

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

There are four Relationship Dynamics assessed in the PREPARE/ENRICH Customized Version and they are defined below.

Assertiveness—is a person's ability to express their feelings to their partner and ability to ask for what they would like.

Self Confidence—focuses on how good a person feels about himself/herself and their ability to control things in their life.

Avoidance—is a person's tendency to minimize issues and reluctance to deal with issues directly.

Partner Dominance—focuses on how much a person feels their partner tries to control them and dominate their life.

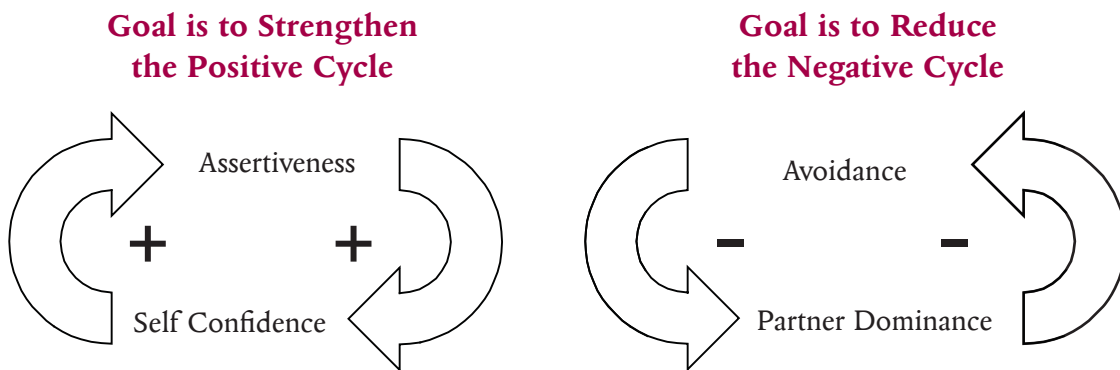
The assessment of these dynamics is designed to increase the facilitator's understanding of each partner and how these tendencies are related to the underlying couple dynamics. These four areas are interrelated with each other and together provide important insight into each person and how the relationship tends to function.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CYCLES

Based on the research, we have discovered there is a positive cycle linking assertiveness and self confidence and a negative cycle linking avoidance and perceived dominance.

In the positive cycle, as a person uses more assertiveness, their level of self confidence tends to increase. As a person's self confidence increases, their willingness and ability to be more assertive increases.

In the negative cycle, when one person perceives their partner as dominating, a common reaction is for that person to avoid dealing with issues. As a person uses more avoidance, they will often perceive more dominance in their partner (see illustrated cycles).



COUPLE EXERCISE FOR INCREASING ASSERTIVENESS

One of the major goals emerging from this section of the assessment is to increase the assertiveness of each partner. This is the central part of the exercise, where the goal is to help the couple improve their assertiveness and active listening skills. For more details on this exercise, refer to the Couple's Workbook.

As partners in a relationship improve their assertiveness and active listening skills, their self confidence will increase. This is the positive cycle of more assertiveness increasing self confidence. Increasing assertiveness also tends to decrease avoidance and partner dominance, which is a common negative cycle in couples.

EXPANDED DEFINITIONS OF RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS SCALES

Assertiveness:

Assertiveness is the ability to express one's feelings to their partner and the ability to ask for what they would like.

Assertive communication involves the honest expression of one's thoughts, feelings, and desires. Assertiveness is self focused and, therefore, is marked by use of "I" and "me" statements rather than "you" statements. Assertive people are able to ask for what they want without demanding it or infringing on the rights of others. Assertive people tend to feel better about themselves because they are able to express themselves.

One important goal in working with a couple is to try to help both people become more assertive with each other. Increasing assertiveness will positively affect the other three relationship dynamics assessed in this section of the inventory. If each person becomes more assertive, this will increase a person's self confidence, reduce the partner's dominance and reduce the tendency to use avoidance.

When both partners are assertive with each other, this tends to increase the level of intimacy because they are able to share their honest feelings and ask for what they want and, thereby, increase the probability they will connect and understand one another's needs.

Avoidance:

Avoidance is a person's tendency to minimize issues and his/her reluctance to deal with issues directly.

