subjective closeness of the actor,  $b = .13$ ,  $t(182) = 1.77$ ,  $p < .08$ . This interaction revealed that women (but not men) were more likely to use logic and reasoning tactics if they felt subjectively closer and their dating partners wanted

<sup>6</sup> We also conducted separate analyses controlling for self-rated measures of how stressful participants found the discussion as well as how upset, anxious, and aroused they felt. Treating use of each influence strategy as a dependent variable, most of the statistically significant effects reported in the text remained significant. The only exception was the partner interaction predicting the use of relationship referencing. After controlling for the self-reported measure of arousal, the partner interaction predicting relationship referencing was marginally significant. Further information about these analyses can be obtained from the first author.

more change. When we controlled for ratings of stress–anxiety and warmth–supportiveness, the actor main effect remained statistically significant,  $b = .23$ ,  $t(215) = 2.87$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the interaction remained marginally significant,  $b = .16$ ,  $t(177) = 1.86$ ,  $p < .07$ . However, when we controlled for the use of the other influence strategies, both effects were no longer significant (both  $t$ s  $< 1$ ). When we controlled for problem severity, the actor main effect remained significant,  $b = .18$ ,  $t(223) = 2.64$ ,  $p < .01$ , but the interaction was no longer statistically significant ( $t < 1$ ). Because the findings for logic and reasoning appear to be dependent on the relation between this strategy and the other two forms of influence, we will not discuss the determinants of logic and reasoning further.

#### *Correlations between influence strategies and influence effectiveness*

To examine the effectiveness of the three influence strategies, we calculated correlations between how much each individual changed his or her opinion on the issue during the discussion (rated by observers) and the extent to which his/her dating partner used each influence strategy (also rated by observers). As predicted, a positive correlation was found between each individual's amount of movement (opinion change) and his or her partner's amount of movement,  $r(122) = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ . In other words, shifts in attitudes during the discussions tended to be reciprocal within couples, reflecting either mutual compromise or mutual polarization.

To determine how effective each influence strategy was in changing partners' opinions, we computed correlations between each individual's movement toward his or her partner's position and his or her partner's use of each influence strategy (see Table 2). The results were consistent for both sexes. Only relationship referencing proved to be an effective influence strategy. In general, the more agents referenced the relationship, the more targets shifted toward agents' positions. This was particularly true if men used relationship referencing. Greater use of logic and reasoning was not associated with the amount of opinion change. Greater use of coercion was associated with less opinion change, with individuals being less likely to move toward their partners' advocated positions the more their partners expressed negative affect and derogated them.

#### *APIM analyses of influence effectiveness*

To determine whether the relations between influence strategy use and opinion change found in the bivariate correlations reported above also emerged in regression models, APIM analyses were conducted treating rating of opinion change as the dependent variable. For these analyses, use of a given influence strategy and subjective

closeness scores served as mixed independent variables, gender was a within-couple independent variable, and which dating partner sought more change was a between independent variable. Actor effects would indicate that the opinion change of each person resulted from his/her own subjective closeness or from his or her own use of a particular influence strategy. Partner effects, in contrast, would signify that an individual's movement resulted from his or her dating partner's use of a given strategy or from his or her dating partner's degree of subjective closeness.

*Effectiveness of relationship referencing.* As expected, a marginally significant actor effect,  $b = .08$ ,  $t(228) = 1.86$ ,  $p < .07$ , and a significant partner effect,  $b = .12$ ,  $t(228) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ , emerged for the use of relationship referencing predicting partners' opinion change. The actor effect indicated that influence agents moved toward the influence targets' advocated positions if the influence agent referenced the relationship more. Similarly, the partner effect indicated that influence targets moved toward influence agents' advocated position if the agent referenced the relationship more. Additionally, a significant partner interaction,  $b = -.07$ ,  $t(113) = -3.01$ ,  $p < .01$ , was found for subjective closeness and relationship referencing. This interaction revealed that using relationship referencing predicted greater movement by the partner toward his or her dating partner's advocated position, and that this was particularly true if the actor was less subjectively close.<sup>7</sup>

We then conducted a series of analyses to control for potential confounds by entering the control variables as predictors into the general model (described above) and treated rated opinion change as the dependent variable. When we entered ratings of stress–anxiety and warmth–supportiveness into the equation as predictors to control for the affective tone of the interaction, the actor effect

