

# Unemployment and Marital Quality in Great Recession America: An Exploratory Canonical Correlation Analysis

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Andrew M. Bland<sup>1</sup> and Kand S McQueen<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

To contribute to the literature on unemployment and marital quality in light of rapid social, economic, and political changes that characterized the past decade (2008-2018), this exploratory study assessed how unemployment during the Great Recession affected marital quality based on participants' beliefs about marital roles (on a continuum from more traditional to more progressive) and on their levels of education, duration of marriage, and duration and frequency of unemployment. Nationwide, 129 participants completed an online questionnaire consisting of two scales of marital quality (Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Revised Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale) plus demographic items. Although the canonical correlation analysis was not significant, a number of trends emerged that suggested possibilities worthy of discussion and that provide a foundation for further research. For example, the results suggested the possibility that humanistic theorizing on unemployment and marriage might not be confined to ideological beliefs about gender-based marital roles, and that marital quality in the face of unemployment may be more directly affected by education level. Moreover, repeated measures analyses of variance suggested that, although most

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<sup>1</sup>Millersville University, Millersville, PA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Andrew M. Bland, Department of Psychology, Millersville University, Susan P. Luek Hall Room 223-A, P. O. Box 1002, Millersville, PA 17551, USA.

Email: [andrew.bland@millersville.edu](mailto:andrew.bland@millersville.edu)

participants experienced situational distress, faith in and commitment to the relationship seemed to sustain marriages despite the short-term obstacle of unemployment, which echoes humanistic psychologists' focus on resilience in relationships.

### Keywords

marital quality, unemployment, traditional and dual-earner marriage, canonical correlation, resilience

Unemployment and marital quality are topics that interested founding humanistic psychologists as they ushered in the Third Force movement in American psychology. Regarding unemployment, Frankl (1983) noted that, by their disposition, some individuals face unemployment adaptively, while others deteriorate into hopelessness, despair, and apathy. He conceptualized the latter as *unemployment neurosis*, based on "the erroneous view that working is the only meaning of life" (p. 124), a distortion that results in confusing unemployment with uselessness and meaninglessness. He regarded the decision to approach unemployment as simply joblessness versus seeing it as "a scapegoat on whose head is heaped all the blame for a 'bungled' life" and "inner emptiness" as an existential choice (pp. 121-122).

According to Yalom (1980), unemployment neurosis also has a socially constructed dimension. Workaholism is "indicative of a powerful death fear" which results in mainstream American culture in experiential avoidance and engagement in compulsive activity (p. 124). Some individuals facing unemployment therefore may find that "work afforded safety not because [they] wanted to [work] but because [they] *had to* [work in order] to assuage anxiety" (p. 209, italics added). Consequently, Fromm (1955) noted that "work, instead of being an activity satisfying in itself and pleasurable, [becomes] a duty and an obsession" (p. 160).

Concerning marriage, humanistic psychologists (e.g., Frankl, 1983; Fromm, 1956; Johnson, 1983; Jourard, 1974; C. R. Rogers, 1972; Welwood, 1990, 1996) conceptualized healthy love as a psychospiritual process characterized by individuals' concern for their partner's well-being and growth, respect for the other's autonomy and individuality (versus jealousy, dependency, or possessiveness), appreciation of the other's idiosyncrasies, realistic and feasible demands and expectations of the other, and self-disclosure. While partners initially approach each other from the standpoint of appraisal (i.e., assessing "attributes of trust, devotion, care, exceptionality"), this shifts to unconditional acceptance and mutual communication of respect

in successful partnerships (Levitt et al., 2006, pp. 469-470). Quality relationships, therefore, are bereft of “self-centered agendas that would use the beloved to meet one’s emotional needs and social and economic aspirations” but rather are characterized by “delight in the freedom and uniqueness of the other” (Bradford, 2015, p. 671).

Despite the richness of these conceptualizations, a search of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* database suggested that minimal direct attention has been given either to unemployment or to marriage since the publication commenced in 1961. To “establish itself anew for each generation,” humanistic psychologists need research to “help support [its] claims,” and “validate the importance of its concepts” (Criswell, 2003, pp. 43, 46) as well as to “provide useful information for helping people . . . consciously recognize their capacity for resiliency” (DeRobertis, 2016, p. 30).

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (2010), the Great Recession lasted for 19 months, officially beginning in December 2007 and ending in June 2009. However, its effects arguably lasted considerably longer in many U.S. communities (Chinni & Gimpel, 2010; Jenkins, Brandolini, Micklewright, & Nolan, 2013; Kalil, 2013; Pfeffer, Danzinger, & Schoeni, 2013), and some economists have argued that at a practical level it remained in effect as of 2017 (Mason, 2017). Most of the studies on the topic of unemployment and marital quality were conducted between the 1980s and the early 2000s (e.g., Aubry, Tefft, & Kingsbury, 1990; Hoffman, Carpentier-Altling, Thomas, Hamilton, & Broman, 1991; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996; Westman, Etzion, & Horovitz, 2004). Given the host of social, economic, and political changes that characterized the past decade (2008-2018), it seems problematic to assume that the mainstream psychology literature on unemployment and marital quality remains unequivocally applicable in a different economic and ecological climate, thereby justifying a reappraisal. Moreover, an inspection of Fonseca, Cunha, Crespo, and Relvas’ (2016) literature review on the impact of macrosystemic crises on marital quality in conjunction with an EBSCO search in January 2018 yielded a relative dearth of updated literature. Accordingly, this exploratory study begins to fill that gap.

## The Great Recession

The Great Recession in America generally began as a consequence of the global credit crunch in 2007-2008 (Pettinger, 2017). It was the first contraction of the global economy since World War II, and the “worst macroeconomic downturn since the 1930s” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 1). Between 2007 and 2009, average housing prices in the United States fell by one third, the Dow Jones Index lost nearly half its value, and unemployment rose 5% to

encompass one tenth of the population; between 2007 and 2011, a quarter of American families lost at least 75% of their wealth and over half lost a minimum of 25% of their wealth, with large relative losses disproportionately concentrated among lower income, less educated, and minority households (Pfeffer et al., 2013). Accordingly, in the United States, job loss was associated with an increase of over 4.75% in depressive symptoms (Riumallo-Herl, Basu, Stuckler, Courtin, & Avendano, 2014) and an estimated additional 4,750 deaths by suicide (Reeves, McKee, & Stuckler, 2014). Fertility rates dropped in the face of economic hardship and uncertainty (D. Schneider, 2015). Additionally, it is plausible that parental job and income losses, residential moves, and children's subjective perceptions of financial strain may have adversely affected children's educational achievement and emotional/behavioral development and well-being, which is likely to have longitudinal effects (Kalil, 2013).

