

## DURATION OF MARRIAGE AND PERCEPTUAL BEHAVIOR OF SPOUSES

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The present study is an attempt to investigate social perception, specifically within the marital relationship and to test hypotheses regarding husband-and-wife perceptual behavior in relation to length of marriage.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Self-concept or self-perception.* The self-concept has been defined as an "organized picture existing in the field of awareness, of the self and the self-in-representation, together with the positive and the negative values attached to such relationship" (Rogers, 1951).

Here, we deal with the conscious self-concept (Rogers, 1951). It is the self as the individual is known to himself. For the present study, the self-concept is the obtained ranking of adjective traits made by a subject, describing what is best characteristic and least characteristic of himself. *Hs* stands for husband perceives himself and *Ws* stands for wife perceives herself.

*Spouse concept or spouse perception.* The spouse concept is the obtained ranking of adjectives from best descriptive to least descriptive, which a subject makes in characterizing his/her spouse. *Hw* stands for husband perceiving his wife, and *Wh* stands for wife perceiving her husband.

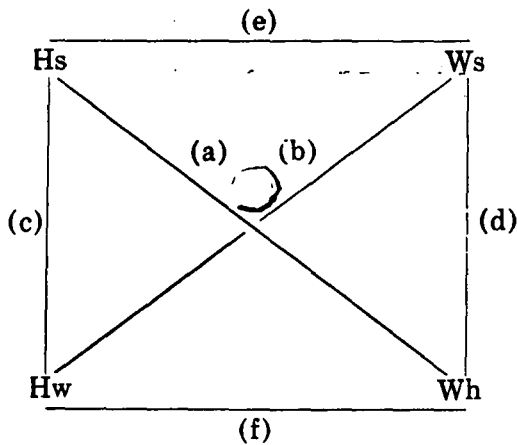
The obtained rankings of trait adjectives in describing oneself and in describing one's spouse were considered valid expressions of the way the subject

chose to present himself, and his opinion of his spouse.

*Independent variable: duration of marriage.* Several related studies have referred to environmental events as social interactional settings. Changes in the environment have been found to influence corresponding changes in the perceptual behavior of the interacting individuals (Manis, 1955). Length of marriage may be viewed as setting the opportunity for these interactional and environmental events (Landis, 1952). The events assumed to have occurred during the duration of marriage, therefore, constitute the actual independent variable in this study. *Ny* represents the number of years the couples have been married.

The terms "increase" and "decrease" are likewise represented by the respective symbols,  $<$  and  $>$ .

*Dependent variable: congruence of self- and spouse perceptions.* If individual and social behavior are to be included in a single theory, the basic monadic unit of behavior (single self-concept, *Hs*, *Ws*, and single spouse concept, *Hw*, *Wh*) must be expandable into a dyadic one (Cronbach, 1955). A dyadic unit is one that describes the congruence between the perceptual behavior of the husband and of the wife. A dyadic unit is desirable as a means of conceptualizing the relationships (Thibaut, 1959) between husband and wife.



In the present research we have six dyadic units describing the combined rating of the husband and the wife, or their perceptual congruence scores.

- (a)  $(Wh \cong Hs) \text{ or } W \rightarrow h \cong Hs$
- (b)  $(Hw \cong Ws) \text{ or } H \rightarrow w \cong Ws$
- (c)  $Hs \cong Hw \text{ or } Hs \cong H \rightarrow w$
- (d)  $(Ws \cong Wh) \text{ or } Ws \cong W \rightarrow h$
- (e)  $(Hs \cong Ws) \text{ or } Hs \cong Ws$
- (f)  $(Hw \cong Wh) \text{ or } H \rightarrow w \cong W \rightarrow h$

#### Hypotheses

Role theory suggests that "the integrative quality of marriage is reflected in degrees of concordance and discrepancies among the partners' qualitative role perceptions and expectations as reciprocally reported by them" (Mangus, 1957). It is assumed, then, that with longer duration of marriage, its integrative function will effect an increase in the accuracy of perceiving one's spouse (taking accuracy in terms of greater congruence with the spouse's self-perception). It is, therefore, hypothesized that:

- (a) As years grow in marriage, there is an increase in congruence between the wife's perception of her husband, and her husband's self-perception. As  $Ny <$ ,  $(Wh \cong Hs) <$ .