Avoidance tends to be highest in people who are passive or nonassertive. Conversely, people who are very assertive tend to be low on avoidance. There is increasing evidence that an avoidant style creates problems in close relationships.

People who score high in avoidance tend to report they feel dominated by their partner, dislike the personalities of their partner, and dislike the way they communicate and resolve conflicts with their partner.

John Gottman (1994), a prominent researcher on marriage, described three common styles of relating in couples. One of his three types of couples was the avoidant couple. Avoidant couples tend to minimize conflict and often don't resolve their differences, agreeing to disagree. Gottman has found an avoidant marriage is one style that can endure, but states, "...there is a low level of companionship and sharing in the marriage." He goes on to report, "Another hazard of this type of marriage is that it can become lonely" (Gottman, 1994, p. 46). Individuals in such marriages may often feel disconnected, misunderstood, and ill-equipped to deal with conflict should it arise.

Self Confidence:

Self Confidence focuses on how good a person feels about himself/herself and his/her ability to control things in their life.

Self Confidence was developed by combining aspects of "Self Esteem" and "Mastery". Self esteem is defined as how positive people feel about themselves. Mastery is the belief people have about how much control they have over what happens in their life. Self Confidence is seen as a valuable integrative concept because it is easier to change than self esteem and focuses heavily on the positive attitude of being able to control your own life.

When two people have higher levels of self confidence, the couple has a higher probability of having a successful marriage. It is, therefore, one of the goals of the program to increase self confidence. This can be achieved by helping both persons become more assertive with each other, as outlined in the exercise.

Partner Dominance:

Partner dominance assesses how much a person feels his/her partner tries to control them and dominate his/her life.

Partner dominance is problematic when a person does not want their partner to be in such a controlling position. A high score on Partner Dominance should trigger a discussion with the person scoring high.

There is considerable evidence in U.S. samples demonstrating couples who have an equalitarian relationship tend to have a more successful marriage (Olson and DeFrain, 1997). There are, however, exceptions. These include couples in which both partners genuinely want more traditional relationship roles, often based on their religious beliefs or their cultural heritage. The traditional relationship is one in which the male is the leader of the family.

The Partner Dominance area should be reviewed in combination with the Role Relationship area. Engaged couples who want and expect to have a more equalitarian relationship in terms of Relationship Roles will struggle if one partner is overly dominant. Married couples may also struggle with their Roles and Responsibilities when one partner is dominant and the other feels the imbalance.

RELIABILITY OF RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS SCALES

Reliability (alpha) assesses the degree to which the items in each of the relationship dynamics areas are interrelated and provide a reliable assessment of that area. The reliabilities of the four scales are based on a sample of 11,996 individuals (an equal number of males and females) who took ENRICH collected between 2006-2008.

The reliability of the four relationship dynamics scales are high, ranging from .74 -.84. This is an ideal level for clinical, educational or research purposes.

Scale	Reliability (Alpha)
Assertiveness	.83
Self Confidence	.80
Avoidance	.74
Partner Dominance	.84

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND COUPLE SATISFACTION

Using a sample of 1,800 individuals (900 couples) who took the ENRICH Inventory, an analysis was done using the four relationship dynamics scales and marital satisfaction. The correlations between these five scales are summarized below.

Table 1: Relationship Dynamics & Couple Satisfaction (2008)

	Couple Satisfaction	Self Confidence	Assertiveness	Avoidance	Partner Dominance
Couple Satisfaction	1.0				
Self Confidence	.49	1.0			
Assertiveness	.73	.47	1.0		
Avoidance	-.60	-.45	-.81	1.0	
Partner Dominance	-.71	-.45	-.68	.71	1.0

Individuals who are high in marital satisfaction tend to be high in assertiveness and self confidence and low in avoidance and partner dominance. This is based on the high positive correlations of marital satisfaction with assertiveness ($r = .73$) and self confidence ($r = .49$) and negative correlations with avoidance ($r = -.60$) and partner dominance ($r = -.71$).

Individuals who are assertive also tend to be self confident and individuals who are avoidant tend to perceive higher partner dominance. This is based on the positive correlation between assertiveness and self confidence ($r = .47$) and positive correlation between avoidance and partner dominance ($r = .71$).