Although the National Bureau of Economic Research (2010) cited June 2009 as the official conclusion of the Great Recession, its effects lasted considerably longer and in varying degrees in many American communities (Chinni & Gimpel, 2010; Donathan & Lim, 2013). With an "anemic" recovery, numerous problems persisted (Kalil, 2013, p. 233) which arguably contributed to the rise of populism and divisiveness in American politics (Chinni & Gimpel, 2010; Hochschild, 2016). For example, in its aftermath, the Great Recession increased the prevalence of "bad jobs," that is, those with low pay and that lacked health insurance and pension plans, consistently for men and selectively for women (Wallace & Kwak, 2017).

## **Unemployment in Traditional and Dual-Earner Marriages**

### *The More Traditional Position*

More *traditional* marriages comprise, by choice, a clearly defined male provider and female homemaker. This has been the prominent marital structure focused on in psychology literature on unemployment and marriage. Researchers have noted that unemployment is detrimental to traditional marriages, triggering marital conflicts, and psychological distress in both partners comparable to Frankl's unemployment neurosis, especially for men (Luhmann, Weiss, Hosoya, & Eid, 2014).

Gerson (2010) described America's recent economic crisis as the "mancession" insofar as the majority of jobs lost had been held by working-class males (p. A15). Consequently, unemployment can lead to men feeling incompetent (as well as empty, expendable, betrayed, and entitled, Kimmel, 2013)

as they are unable to provide for their families, and it “undercuts marriage . . . and leaves men more rootless and socially disconnected” (Gerson, 2010, p. A15). This argument has been empirically supported by mainstream psychologists for several decades: Threats to men’s role as provider trigger anxiety, hopelessness, irritability, and hostility which then crosses over to their wives (Hoffman et al., 1991; Luhmann et al., 2014; Westman et al., 2004) and children (McLoyd, 1989), resulting in vicious cycles of poor communication and unconstructive attitudes and behavior among all involved.

The literature on the traditional position also suggests that unemployment correlates with conflicts regarding marital roles, that is, husbands feel vulnerable when their wives offer to work (Aubry et al., 1990). As feelings are hurt and arguments ensue, wives’ motivation to provide emotional support for their husband wanes, making the marriages increasingly vulnerable to social undermining among both partners (Vinokur et al., 1996). As husbands’ anxiety/depression worsen, avolition and withdrawal increase, and unemployment becomes prolonged as motivation for job seeking diminishes. As families’ economic resources become increasingly limited and unstable, unemployed parents tend to become increasingly disengaged and erratic, triggering poor adjustment and motivation in their children (Kalil, 2005). Kraft (2001) noted that the probability of separation/divorce for traditional couples increases with extended unemployment.

### *The More Progressive Position*

On the other side of the continuum, the more *progressive* position has emerged in recent decades (see Silberstein, 1992) in response to social and institutional changes that prompted increasing acceptability and expectation of dual-earner partnerships in American society. This was accompanied by a paradigm shift in psychological theory and research on marital relationships in general that reflected the humanistic perspective on healthy love previously described. In contrast to the traditional position, proponents of the progressive position (e.g., Lane, 2009) suggest that unemployment can actually strengthen marriages insofar as it incites couples to work and grow together through mutual crises, and the impact of unemployment can therefore be less disruptive.

With these shifts in attitudes regarding gender and marital roles, many Americans have increasingly accepted egalitarian decision making and women’s involvement in previously male-dominated roles, including that of family provider (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Zuo, 1997). While jobs traditionally held by men have ebbed, service sector jobs have risen, prompting more women to enter the workforce to help cover family expenses

(Schlosser, 2001). As of 2011, fewer than 22% of U.S. families had a traditional male-breadwinner and female-homemaker household (Britt & Roy, 2014). Meanwhile, as Americans, both male and female, increasingly work during evenings and weekends, both partners have begun role sharing at home (Presser, 2007).

A degree of backlash is to be expected with these shifts and the economic, social, and logistical adjustments they entail. However, in light of evidence that relationship commitment also is on the rise and valued equally with egalitarianism, Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) suggested that the macro-systemic changes will incrementally become reflected both in families' value systems and "in the actual division of labor and decision-making" in future generations (p. 1032). Accordingly, marital quality has improved for couples who embrace egalitarian roles—that is, where wives contribute more to family income and husbands perform a greater share of housework (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; S. J. Rogers & Amato, 2000). Moreover, Britt and Roy (2014) reported that discrepancies in income among partners does not significantly predict marital quality.

Since the 1990s, these shifts in attitude were accompanied by an emerging body of literature that echoed the aforementioned humanistic perspective on marriage. Previously, mainstream psychological theories of marriage had emphasized economic gain (from shared expenses, affection, and a sexual relationship) and a sense of security (from overcoming the loneliness of single life) as primary drivers of marriage (Nielsen, 2005). This reflected mainstream American values of achievement, material acquisition, and social status, which were critiqued by humanistic psychologists (e.g., Fromm, 1955, 1976; May, 1967). In contrast, the newer perspectives highlighted the significance of marriage as a transformative platform (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007) for social support and for mutual ownership and solving of problems (Afifi & Nussbaum, 2006; Fowers, 2000). Commitment, sacrifice, and forgiveness were identified as features that sustain marriages, with each partner contributing to the other's personal growth rather than surviving together in rigidly defined roles (see Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Welwood, 1990, 1996).