- (b) As years grow in marriage, there is an increase in congruence between the husband's perception of his wife and his wife's self-perception. As  $Ny <$ ,  $(Hw \cong Ws) <$ .

If interpersonal attraction is assumed to occur between two people who have gotten married, perceiving similarity of the other to self is probably its initial facilitating factor (Newcomb, 1956). However, whereas high congruence in self-perception and perception of spouse occurs in the beginning of the relationship, length of marriage may serve to effect a decrease in perceiving congruence, as the inferred environmental and interactional events give the couple more chances to really know each other (Burgess, 1953). In short, the primary "idealism" characterizing newly-weds decreases with length of marriage. Therefore:

- (c) As years grow in marriage, there is a decrease in congruence between the husband's self-perception and his perception of his wife. As  $Ny <$ ,  $(Hs \cong Hw) >$ .
- (d) As years grow in marriage, there is a decrease in congruence between the wife's self-perception and her perception of her husband. As  $Ny <$ ,  $(Ws \cong Wh) >$ .

Inconsistent findings regarding similarity of self-perceptions are evidenced in related studies (Brant, 1958; Friedler, 1952; Izard, 1960; Preston, Peltz, Mudd & Frosher, 1952). Based on the common belief that married couples "tend to look more and more alike" (Berelson, 1964), we explored the hypothesis that:

- (e) As years grow in marriage, there is an increase in congruence between married couples' self-perception. As  $Ny <$ ,  $(Hs \cong Ws) <$ .

It is suggested (Berelson, 1964) that a delicate balance characterizes the early marital situation where there is no other support within the husband-wife relationship for either one in case of disagreement, and where, therefore, greater mutual tolerance and more effort to please each other are deemed necessary for the survival of the relationship. As the couple grow in familiarity with each other and with the relationship, the initial effort of avoiding disagreement diminishes. The partners feel more free to express differences in judgment, including the way they appraise each other. So, we likewise explored the hypothesis that:

- (f) As years grow in marriage, there is a decrease in congruence between spouse perceptions. As  $N_y <$ ,  $(H_w \cong W_h) >$ .

To recapitulate, the six hypotheses in formula form are:

- (a) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(W_h \cong H_s) <$ .  
 (b) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(H_w \cong W_s) <$ .  
 (c) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(H_s \cong H_w) >$ .  
 (d) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(W_s \cong W_h) >$ .  
 (e) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(H_s \cong W_s) <$ .  
 (f) As  $N_y <$ ,  $(H_w \cong W_h) >$ .

## METHOD

### Subjects

The subjects were 120 married couples equally divided into four experimental groups: Group I, 1 to 5 years married; Group II, 5 to 10 years married; Group III, 10 to 15 years married; and Group IV, 15 to 20 years married. The subjects were acquired with the help of three sources: the Christian Family Movement, a market research firm, and personal acquaintances of the experimenter. The subjects were matched for educational attainment, occupation, socio-economic level, religion, nationality, and months or years of travel. All subjects were Catholic Filipinos residing in the Greater Manila Area. The majority belonged to the middle and upper-middle class.

### Test Instrument and Procedure

The test Alternation Ranking of Trait Adjectives, provides an organized way of dealing with what a subject says about himself and his spouse. It was constructed by the Ateneo Central Guidance, following the Q-sort technique developed by Stephenson (1953). It consists of two lists of 25 trait adjectives, both favorable (e.g. appreciative, gentle, happy) and unfavorable (e.g. sarcastic, harsh, self-centered). De Jesus (1965) reported that based on a random sample of 50 subjects, the self-concept instrument had a mean repeat-reliability coefficient of .73.

Using the two lists of trait adjectives one at a time, each husband was asked to rate his wife, and each wife her husband, along the continuum "most descriptive of my wife/husband" to "least descriptive of my wife/husband" by the alternation ranking method. Instructions given to subjects marking the lists, solicit direct, conscious responses which tap the subject's perception and his willingness to express this perception. The forms for each couple were given codes by which to trace the husband-and-wife pair afterwards. The couples were told not to write any identifying mark and to work independently on their own forms. The ratings made on the spouses were collected before the subjects were asked to rate themselves along the continuum "most descriptive of myself" to "least descriptive of myself," by the same alternation ranking procedure using the same instrument.