<sup>7</sup> Our primary analyses focused on measures of observed attitude change. Opinion movement could also be associated with the degree to which partners perceived that their discussion was productive or believed that they had resolved the problem. Ratings of opinion movement were moderately correlated with perceptions that the discussion was productive ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ , for men and women, respectively) and beliefs that the problem was resolved ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ , and  $r = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ , for men and women, respectively). Thus, we also conducted separate analyses treating these two self-report measures as dependent variables. For the self-report measure of perceived problem resolution, a marginally significant partner effect for relationship referencing emerged. Greater use of relationship referencing by the influence agent was associated with reports of more problem resolution by the target. A significant actor and partner effect for coercion was also found. Greater use of coercion was associated with reports of less problem resolution for both the agent and the target. No effects emerged for internalization. Treating the self-report measure of productivity of the discussion as the dependent variable, no effects emerged for relationship referencing. For coercion and logic and reasoning, however, the results mirrored the findings we report in the text for rated opinion movement. Further information about these analyses can be obtained from the first author.

Table 2  
Correlations between the use of influence strategies and partners' opinion change

Influence strategy	Men	Women
Coercion	-.28**	-.34**
Logic/reasoning	-.07	-.15
Relationship referencing	.26**	.18*

Note. Positive values reflect shifts toward the partner's original advocated position with greater use of that strategy; negative values reflect divergence from the partner's original position.

\*  $p < .10$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

remained marginally significant,  $b = .09$ ,  $t(232) = 1.94$ ,  $p < .06$ , and the partner effect remained significant,  $b = .13$ ,  $t(232) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .01$ . The interactions, however, were no longer significant (both  $ts < 1$ ). To ensure that our findings were not attributable to the influence agents' degree of involvement in the discussion, we also controlled for the degree to which each person rated the topic as a major problem in their relationship. Controlling for problem severity, the actor effect remained significant,  $b = .04$ ,  $t(237) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ , the partner effect remained significant,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(237) = 3.74$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the partner interaction remained marginally significant,  $b = -.02$ ,  $t(231) = -1.89$ ,  $p < .07$ . The actor interaction, however, was no longer significant.<sup>8</sup>

*Effectiveness of coercion.* Consistent with the bivariate correlations, an actor main effect emerged for coercion,  $b = -.39$ ,  $t(227) = -10.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that individuals tended to move away from their dating partners' original positions the more partners used coercive tactics. This effect remained significant when we controlled for both stress–anxiety and warmth–supportiveness,  $b = -.41$ ,  $t(214) = -10.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , and problem severity,  $b = -.34$ ,  $t(234) = -11.30$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Effectiveness of logic and reasoning.* An unexpected actor main effect emerged,  $b = -.14$ ,  $t(192) = -3.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that individuals moved away from their dating partners' original positions the more they (the actor) used logic and reasoning. This effect remained significant when we controlled for both warmth–supportiveness and stress–anxiety,  $b = -.15$ ,  $t(188) = -3.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , and problem severity,  $b = -.16$ ,  $t(222) = -4.41$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Effectiveness of multiple strategies.* Although we had no predictions about the combined effects of influence strategies, we conducted exploratory analyses to assess the effectiveness of combinations of strategies. For these analyses, use of all three strategies and subjective

closeness scores served as mixed independent variables, gender was a within-couple independent variable, and which dating partner sought more change was a between independent variable. Of the three possible influence strategy combinations, the only significant finding was a not highly meaningful interaction between the use of relationship referencing and logic and reasoning,  $b = -.03$ ,  $t(229) = -2.52$ ,  $p < .05$ . It revealed that influence agents who used less logic and reasoning were more likely to move toward their partners' opinions if they also used more rather than less relationship referencing. When influence agents used more logic and reasoning, the use of relationship referencing had little impact on their opinion change toward their partners.

*Subjective closeness and observed attitude change.* Our theoretical framework implies that an influence agent's subjective closeness might promote opinion change in their partners via the amount of relationship referencing agents display. However, given that participants' degree of subjective closeness was not significantly correlated with their partners' amount of opinion change [men's use of relationship referencing and women's opinion change,  $r(122) = .10$ , ns, and women's use of relationship referencing and men's opinion change,  $r(122) = -.05$ , ns] mediation analyses could not be performed (see Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998).

## Discussion

In a dyadic problem solving paradigm, this study examined the extent to which dating partners spontaneously used different strategies to influence their partners and the degree to which different strategies predicted overt changes in partner's attitudes toward the problem being discussed. Guided by classic theories of social influence, most notably Kelman's (1958, 1961) notion of identification, we hypothesized that one major source of influence power for dating partners who are subjectively close should be the value of the relationship itself. Accordingly, we predicted that influence strategies would be framed in terms of existing relationship norms or role expectations when individuals felt closer to their dating partners and defined themselves more in terms of the relationship. As predicted, individuals who reported being subjectively closer to their dating partners were more likely to use identification-based influence tactics that invoked relationship norms, belongingness, and the importance of the couple as a "unit." These individuals, for example, typically structured their influence attempts by saying things such as, "This issue is important to our future together; please see it my way" or "We've done this in the past and it worked for us then."