This conceptual shift was reflected in qualitative studies that explored the impact of unemployment on dual-career marriages. Lane (2009) suggested that with family roles less clearly defined, unemployment is deemed less a crisis of masculine self-sufficiency and instead is associated with "willingness to rise to the occasion" (p. 684). Approaching the marriage as a collaborative partnership (Zuo, 1997), one partner is expected to readily take up the financial slack, while the other manages the responsibilities at home until he or she is able to return to the workforce. Accordingly, progressive partnerships in Germany have been identified as continually drawing on each other

for social support which serves as a protective factor against annulment (Kraft, 2001). Likewise, Newman, MacDougall, and Baum (2009) noted that Australian children did not regard their parents' layoff as problematic but rather as opportunities for their parents both to spend more time with them and to seek better prospects. In addition, the children tended to appreciate remaining in their home communities and not having to abandon their established social relationships if the family was forced to move in search of employment elsewhere.

## **Purpose of This Study and Concerns About the Extant Research**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to ascertain how participants' beliefs about gender roles in marriage partnerships—on a continuum from more traditional single-earner marriage partnerships to more progressive dual-earner marriage partnerships—as well as levels of education, duration of marriage, duration of unemployment, and frequency of unemployment affect their reported level of marital quality in response to unemployment in the United States.

While the traditional–progressive distinction is not new (see Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980), it is worth questioning whether the extant literature on unemployment and traditional marriage in the United States, with its emphasis on deficits and conflict, could have been clouded by limited conceptualizations of marital quality as an outcome variable. In addition, Lane's (2009) aforementioned study on the progressive perspective included participants who were laid off their "real jobs" but managed to find part-time work elsewhere, which involved a different population from couples in which partners were unemployed altogether. Furthermore, during the Great Recession, the national unemployment rate (9.7%; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011) at the time this study's data collection commenced, was higher than the times during which most of the extant research was conducted. Given the aforementioned combination of recent rapid changes both in (a) the U.S. economy and social and organizational structures, values, and dynamics and (b) psychologists' thinking about marriage, an exploratory reappraisal was necessary for the research canon on unemployment and marriage to remain valid and up-to-date.

With regard to education, duration of marriage, duration of unemployment, and frequency of unemployment, these factors have not been directly addressed in studies specifically pertaining to the impact of unemployment on marital quality. Kraft's (2001) longitudinal study probed social survey data in Germany in the 1980s–1990s in an attempt to assess trends in education, duration of marriage, and duration of unemployment over a 9-year

period. He then compared those trends with the country's overall divorce rates for the same period of time. Although this provided a starting point, something was lost by not querying people directly about their own, personal separation and divorces rates. Second, he only examined separation and divorce, not quality of the relationship. Many couples with poor marital quality may decide for a host of reasons to stay together and not divorce or separate (Firestone & Catlett, 1999). Kraft's analysis was insufficient to detect those couples. Moreover, like Lane's (2009) study above, it involved participants who were still employed part-time.

## **Operational Definitions**

### *Marital Quality*

Marital quality entails couples' ability to embrace and become transformed by both external and internal change (Graham & Conoley, 2006). It involves a combination of objective characteristics of a successful marriage partnership (including commitment, communication, expressions of affection and concern, and handling of disagreements/conflicts) and couples' subjective impressions of their relationships (including degree of marital satisfaction; Xu, 1996). This definition is based in part on Spanier's (1979) concept of dyadic adjustment, which served as the basis for the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) used to measure marital quality in this study. Furthermore, only married (versus cohabitating) couples were included because differences in DAS scores have been noted between the two groups (Moore, McCabe, & Brink, 2001). Also, given the emphasis on gender-based marital roles, only cisgendered heterosexual couples were included to avoid introducing a potentially confounding variable.

### *Unemployment*

Unemployment refers to the absence of paid employment. Individuals who were laid off from their "real jobs" but managed to find part-time work elsewhere to cover expenses were excluded. This was a contribution of this study in that, as aforementioned, Lane's (2009) and Kraft's (2001) samples included such individuals.

## **Method**

This study involved an ex post facto design to explore participants' reflections on their experiences with unemployment. As noted above, this study



was exploratory and descriptive in nature insofar as its purpose was to serve as a starting point for understanding the impact of unemployment on American marriages during the Great Recession in contrast with earlier eras.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Data were collected over 11 weeks between May and July 2011. Married people who were unemployed or whose partners were unemployed completed an online questionnaire. Participants were recruited nationwide via electronic announcements posted to unemployment- and marriage-related web sites and message boards. In addition, the designated contacts for career and/or marriage-related ministries, support groups, employment agencies, labor unions, and professional organizations agreed to disseminate recruitment messages. Thereafter, snowball sampling was used. This study was conducted without the use of material incentives.

### *Couple as Unit of Analysis*

The original study design involved couples completing the questionnaire in one sitting, one partner at a time. After soliciting participation for about a month, fewer than 20 couples had completed the questionnaire. In an effort to accommodate this unsatisfactory response rate, an individual format was developed that allowed one member of the couple to complete the questionnaire, and couples' responses to the questionnaire were converted to two individual responses. The individual form of the questionnaire consisted of the same items as the original couples' form, but with extra demographic items added to collect descriptive information about participants' partners so that education, duration of unemployment, and frequency of unemployment could be analyzed through the lens of the couple as the unit of analysis. On the other hand, participants provided only their own responses to the marital quality scales, with their perspective on the relationship representing the couple. Acitelli (1997) noted that "this approach is acceptable if it is acknowledged that the topic of investigation is individuals' perceptions of interactions or relationships" (p. 246). Although this has obvious limitations, it was necessary to acquire an adequate sample for analysis.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the individual format yielded appropriate variability for the variable pertaining to beliefs about traditional–progressive marital roles (which was a principal focus of the study) within the context of the practical constraints associated with obtaining a suitable sample for couples' research. That is, in addition to the general difficulty "obtaining the willingness of both partners" (Olson & Miller, 2014, p. 80),

response rates from more traditional versus more progressive couples can vary depending on method of solicitation (Karney et al., 1995).