The obtained rankings representing perceptions of self and of spouse were then forced on a 9-point distribution of stanines yielding four distributions of ratings (monadic units:  $H_s, W_s, H_w, W_h$ ). From these four distributions of ratings, six coefficients of correlation were calculated for each married couple. These correlations translated into  $z$  scores represented the six perceptual congruence scores of each married couple (dyadic units:  $W_h \cong H_s, H_w \cong W_s, H_s \cong H_w, W_s \cong W_h, H_s \cong W_s,$  and  $H_w \cong W_h$ ).

The perceptual congruence scores of the four experimental groups were then compared. In effect, six one-way analyses of variance were computed to test for significant differences among the four groups in each of the congruence scores. An  $F$  ratio of 2.68 would indicate over-all significant difference among the groups in a congruence item, and therefore followed by  $t$  tests to locate where the differences lay. A  $t$  score of 1.98 would indicate that the difference between the two groups under observation was significant at the .05 level.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the obtained  $F$  or variance ratios. The asterisks indicate which over-all variances or differences are significant at the .01 level.

We find the congruence between couples' self- and spouse perceptions for

TABLE 1

INTER-GROUP DIFFERENCE IN CONGRUENCE BETWEEN PERCEPTION OF SELF AND OF SPOUSE (N = 120 PAIRS)

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
	$W_h \approx H_s$	$H_w \approx W_s$	$H_s \approx H_w$	$W_s \approx W_h$	$H_s \approx W_s$	$H_w \approx W_h$
F	4.08*	1.61	4.61*	5.16*	.25	2.55

\*  $p < .01$

hypotheses (a), (c), and (d) yielding F ratios of 4.08, 4.61, and 5.16 which are significant beyond the .01 level. On the other hand, congruence between couples' self- and spouse perceptions as stated in hypotheses (b), (e), and (f) yielded F ratios of 1.61, .25, and 2.55 respectively, indicating no significant differences among the four groups even at the .05 level. The significant differences shown by the four groups in the perceptual congruence items reflected in hypotheses (a), (c), and (d) were defined more concretely through t tests.

A summary of the mean congruence z scores of husband and wife perceptions are shown in Table 2. These mean z scores are plotted on graphs (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Hypotheses (a) and (b)

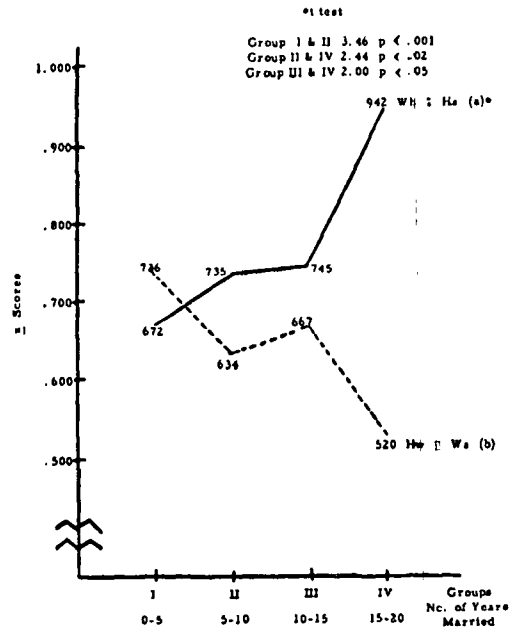


FIG. 1. Plotted mean congruence z scores between perception by spouse and spouse's self-perception.

TABLE 2

MEAN z CONGRUENCE SCORES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE PERCEPTIONS AMONG FOUR GROUPS

Group (Ny)	(a) $W_h \approx H_s$	(b) $H_w \approx W_s$	(c) $H_s \approx H_w$	(d) $W_s \approx W_h$	(e) $H_s \approx W_s$	(f) $H_w \approx W_h$
I (0-5)	.672	.736	.876	1.015	.602	.680
II (5-10)	.735	.634	.653	.738	.566	.546
III (10-15)	.745	.667	.699	.687	.621	.650
IV (15-20)	.942	.530	.520	.614	.556	.468

are illustrated in Figure 1, (c) and (d) in Figure 2, and (e) and (f) in Figure 3.