Individuals who are high on assertiveness and self confidence tend to be low on avoidance and partner dominance. This is reflected by the high negative correlations of assertiveness with avoidance ($r = -.81$) and partner dominance ($r = -.68$). There is also a high negative correlation between self confidence with avoidance ($r = -.45$) and partner dominance ($r = -.45$).

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND COUPLE TYPES

This study compares the five couple types from ENRICH with the four scales in the Relationship Dynamics area (Kouneski and Olson, 2004). The five couple types range from the happiest (Vitalized) to the least happiest (Devitalized).

Table 2: Relationship Dynamics and ENRICH Couple Types (%)

	Vitalized	Harmonious	Conventional	Conflicted	Devitalized
Assertiveness					
Both high	95%	74%	52%	14%	4%
Both low	1	1	2	15	33
Self Confidence					
Both high	79	58	41	23	11
Both low	1	2	5	17	30
Avoidance					
Both high	1	1	4	17	36
Both low	86	58	29	9	2
Partner Dominance					
Both high	1	3	7	35	64
Both low	77	32	13	2	1

Note: Results indicate whether both partners had high or low individual percentile rank scores on a given scale and other combinations are omitted.

The Vitalized couples had the highest percentage (95%) of couples where both partners were high in assertiveness, both high in self confidence (79%), both low (86%) in avoidance and both low (77%) in partner dominance.

At the opposite extreme with Devitalized couples, we see the opposite pattern related to these four variables. On assertiveness, about one-third (33%) of the Devitalized couples were both low and about 30% were both low in self confidence. Devitalized couples were both high on avoidance (36%) and almost two-thirds (64%) had both partners high in partner dominance.

In summary, the more healthy and happy the couple, the higher both partners are on assertiveness and self confidence and the lower their scores on avoidance and partner dominance.

In another study, Craddock (2006) found the women who experienced parental abuse had lower relationship satisfaction, and this effect was mediated by lower scores on the Self Confidence scale.

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND PREPARE SCALES

A correlation analysis was done based on a sample of 2,766 people who took PREPARE. Correlations were computed between the three areas of Assertiveness, Avoidance, and Partner Dominance (Self confidence was not available) and with other PREPARE areas (Personality, Communication and Conflict Resolution). The results are summarized below.

People high in Assertiveness tend to be:

- Lower in Avoidance ($r = -.72$)
- Lower in Partner Dominance ($r = -.50$)
- Like the personality of their partner ($r = .49$)
- Feel good about communication with their partner ($r = .77$)
- Feel good about conflict resolution with their partner ($r = .68$)

There were specific relationships within three of the scales in this area. Assertiveness was found to be negatively correlated with Avoidance ($-.72$) and Partner Dominance ($-.50$). This means the more assertive a person is, the less they use avoidance and the less they perceive their partner as dominating them.

Assertiveness is highly correlated with other areas in PREPARE. The higher a person scores on Assertiveness, the more the person likes the personality of their partner ($.49$), feels good about their communication ($.77$) and feels good about their conflict resolution ($.68$).

People high in Avoidance tend to be:

- Lower in Assertiveness ($r = -.72$)
- Higher in Partner Dominance ($r = .62$)
- Dislike the personality of their partner ($r = -.59$)
- Dislike the communication with their partner ($r = -.66$)
- Dislike the conflict resolution with their partner ($r = -.71$)

As indicated previously, people high in avoidance tend to be low in assertiveness. As expected, there is a positive correlation between avoidance and partner dominance ($.62$). This indicates the more a person uses avoidance, the more they perceived their partner as dominant.

In contrast to assertiveness, people with high scores on avoidance tend to perceive their relationship with their partner in more negative terms. People high in avoidance tend to dislike the personality of their partner ($-.59$) and not feel good about their communication ($-.66$) and conflict resolution ($-.71$) with their partner.

In addition, people who view their partner as dominant (high score on Partner Dominance) tend not to like the personality of their partner ($-.83$) and dislike their communication ($-.67$) and conflict resolution ($-.66$) with their partner.

In summary, this analysis clearly demonstrates people who are assertive tend to view their relationship as positive while people who are avoidant tend to view their relationship as more negative. Thus, an important goal of the program is to increase the level of assertiveness in each person so they can develop a better understanding of each other's feelings, needs and preferences.