### Instruments

Participants completed the DAS (Spanier, 1976, 2001) and the Revised Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (RKMS; Akagi, Schumm, & Bergen, 2003) to provide a comprehensive portrait of both the positive and negative dimensions of their marital quality that neither overemphasized nor underemphasized any particular dimension of marital quality. The DAS provided a snapshot measure of marital quality in the face of unemployment at the time of data collection. It comprises four subscales: (a) Dyadic Consensus (13 items measuring agreement on goals, household tasks, and spirituality); (b) Dyadic Satisfaction (10 items assessing couples' handling of disagreements, perceived marital stability, interpersonal behavior patterns, and commitment to the marriage); (c) Affectional Expression (4 items on sexuality and physical touch); and (d) Dyadic Cohesion (5 items pertaining to closeness, shared activities, and positive interactions). Items involve two dichotomous items and 30 items on 5- to 7-point Likert-type scales. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) coefficients of .96 (total score) and between .73 and .94 (subscales) were reported by the DAS author (Spanier, 1976) and replicated in a meta-analysis by Graham, Liu, and Jeziorski (2006): .92 (total score) and .71 to .88 (subscales). Factor invariance has been noted across men and women (South, Krueger, & Iacono, 2009).

The RKMS provided a global measure of marital quality. Its three 7-point Likert-type items assessed participants' perception of their marriage at present, the way it is developing, and the way it has developed since it began. A Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of .93 was reported by the RKMS authors (Akagi et al., 2003), and robust concurrent validity has been noted between the original KMS and the DAS (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000).

### Exogenous (X) Variables

**Marital Role.** Participants who identified as espousing the husbands' role as provider were regarded as *more traditional*, whereas those who did not were regarded as *more progressive*. To identify their position on the traditional–progressive continuum, participants were asked, “Some people believe that it is principally the husband's role to work outside the home to provide for his family. To what extent do you embrace this attitude?” Participants rated their beliefs on a scale from 0 to 9, with higher scores indicating more traditional and lower scores indicating more progressive (as illustrated below):

<i>Not at all</i>		<i>Somewhat</i>			<i>Considerably</i>			<i>Totally</i>	
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Participants also were asked, “To what extent does your partner seem to embrace that attitude?”

*Education.* Participants’ and their partners’ total education was measured in years. This ensured that all completed years of education were counted, even though a degree may not have been completed. Because the couple was the unit of analysis for the X variables, participants’ and their partners’ years of education were summed.

*Duration of Marriage.* Participants identified how long they had been married to their partners in years and months. Responses were converted into years to two decimal places.

*Duration of Unemployment.* Participants identified how long they and their partners had been out of work in years and months. Participants also could specify that they or their partners were either currently employed or had not worked since they married. Such cases were coded as “0.” Responses were converted into years to two decimal places. Again, because the couple was the unit of analysis, participants’ and their partners’ amount of time spent out of work were summed.

*Frequency of Unemployment.* Participants identified how many times they and their partners had been out of work during the past 5 years. Participants also could specify that they or their partners were either currently employed or had not worked since the marriage began. Such cases were coded as “0.” Again, because the couple was the unit of analysis, participants’ and their partners’ frequency of unemployment was summed. Cases in which neither partner had worked since they were married were coded as “1” time unemployed.

**Statistical Analysis**

Canonical correlation analysis was employed based on its utility for exploratory research (Guarino, 2004); it is “best considered a descriptive technique . . . rather than a hypothesis-testing procedure” and is useful when researchers “want to know if and how . . . two sets [of variables] relate to each other” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, pp. 177-178). As aforementioned, this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature insofar as its purpose was to serve as a

starting point for understanding the impact of unemployment on American marriages during the Great Recession in contrast with earlier eras. It determined how specific factors related to unemployment incrementally predicted dimensions of the participants' marital quality.

Canonical correlation refers to the Pearson  $r$  between two synthetic variables which respectively are linearly combined from the sets of observed exogenous (X) and endogenous (Y) variables and weighted based on the relationships between those variables. Canonical functions are standardized coefficients for the observed X and Y variable sets, with as many functions as there are variables in the smaller set (Sherry & Henson, 2005; Thompson, 2000). In this case, the X variables consisted of participants' beliefs about marital role, levels of education, duration of marriage, duration of unemployment, and frequency of unemployment. The Y variables consisted of participants' scores on the four subscales of the DAS and on the RKMS. Rather than exploring marital quality according to a total DAS score only—which is discouraged by its author (Spanier, 2001)—its four dimensions could be treated as separate Y variables, and combinations of these variables could be explored in relation to the X variables. This preserved “the complexity of the constructs examined” (Sherry & Henson, 2005, p. 38) wherein “multiple causes relate with multiple effects” (Thompson, 2000, p. 286) while decreasing the risk of inflated experiment-wise Type I error inherent in conducting multiple ordinary least squares regression analyses (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

## Results

The initial sample consisted of  $N = 455$  participants. A total of 170 cases were removed in which the informed consent agreement was clicked but no data were provided. Thereafter, cases were removed in which participants stopped early ( $n = 67$ ) or they left one or more items blank on the marital quality measures ( $n = 16$ ). In the DAS User's Manual, Spanier (2001) emphasized the importance of ensuring “that all items are rated” (p. 7). No substantial patterns were found among specific items or among demographic groups, indicating that the items were missing at random. Cases also were removed if participants did not provide responses for items pertaining to the X variables (did not identify their belief about husband as provider:  $n = 17$ ; did not clearly identify their or their partner's level of education:  $n = 10$ ; did not identify how long they had been married:  $n = 4$ ; did not identify how long they or their partner had been out of work:  $n = 6$ ). Moreover, participants were not included if their unemployment status did not match the definition specified for this study (i.e., identified themselves or their partners as homemakers by choice,

while the other worked full-time:  $n = 14$ ; received disability or veteran's income:  $n = 5$ ; had been recently unemployed but had resumed work at the time of the study:  $n = 15$ ). Finally, cases were removed in which participants had been out of work for over a decade ( $n = 2$ ); because this was well above the mean of less than 2 years (see below), it was reasonable to assume these two participants were from a different population than the others.