Observation of plotted mean (Figure 1) z scores between wife's perception of husband and husband's self-perception shows a continuous increase in congruence from the youngest (Group I)

to the oldest group (IV). Plotted mean congruence z scores of husband's perception of wife relative to wife's self-perception reveal a decreasing trend.

Figure 2 illustrates a significant decrease in mean z score congruences of (c) and (d). The youngest group per-

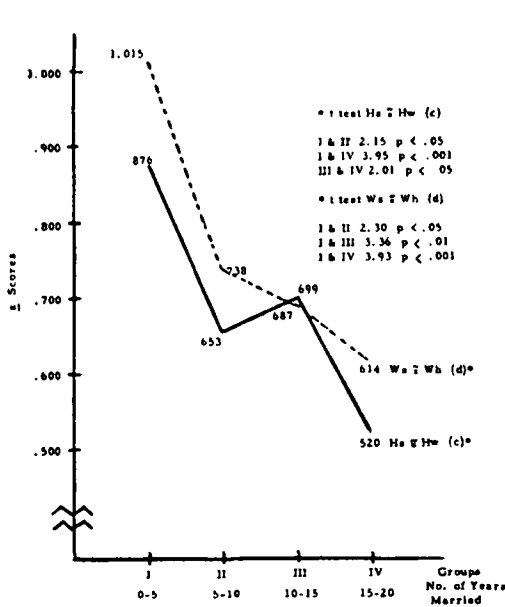


FIG. 2. Plotted mean congruence z scores between self-perception and perception of spouse.

ceived themselves and their spouses more highly similar than the oldest group. Specially noticeable is the steep drop of congruence scores in the second group (significant at .05 level). In general, wives show higher congruence scores in perceiving themselves and their husbands, than do husbands.

The mean congruence z scores between husband and wife self-perceptions yielded no significant intergroup differences thus indicating consistency among the four groups. Figure 3 illustrates this consistency in congruence of self-perceptions. Likewise, there were no significant differences among the four groups regarding congruence of spouse perceptions. A decreasing trend is apparent, however, from the plotted mean z score congruences between the husband's perception of his wife and the wife's perception of her husband (Figure 3).

DISCUSSION

Within limits of the assumption of representativeness of the samples taken, and of the adequacy of the scoring tech-

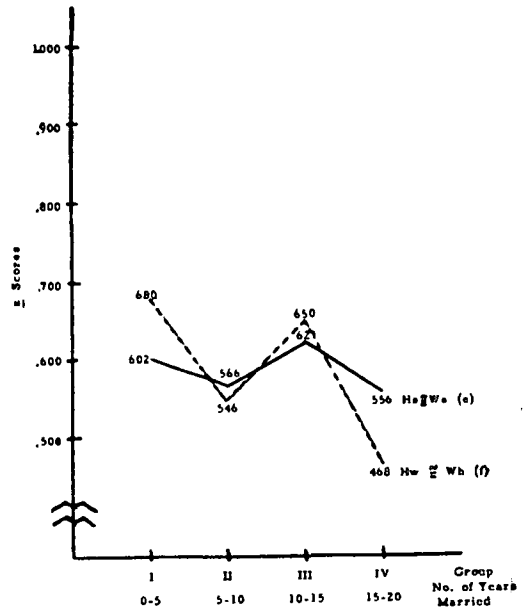


FIG. 3. Plotted mean congruence z scores between self-perceptions (e) Hs = Ws and between spouse perceptions (f) Hw = Wh.

nique, it is possible to draw up tentative explanations on the foregoing results. It must be remembered that the dyadic congruence score is the combined conscious perceptions of the husband and of the wife—the specific conceptualization of an interactional relationship in the realm of their perceptual behavior (Sears, 1951). How then does the social interaction even assumed to occur with length of marriage affect the perceptual behavior of married couples? What factors within the marital interrelationship serve to explain the changes in their perceptual behavior?