The present findings also underscore the intrinsically dyadic nature of influence processes. Considerable reciprocity was found in the influence strategies used by

<sup>8</sup> We also conducted separate analyses controlling for self-rated measures of how stressful participants found the discussion along with how upset, anxious, and aroused they felt. The results predicting opinion movement replicated those reported for problem severity. Further information about these analyses can be obtained from the first author.

partners within dyads. The more individuals utilized any one strategy, the more their partners used that strategy in return. Furthermore, reciprocity was found in the amount of opinion change each partner displayed during the discussion. Whereas most dating partners shifted their opinions toward one another and compromised their positions during the discussions, some partners displayed reciprocity by polarizing their initial opinions away from their partners' opinions. It is impressive that this synchrony in opinion shifts was observed in a short (7–10 min) discussion.

The dyadic nature of influence was also evident in the relationship referencing results. We hypothesized that individuals would reference their relationships more if their dating partners (i.e., the targets of influence) were higher on subjective closeness. Though this effect did not emerge in the exact form we predicted, it did appear as a marginally significant interaction involving another predictor variable, namely, which dating partner was seeking the most change in others' behaviors and attitudes. This partner interaction effect revealed that, when subjectively closer men and women wanted more change, *their dating partners* were more likely to use relationship referencing tactics. This suggests that people adjust the content of their influence appeals to meet the requirements of both the problem under discussion as well as the attributes of their dating partners. When their dating partners are subjectively closer and are motivated to initiate changes in the relationship, influence agents accentuate the importance of the relationship and try to explain how the position they are advocating is consistent with existing relationship norms, values, and practices.

Subjectively closer individuals were also more likely to use negative coercion tactics to influence their dating partners. Although this effect was marginal and requires replication, subjectively closer individuals may simply be motivated to work harder to influence their dating partners, using an array of different strategies to change their partners' opinions.<sup>9</sup>

Over the course of their relationships, subjectively closer individuals may amass "idiosyncrasy credits" that allow them to occasionally exhibit negative behaviors when discussing important issues without having to worry about retribution from their partners or doing

irrevocable damage to their relationships (see Sillars, 1980).

### *Influence strategies and opinion change*

The present study also examined the relation between the three influence strategies and how much dating partners changed their opinions on the discussion topics. The only influence strategy that predicted changes in targets' opinions in the desired direction was relationship referencing. Both agents and targets of influence shifted toward their dating partners' positions when the agent referenced the relationship during influence attempts. Greater use of logic and reasoning was not conducive to change, and greater use of coercion was counterproductive, leading dating partners to move farther away from each other's advocated views.

The greater use of relationship referencing may have generated opinion shifts through a variety of psychological processes. For example, the mutual compromise in positions associated with the use of greater relationship referencing might have stemmed from behavioral concessions, in which compromises made by one dating partner were matched by the other partner's attitude shifts (Cialdini et al., 1992; Dijksterhuis, 2001). Alternatively, agents who used more relationship referencing might have presented arguments that favored mutual compromise (e.g., explaining the undesirable consequences for the relationship of not mutually yielding), or they may have presented more powerful heuristic cues supporting agreement and harmony (e.g., "Let's agree for the sake of the relationship").

Regardless of the specific mechanisms through which relationship referencing generated observed attitude change, this strategy is effective because it primes individual's commitment to the relationship and highlights the importance of acting in a way that maintains the relationship. The link between relationship referencing and observed attitude change is consistent with perspectives in social influence that consider attitude change to be a product of identification with important social groups (e.g., Turner, 1991; Wood, 1999). The identities associated with the fairly long and well-established dating relationships in the present study apparently served as potent sources of power for generating agreement between dating partners.

Our theoretical framework implies that subjective closeness might promote observed attitude change through its effects on relationship referencing. However, no such mediation was found. Although subjective closeness was significantly correlated with the use of relationship referencing and the use of relationship referencing correlated with partners' attitude change, subjective closeness was not directly correlated with partners' attitude change. Given the multitude of factors that could have affected attitude change (e.g., the nature

<sup>9</sup> Raters coded the frequency with which individuals used each influence strategy relative to other individuals in the sample. Thus, a person who appeared disengaged throughout an entire discussion received low scores on all three influence tactics. The relative magnitude of scores on each influence strategy, however, cannot be compared because ratings assessed how often a person used a given strategy *relative to other people* rather than relative to alternate strategies. Furthermore, certain strategies (e.g., coercion) were displayed less frequently than other strategies (e.g., identification). Therefore, we cannot and do not make comparisons *between* the three influence tactics in terms of how frequently they were displayed.

of the problem being discussed, its history in the relationship, the degree to which different influence tactics were employed by each partner), it may have been unrealistic to expect that a relatively “distal” variable like an influence agent’s subjective closeness would reliably predict a target’s amount of attitude change directly.