The final sample consisted of 129 participants, including 57 husbands (44%) and 72 wives (56%). For a canonical correlation analysis, a sample of at least 10 to 20 participants per Y variable (in this case, 50 to 100 participants) is adequate to avoid obscuring meaningful relationships while also circumventing results with statistical significance at the expense of practical significance (Hair et al., 2010; Thompson, 2000).

## Demographics

The majority of the sample consisted of people in middle adulthood (between 40 and 60 years old—59% of participants and 57% of partners), who were White/European American (81% of participants and 77% of partners), and who had been married once (78% of participants and 76% of partners). See Table 1.

## Exogenous (X) Variables

**Marital Role.** Participants' positions on the traditional–progressive continuum ranged from 0 to 9 ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 2.80$ ), and perceived partner scores ranged from 0 to 9 ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 2.80$ ). Both had a relatively even distribution. See Figure 1. The majority of participants reported that their partners had the same ( $n = 33$ , 26%) or about the same ( $n = 53$ , 41%) beliefs as their own (a difference of 2 or less on the traditional–progressive continuum). Only 4% ( $n = 5$ ) reported strong discrepancies (i.e., a difference of 7 or more in either direction).

**Education.** Participants' education ranged from 12 to 25 years ( $M = 16.42$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ), while partners' education ranged from 5 to 25 years ( $M = 15.46$ ,  $SD = 2.88$ ). For the analysis, total education for each couple ranged from 21 to 44 years ( $M = 31.88$ ,  $SD = 4.26$ ).

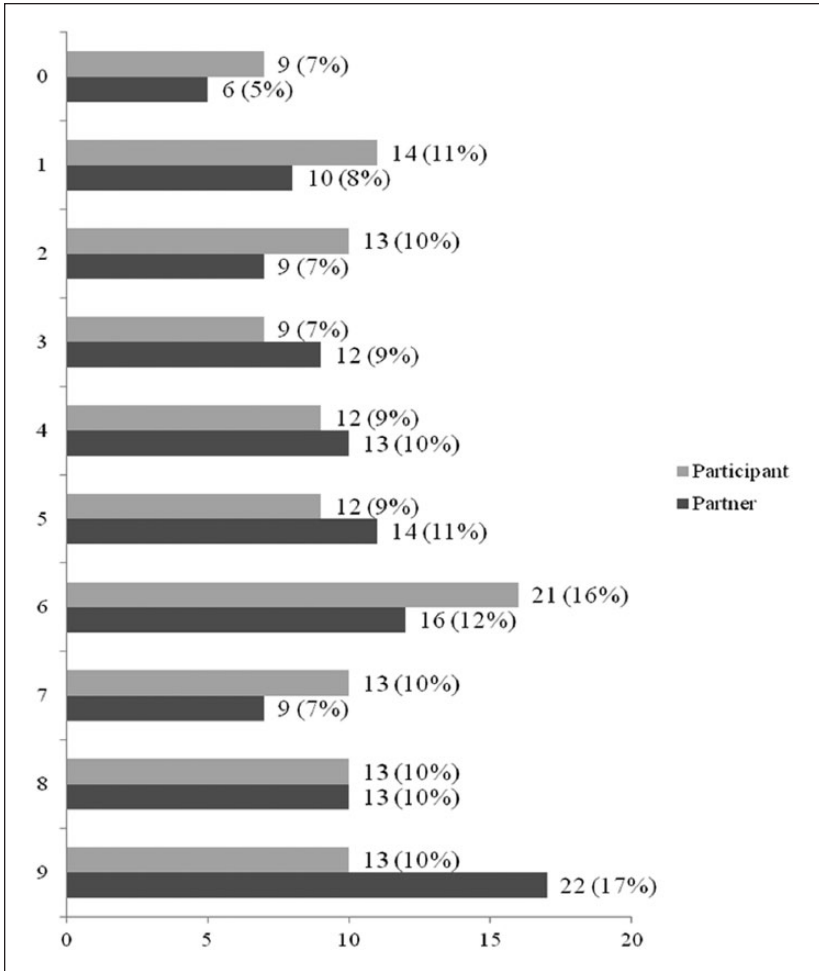
**Duration of Marriage.** Duration of marriage ranged from 0.21 to 40 years ( $M = 16.35$ ,  $SD = 11.25$ ). Twenty percent of participants ( $n = 26$ ) had been married to their partners for 4 years or less, 18% ( $n = 23$ ) for 10 to 14 years, and 8% ( $n = 11$ ) for 35 years or more.

**Table 1.** Participants' and Partners' Demographics.

	Participant, <i>n</i> (%)	Partner, <i>n</i> (%)
Age (years)		
20 to 24	5 (4)	3 (2)
25 to 29	7 (5)	8 (6)
30 to 34	17 (13)	12 (9)
35 to 39	14 (11)	22 (17)
40 to 44	12 (9)	14 (11)
45 to 49	18 (14)	16 (12)
50 to 54	24 (19)	25 (20)
55 to 59	22 (17)	18 (14)
60 to 64	9 (7)	10 (8)
65+	1 (1)	1 (1)
Race/ethnicity		
White/European American	104 (81)	99 (77)
African American	16 (12)	16 (12)
Latino/Hispanic American	3 (2)	7 (5)
Asian American	5 (4)	5 (4)
Native American/American Indian	—	1 (1)
Mixed/multiracial	1 (1)	1 (1)
Number of marriages		
Married once	101 (78)	98 (76)
Divorced and remarried once	24 (19)	24 (19)
Divorced and remarried twice	3 (2)	5 (4)
Divorced and remarried 3+ times	1 (1)	1 (1)
Widowed and remarried	—	1 (1)

*Duration of Unemployment.* Total duration of couples' unemployment ranged from 0.8 to 8.17 years ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ). About 26% ( $n = 33$ ) of couples' total unemployment was 6 months or less, whereas 60% ( $n = 78$ ) of couples' total unemployment was a year or more. Just over half of participants ( $n = 72$ , 56%) had partners who worked at the time of the study. About 20% ( $n = 26$ ) were employed with their partners out of work.

*Frequency of Unemployment.* Couples' total frequency of unemployment ranged from 1 to 8 times ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ). One third of couples ( $n = 43$ ) had been collectively unemployed once, including some in which neither partner had worked since they married. About 13% ( $n = 16$ ) had been collectively unemployed five or more times.