Comparison of Four Groups of Married Couples on Congruence Between Self- and Spouse Perception

Hypotheses (a) and (b). Figure 1 shows length of marriage to be associated with wives seeing their husbands as their husbands see themselves, but not significantly associated with husbands seeing their wives as their wives see themselves. An adequate explanation of this phenomenon is couched in role theory.

The husband role is more instrumental, and the wife role more integrative and expressive (Berelson, 1964; Kotler, 1962; Tharp, 1963). In our society, the husband is expected to provide material support and at least to exercise de jure authority within the family, while the wife is expected to provide affection and moral support. The "breadwinner" role of the husband affords him a leeway of activities; the wife role demands a thorough commitment to domestic attitudes, thereby limiting her activities primarily to her husband, home, and children. Thus, her emotional investment and effort at adjustment is necessarily greater. As the novelty of the marriage relationship develops into familiarity and routine, the instrumental role of the husband serves to render him decreasingly concerned over his wife as he becomes increasingly preoccupied with the interests of his occupational world, while the wife role expectations drive her to be more perceptive of her husband's qualities and needs.

Besides the difference in role expectations between husband and wife, marital strain tends to be greater in the wife than in the husband, because the course of her ways change considerably more than her husband's in marriage. Hence, her share in the process of accommodation is greater than his. The man goes to work after marriage as he did before, and even when he returns to his own home, he still returns to someone who provides for his needs in food and rest. Although he must assume new economic responsibilities and his affectional life is assumed to be richer than before, his life habits need not be greatly disturbed. For the woman, however, the change is usually far greater. Before marriage, she is either in her parents' home, where she seldom carries much responsibility or else out in work of her own,

coming and going in much the same way as the man at work. But in marriage, her activities and responsibilities are directed toward her primary function — the integration of her home. The success of her marriage depends on her ability to make the proper adjustments. If the effort at adjustment demanded of the wife is to succeed, it is necessary that she perceive her immediate environment accurately. Since her husband is the primary environmental object to which adjustment is to be made, the proper recognition of his personal characteristics is of utmost importance to her. Therefore, the more she sees and knows her husband as he knows himself, the better she responds to him, the more accurate are her expectations of him, and the more keenly she can anticipate his feelings. In the process of achieving satisfactory marital interaction, the wife finds herself accommodating her ways to the challenges afforded by the way of life her husband undertakes.

The studies of Manis (1955) and Luckey (1960) presenting social interaction as the primary influencing factor in one's perception of self and other's perception of him are consistent with the present finding confirming hypothesis (a). The findings of Burgess and Locke (1953) and Landis (1952), that the wife makes the greater adjustment in marriage, are in line with the increasing congruence found in this study between the wife's perception of her husband and his self-perception as marriage progresses, without a corresponding change in the husband's perception of his wife's self.

*Hypotheses (c) and (d).* As marriage progresses there is a statistically significant decrease in congruence between the husband's perception of himself and his perception of his wife. Similarly, there is a significant decrease in con-

gruence between the wife's perception of herself and her perception of her husband.

According to Thibaut (1959), "at the onset of marriage, both the husband and wife are insecure over their eventual stability because of the irreversibility and non-voluntary (committed) nature of marriage." Defensiveness, resulting from the insecurity of an anticipated unfavorable marriage, induces one to perceive the spouse in a fashion consistent with one's concept of self (Rogers, 1951). Perception is, therefore, selective and at times objectively inaccurate (Krech, Crutchfield & Balchey 1962). This perceptual defense, sometimes termed as idealization or romanticism, fills in the gaps of the "unstructured" expectations which could otherwise result in feelings of insecurity. The "process of constructing a mental picture of the loved one that corresponds more to what the lover imagines and wishes than to actuality" give some kind of "temporal stability" (Burgess, 1953), an aid to the couple's first attempts at adjustment.