It is also interesting to consider the processes underlying the association between coercion and attitude change. The boomerang opinion shifts found for greater use of compliance strategies could reflect behavioral reciprocity, whereby targets shifted away from the agent’s advocated position to reciprocate the negative affect in coercive strategies. In addition, agents using coercive strategies may have provided strong arguments that maintained and further differentiated each partner’s initial opinion about the issue being discussed (e.g., elucidating the negative consequences for the self of yielding), or they may have presented strong heuristic cues that exacerbated the problem (e.g., “This argument is me against you”).

#### *Potential confounds*

As would be expected, each influence strategy had a particular pattern of affective valence. Greater coercion was associated with the display of more stress and anxiety during the discussions, whereas greater relationship referencing was associated with the display of more warmth and supportiveness. Although a negative affective tone is inherent in coercion and a positive tone is inherent in relationship referencing, the analyses controlling for warmth–supportiveness and stress–anxiety revealed that affect alone did not account for the results we found for the use of different influence strategies. For example, subjective closeness still predicted greater use of relationship referencing and the frequency of use of each strategy continued to predict dating partners’ amount of opinion change even when affect was statistically controlled. The associations between strategy use, subjective closeness, and opinion change therefore appear to be attributable to the unique content of the strategies themselves and not merely their affective tone.

We were also able to rule out another potential confound, the influence agents’ degree of personal involvement in the discussion. Agents who rated the problem as being a major issue in their relationship might plausibly have been more motivated to use all three strategies in a concerted effort to change their partners’ behavior or attitudes. However, when we conducted analyses to control for problem severity (as reported by the influence agents themselves), the primary results remained intact. For example, with problem severity controlled, subjective closeness still predicted greater use of both relationship referencing and the frequency of use of each strategy continued to predict changes in dating partners’ opinions. Thus, by

conducting analyses that controlled for potential alternate explanations of our findings, we were able to demonstrate the robustness of our results across the affective tone in the discussion and the perceived importance of the discussion problem.

#### **Summary and conclusions**

It is important to note that our predictor variables were not experimentally manipulated. Because we were studying dating couples, it was not ethically possible to manipulate the subjective closeness of either dating partner. Consequently, we were limited to observing how real dating couples with unique histories and varying levels of subjective closeness tried to influence each other. The correlational nature of our data does not, of course, allow us to draw any causal inferences about subjective closeness and influence strategy use.

The present study demonstrates that influence in close relationships can be understood in terms of classic models developed to explain social influence across a wide variety of settings (French & Raven, 1959; Kelman, 1958). Although we examined social influence in a setting different from the contexts typically examined in laboratory-based persuasion research, this study confirms that theoretically meaningful influence tactics are deployed when couples attempt to resolve relationship problems. By investigating influence processes in a relatively ecologically valid setting, we were able to observe, without artificially constraining or limiting interactions, how influence agents with different interpersonal motives try to elicit attitude change. It is of course possible that our findings are tied to the specific context that we examined. For example, relationship referencing might be used more often when partners negotiate relationship-based problems than in other influence contexts, such as making new, joint decisions with a partner. Nevertheless, given the importance of social relationships across a variety of life contexts, it seems likely that relationships will emerge as important motivators of influence in a range of interactions including those with family members, friends, and close co-workers.

Our approach differs from standard social influence models in recognizing the multiple motives that can produce observed attitude change in a given interaction. In our study, participants did not rely solely on identification as a strategy to influence their dating partners; they also used coercive tactics, which motivate agreement through punishments for noncompliance, as well as logic and reasoning, which motivate agreement by convincing others that a given position fits well within their broader values and goals. Thus, people rely on a variety of motives when attempting to influence their partners in ongoing relationships.

An innovative feature of our approach is that it conceptualizes social influence as a dynamic, dyadic process that unfolds in response to the attributes and motives of both relationship partners. According to this view, influence is a component of social interaction that entails the attributes of both dating partners. We found that the influence strategies devised by individuals reflected not only their own motives to belong to the relationship but also their partners' motives. Furthermore, influence was a reciprocal phenomenon, with both dating partners either compromising their initially divergent positions or experiencing polarization. These findings move beyond static conceptions of influence agents who deliver appeals and targets who respond by agreeing with or resisting influence attempts and they provide important evidence of the intrinsically interactive nature of influence in ongoing relationships.

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