**Figure 1.** Participants’ positions on traditional–progressive continuum and perception of their partners’ positions.

*Endogenous (Y) Variables: Dimensions of Marital Quality*

**DAS Subscales.** Participants’ responses to individual items were summed into subscale scores, which were converted into *T*-scores and interpreted in accordance with the DAS User’s Manual (Spanier, 2001). *T*-scores below 40 suggest marital distress. Participants’ *T*-scores on the DAS Consensus subscale ranged from 20 to 62 ( $M = 42.96, SD = 10.73$ ), on DAS Satisfaction from 20

to 62 ( $M = 42.43$ ,  $SD = 11.49$ ), on DAS Affectional from 20 to 63 ( $M = 43.36$ ,  $SD = 13.09$ ), and on DAS Cohesion from 20 to 73 ( $M = 52.07$ ,  $SD = 12.28$ ). At least one third of participants reported significant distress on DAS Consensus ( $n = 43$ , 34%), DAS Satisfaction ( $n = 42$ , 33%), and DAS Affectional ( $n = 48$ , 38%). Another third or more of participants had average scores on DAS Consensus ( $n = 41$ , 32%), DAS Satisfaction ( $n = 49$ , 38%), and DAS Affectional ( $n = 53$ , 41%). See Table 2.

**RKMSS.** The RKMSS is scored from 1 to 21. Scores below 17 indicate the potential for marital distress (Crane et al., 2000). RKMSS scores were converted to  $T$ -scores to make them compatible with the DAS subscales when examining variance. Thus,  $T$ -scores below 56 suggest marital distress. Participants' RKMSS  $T$ -scores ranged from 30 to 63 ( $M = 50.03$ ,  $SD = 10.10$ ). Forty percent ( $n = 51$ ) of participants reported that they were satisfied with the overall development, present status, and projected future of their marriage; 60% ( $n = 78$ ) of participants suggested some degree of distress in their marriage. See Table 3.

### Statistical Analyses

**Canonical Correlation.** The full model was not statistically significant,  $\Lambda = .751$ ,  $F(25, 443.57) = 1.42$ ,  $p = .09$ , two-tailed. One minus Wilks'  $\Lambda$  ( $1-\Lambda$ ) indicated

**Table 2.** Range of Participants' DAS Subscales.

Range <sup>a</sup>	Consensus, <i>n</i> (%)	Satisfaction, <i>n</i> (%)	Affectional, <i>n</i> (%)	Cohesion, <i>n</i> (%)
High				
71+ (Markedly atypical)	—	—	—	6 (5)
66-70 (Moderately atypical)	—	—	—	15 (12)
61-65 (Mildly atypical)	5 (4)	1 (1)	12 (9)	15 (12)
56-60 (Slightly atypical)	10 (8)	13 (10)	8 (6)	21 (16)
Average (typical score, no concern)				
45-55	41 (32)	49 (38)	53 (41)	31 (24)
Borderline (possible concern)				
40-44 (Slightly atypical)	30 (23)	24 (19)	8 (6)	23 (18)
Significant problem				
35-39 (Mildly atypical)	20 (16)	9 (7)	11 (9)	7 (5)
≤ 34 (Moderately atypical)	23 (18)	33 (26)	37 (29)	11 (9)

Note. DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

<sup>a</sup>Interpretive guidelines from Spanier (2001, p. 14).



the full set of the five canonical functions explained about 25% of the variance shared among sets of the five Y variables. A dimension reduction analysis yielded five functions with squared canonical correlations ( $R_c^2$ ) of .129, .088, .050, .004, and .001 for each successive function. None of the five canonical functions was significant at  $\alpha = .05$ , two-tailed.

**Repeated Measures ANOVAs.** Although the canonical correlation was not significant, in light of the high degree of intercorrelation among the Y variables (see Table 4), two follow-up repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were computed to compare their means. The first ANOVA assessed for significant differences among the five Y variables. Then, on discovering that the RKMSS *T*-scores were significantly higher than those for the three DAS subscales that most clearly suggested acute/situational marital distress for some participants, a second ANOVA assessed whether significant differences existed among the three RKMSS items that could distinguish between acute/situational distress and participants' overall relationship quality.

**ANOVA for five Y variables.** A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of unemployment on each of the DAS subscales and the RKMSS. The Mauchly's Test of Sphericity ( $W = .55$ ) was significant, indicating that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(9) = 76.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Greenhouse–Geisser estimates of sphericity ( $\epsilon = .78$ ) to account for the lack of sphericity. The results indicated that statistically significant differences existed among the five Y variables,  $F(3.13, 400.66) = 58.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .31$ . Per Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this is a large effect. A Bonferroni post hoc test revealed that the mean DAS Cohesion *T*-score ( $M = 52.07$ ) was significantly greater than the mean *T*-scores for DAS Consensus ( $M = 42.96$ , difference = 9.11), DAS Satisfaction ( $M = 42.43$ , difference = 9.64), and DAS Affectional ( $M = 43.36$ , difference = 8.71). In addition, the RKMSS *T*-score ( $M = 50.03$ )

**Table 3.** Range of Participants' RKMSS Scores.

Raw score range	<i>T</i> -score range	<i>n</i> (%)
17-21	56-63	51 (40)
12-16	47-54	30 (23)
7-11	38-45	32 (25)
≤6	≤36	16 (12)

Note. RKMSS = Revised Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Raw score ≤16, *T*-score ≤54 = potential for distress (Crane et al., 2000).

**Table 4.** Intercorrelations Within X and Y Variables.

	Marital role	Education	Duration of marriage	Duration of unemployment	Frequency of unemployment	DAS Consensus	DAS Satisfaction	DAS Affective	DAS Cohesion	RKMSS
Marital role	—									
Education	-.12	—								
Duration of marriage	.13	.05	—							
Duration of unemployment	.04	-.10	.15	—						
Frequency of unemployment	.13	-.16	-.06	-.05	—					
DAS Consensus	.11	.16	.05	.07	.01	—				
DAS Satisfaction	-.04	.15	.05	-.04	.06	.76*	—			
DAS Affective	.06	.25*	-.02	.11	.04	.64*	.56*	—		
DAS Cohesion	-.02	.14	-.13	.02	.11	.67*	.68*	.54*	—	
RKMSS	-.01	.15	-.01	-.01	.05	.76*	.84*	.66*	.69*	—

Note. DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale; RKMSS = Revised Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.