As the marital relationship progresses, interaction brings more knowledge of the other person, "blind spots" are discovered and differences are recognized. It is assumed, in another words, that initially in marriage, certain traits are held in abeyance by the newness of the relationship and clouded by other favorable traits. However, as the interactional relationship in marriage progresses, spouses constantly wake up to the fact that their partners have certain traits that are hard to live with, and find that their partners feel the same way about them. They gradually awaken to their differences.

It might be worthwhile to note, at this point, the abrupt and sharp decrease in perceived trait similarities from Group I (0 to 5 years married) to

Group II (5 to 10 years married) for both the husbands and wives, with the wives having a considerably higher initial perceptual congruence with their husbands (Figure 2). This interesting phenomenon suggests that it is during the first five years of marriage that couples undergo tremendous adjustments in either or both their self and spouse concepts. And if we are to believe Wylie's (1961) hypothesis, there may be a higher tendency for female idealization as a cultural phenomenon, or for vicarious satisfaction through identification with a "superior" person.

*Hypothesis (e).* No significant difference was found among the four groups in similarity of husband and wife self-ratings. Instead, there was a very substantial congruence between self-perceptions that appeared relatively stable as number of years of marriage increased. This finding supports Newcomb's (1956) contention that basic common self-perceptions between two people are the foundation which facilitates continuing interpersonal rapport. Likewise, this finding seems consistent with Burgess' (1943) hypothesis that homogamy is characterized in assortive mating — that there exists a tendency within a person to fall in love with and marry another who is basically like himself. The possibility exists and may very well result from the intimate relationship of marriage itself.

The results of the present investigation, however, appear to indicate that basic homogamy is antecedent to marriage. If homogamy were the product of marriage, a significant increase in congruence between the husband's and wife's self-perceptions should have been manifested. Instead, the congruence between self-perception remained relatively consistent.

*Hypothesis (f).* A decreasing trend was noted in congruence of spouse per-

ceptions as length of marriage increased but no statistically significant difference was obtained (Figure 3). Explaining the decreasing trend, one may venture to say that: whereas in the beginning, spouses exert more effort to be similar in their relationship in order to get along well with each other, the growing familiarity in their relationship allows them to relax and "feel at home" with their differences. Conversely, we may suppose that reciprocal idealization occurs to a higher degree in newly wedded couples' relationships.

As a concluding statement to this discussion, the investigator realizes that to some people, the foregoing explanation and interpretations of results may not fully account, and to others assume too much, for the observed relationship between self- and spouse perceptions, congruence, and longevity of marriage. They are nevertheless offered as tentative explanations in the hope that they would stimulate further thought and research on the subject and along related areas of marital adjustment and satisfaction, of self-acceptance and acceptance of spouse.

#### SUMMARY

The present study investigated social perception specifically in the marital relationship, and tested six hypotheses regarding perceptual congruences (of husband and wife self-perceptions and spouse-perceptions) in relation to length of marriage. It was assumed that the duration of marital interaction would affect the spouses' perceptions of themselves and their partners.

The subjects were 120 married couples equally divided into (four experimental groups: Group I (0 to 5 years married), Group II (5 to 10 years married), Group III (10 to 15 years married), Group IV (15 to 20 years married), and matched on a number of

control variables. Each husband and each wife was asked to rate his spouse first, and then himself on the Alternation Ranking of Trait Adjectives. Four distributions of ratings were obtained for each couple: husband rating his wife (Hw), husband's self-rating (Hs), wife rating her husband (Wh); and wife's self-rating (Ws). From these four distributions of ratings, the six coefficients of correlation per couple were calculated. These correlations translated to z scores represented the six perceptual congruence scores of each married couple.

The four experimental groups were then compared on their performance on each of the perceptual congruence scores. In effect, six one-way analyses of variance were computed to test for significant differences among the four groups in each of the congruence scores. The results obtained indicated significant differences among the four groups on the following hypotheses: (a) As years grow in marriage, there is an increase in congruence between the wife's perception of her husband, and her husband's self-perception. (c) As years grow in marriage, there is a decrease in congruence between husband's self-perception and his perception of his wife. (d) As years of marriage increase, there is a decrease in congruence between the wife's self-perception and her perception of her husband. Three hypotheses were not confirmed. Conclusions were drawn from these results.

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