\* $p \leq .01$  level, two-tailed.

was significantly greater than the mean  $T$ -scores for DAS Consensus ( $M = 42.96$ , difference = 7.07), DAS Satisfaction ( $M = 42.43$ , difference = 7.60), and DAS Affectional ( $M = 43.36$ , difference = 6.67).

*ANOVA for individual RKMSS items.* Because the RKMSS  $T$ -score was found to be significantly greater than the mean  $T$ -scores for the DAS factors except Cohesion, a second one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of unemployment on each of the three RKMSS items. The Mauchly's Test of Sphericity ( $W = .79$ ) was significant, indicating that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 29.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Greenhouse–Geisser estimates of sphericity ( $\epsilon = .83$ ) to account for the lack of sphericity. The results indicated that statistically significant differences existed among the five  $Y$  variables,  $F(1.65, 211.60) = 8.68$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . Per Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this is a medium effect. A Bonferroni post hoc test revealed that the mean score depicting participants' satisfaction with the way their relationships developed since they began ( $M = 4.81$ ) was significantly greater than their satisfaction with their relationships at this time ( $M = 4.48$ , difference = 0.33) or with the way their relationships are developing ( $M = 4.53$ , difference = 0.28).

## Discussion

The canonical correlation model was not significant, suggesting that marital quality varied *across* the traditional–progressive continuum. The results of a sequence of follow-up repeated measures ANOVAs suggested that (a) in general, participants spent more time with their partners when at least one partner was out of work but also reported short-term marital distress at the time of at least one partner's unemployment (as evidenced by mean  $T$ -scores on the DAS Consensus, Satisfaction, and Affectional subscales being lower than mean DAS Cohesion  $T$ -scores) and (b) while many participants, at the time one or both partners were unemployed, reported distress in their marriage on the RKMSS (and, to a lesser extent, discouragement about its future), most participants *also* reported high levels of relationship quality since the marriage began. It seems plausible that this sense of faith in and commitment to the relationship may have sustained marriages despite the short-term obstacle of unemployment. This reflects existing literature suggesting that the qualities valued most by marital partners are those that emerged *from the relationship* (Thompson-Hayes & Webb, 2008) and that resilience—that is, the ability to struggle well, associated with sustainable relationships (Walsh, 2016)—moderates the relationship between external stressors and marital quality (Graham & Conoley, 2006).

Perhaps couples who spent more time together because at least one partner was out of work may have experienced the increased time together differently. Consistent with the humanistic perspective surveyed earlier, participants who reported healthier marriages may have appreciated the additional time together as a source of support to weather the strain of joblessness. Conversely, those who reported poorer quality marriages may have found themselves burdened by the experience of unemployment neurosis (see above) either within themselves or in their partners. In other cases, from a cultural psychology angle, it seems conceivable that previous researchers may have misunderstood marital conflicts as being rooted in unemployment when in fact they may have arisen as a result of the disruption of typical gender interaction patterns due to the increase in more time spent together (see Payne, 2005).

### *Traditional–Progressive Marital Role*

Marital quality varied for participants *across* the traditional–progressive continuum, which calls into question the dichotomous claim that traditional marriages suffer due to unemployment and that progressive partnerships fare better. Consistent with humanistic psychologists' focus on individualization as well as holism and context (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017) as alternatives to polarizing categories (K. J. Schneider, 2013) and reductionistic generalizations (Misiak & Sexton, 1973), the results echoed Chinni and Gimpel's (2010) observation that during the Great Recession, Americans experienced "not one but [multiple] different recessions" based on variations within—not just between—communities with varying values, attitudes, and preferences which could have affected marriages differently (p. 214).

For example, for some participants, the personal sacrifices inherent in traditional marital roles ("a 'good' woman is expected to take care of and rescue her man and her children as needed," Payne, 2005, p. 52) may have served as a safeguard against personal disillusion in the face of unemployment. For other participants, both partners working full-time may have reinforced the isolation associated with the frantic pace of contemporary society. On unemployment, then, reliance on their marriage as their principal source of social support may have placed too much weight on the couple and thereby triggered fragility in the relationship (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Schwartz & Olds, 2000). Accordingly, marital problems may have come to light or become exacerbated by spending more time together while unemployed.

In general, then, the results indirectly provide preliminary credence to the idea that an individual's ability to face unemployment constructively versus apathetically (see Frankl, 1983)—and the outcomes thereof for marriage—is

based less in ideological beliefs about marital roles. Rather, a person's ability to develop and maintain a sustainable identity involves balance across multiple life domains *including but not limited to* their work (see Erikson, 1959/1994; Sweet, 2014) which also is conducive to a "greater potential for intimacy" (Firestone & Catlett, 1999, p. 86).

### *Education*

Consistent with Kraft's (2001) aforementioned German study, level of education positively correlated with reported level of marital quality in response to unemployment,  $r(127) = .25, p < .01$ . Although this is a relatively meager relationship, of all the X variables, it was the strongest correlation (see Table 4). This is meaningful insofar as Hart (2009) suggested that education can provide not only the practical advantage of increased vocational opportunities but also tools for coping with change and "preparation to walk into a future not yet determined" (p. 5). It therefore can serve as a protective factor, supporting capacities for resilience, intentionality, self-compassion, and self-reflection. Accordingly, education can be a key to (a) replacing feelings of helplessness in the face of unemployment with awareness of and motivation to act on possible alternatives, (b) improving communication and support within marriages, and (c) promoting a self-reinforcing reciprocal relationship between these two.

It also is worth noting that in some cases, from a cultural psychology angle, previous theorists/researchers may have overlooked the self-protective tendency of individuals from poor and working-class communities to not stray far from their upbringings (Galbraith, 1958). Accordingly, it seems possible that in some cases they may have confused unemployed husbands' feelings of anxiety and ambivalence about "getting above [one's] raisings" by pursuing a higher degree of education for avolition (Payne, 2005, p. 52).

### *Duration of Marriage*

In contrast with Kraft's (2001) German study, in which marriages of longer duration appeared to be at a lower risk of disillusion as a result of unemployment, herein, results did not indicate a significant relationship between duration of marriage and reported level of marital quality in response to unemployment. This could relate to Firestone and Catlett's (1999) observation that "the longevity of a relationship is not necessarily a good measure of an ideal couple; people may choose to maintain destructive relationships over an extended period of time" (p. 82). In addition, for some participants, longer marriages did correlate negatively with the DAS Cohesion subscale (which,

on the whole, was the highest scoring DAS factor). It seems plausible that this could reflect humanistic-oriented developmental theories of marriage which suggest that the later phases of marriage are characterized by increasing degrees of individuality (Johnson, 1983) and individual space (Minirth et al., 1991) within marriages.

### *Duration of Unemployment*

Results indicated some slight negative correlations between duration of unemployment and reported level of dimensions of marital quality in response to unemployment, particularly in the subscales indicating acute distress. They did not directly echo Kraft's (2001) finding that unemployment does not affect marriages until after about 6 months, that the likelihood of separation increases as unemployment continues, and then marriages restabilize when one or the other partner returns to work. On the other hand, as aforementioned, Kraft's focus was couples' pursuit of separation/divorce and not their reported marital quality.

### *Frequency of Unemployment*

Results did not indicate a significant relationship between frequency of unemployment and reported level of marital quality. Because no extant studies broached this variable, it was worth exploring, especially during the Great Recession. In retrospect, it seems possible that the dearth of extant literature on the subject may stem from the fact that frequency of unemployment simply has little impact on marital quality when partners are out of work.

### *Limitations*

Sampling issues may have affected the results of this study. First, the sample consisted of individuals who were computer literate and who likely utilized the Internet for marriage and/or unemployment support. Second, the majority of the sample consisted of people in middle adulthood, with fewer than 10% younger than 30 years old, leaving little room to explore potential generational effects. Third, the majority of the sample consisted of White Americans, which calls into question the applicability of the findings to other racial/ethnic groups. Fourth, whereas the extant literature on the traditional perspective focused primarily on blue-collar families (who historically have held an associate's degree or less), this sample consisted mainly of people who were more highly educated. In addition, relatively fewer blue-collar jobs exist in America today compared with earlier decades (Carr, 2014), and those who work them

are less likely to be married but rather single or cohabiting (Paulson, 2010). Fifth, as noted above, due to response rate issues, most of the marriages represented in this exploratory study were represented by only one partner's perspective.

## Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Although the canonical correlation analysis was not significant, a number of trends emerged that suggested several possibilities worthy of discussion and/or further research. For example, the results suggested the possibility that (a) better marriages and worse marriages exist *across* the traditional–progressive continuum and (b) marital quality in the face of unemployment appears to be more directly affected by levels of education than by the partners' ideological beliefs about marital roles. Future confirmatory research should further take up these topics. In addition, the ANOVAs implied that a sense of faith in and commitment to the relationship seemed to sustain marriages despite the short-term obstacle of unemployment. Accordingly, this suggests the possibility that the humanistic perspective on resilience in marriage appears applicable not only for progressive marriages but also traditional ones. By virtue of the humanistic influence, today mainstream psychologists view marital quality less by absence of conflict (which may have been overemphasized by previous researchers at the expense of resilience due to the dominant theoretical/conceptual perspectives at the time, Walsh, 2016) but rather by couples' commitment to collaboratively working through challenges beyond survival and self-interest (Fowers, 2000).

Without altogether denying the effects of unemployment on couples, in the current era, it also is worth asking whether unemployment and marital quality are as directly connected as the extant literature insinuates. It seems plausible that unemployment may relate more directly to existential anxiety and related cognitions at the individual level and that the outcomes thereof affect marriages (Luhmann et al., 2014). Furthermore, macrosystemic variables also need to be taken into consideration. Echoing humanistic psychologists such as Fromm (1955, 1976) and May (1967), Olds and Schwartz (2009) observed that “Calvinism, capitalism, and competitiveness” impede social interest and contribute to loneliness and isolation in contemporary American society (p. 29). It may not be until the frenzy of overwork ceases that its impact on marital quality becomes experienced most fully, as couples have more free time together (as noted in the first ANOVA). This is an interesting and noteworthy possibility and warrants additional research.

Frankl (1983) suggested that confusion of one's work identity with the totality of one's identity is what constitutes the difference between those who

deal constructively versus apathetically with unemployment. Helping professionals can assist clients in adaptively dealing with their unemployment-related distress by reframing their experiences in order to develop meaningful frameworks conducive to them experiencing their lives “as making sense, as being directed and motivated by valued goals, and as mattering in the world” (George & Park, 2016, p. 206). This serves as an alternative to Diamond and Hicks’ (as cited in Fonseca et al., 2016) allusion to couples coping best when partners of unemployed individuals blame the economy as a means of helping the other feel better. Rather, sometimes the need to negotiate meaning in life does not become apparent “until some personal or professional crisis occurs” whereby “some source of meaning no longer provides a sense of order and purpose in life” and prompts “a search for new, more integrative personal meanings and values” (Debats, 1999, p. 47).

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## Author Biographies



**Andrew M. Bland** is a member of the graduate clinical psychology faculty at Millersville University in Lancaster County, PA. He received a master's degree from the University of West Georgia's humanistic–existential–transpersonal psychology program and a PhD in counseling psychology from Indiana State University. He is a licensed psychologist, currently in practice at Samaritan Counseling Center in Lancaster, PA. He is a member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*.

His research interests include the practical application of themes from contemporary existential–humanistic psychology in the domains of love, work, social justice, the processes of therapy and education, creativity, spirituality, and human development.



**Kand S McQueen** is a senior lecturer in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN and holds a PhD in educational psychology with a specialization in inquiry methodology from Indiana University's School of Education. McQueen is also a national keynote speaker on issues of gender identity.