

## The Couple's Grid: A Tool for Assessing Interpersonal Construction in Couples

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## **Abstract**

In the study of human relationships, interest in interpersonal construction is increasing because of its implications for the quality of the couple's relationship. The processes involved in construing self and others may play a key role. However, a precise enough methodology to study those processes has not yet been developed. The aim of this paper is to present a dyadic assessment tool, the Couple's Grid (CG), which is inspired from constructivist and systemic perspectives. Derived from Procter's (1985) Family Grid, the CG is similarly based on the Repertory Grid Technique. The CG assesses perception of self and partner, and their ideals; and also the metaperception of the partner's view (e.g., "What does your partner think about you?"). These two levels of analysis provide measures of perceived similarity, commonality and sociality. This article describes the development of CG as an assessment tool with a case illustration.

*Keywords:* interpersonal perception, couples assessment, Repertory Grid, theory of mind, metacognition.

## The Couple's Grid: A Tool for Assessing Interpersonal Construction in Couples

In the study of human relationships, interest in interpersonal construing processes has increased due to their centrality in the origin and maintenance of psychological disorders. Therapeutic interventions with couples and families, rather than individuals, are receiving more and more attention and are considered to improve the prognosis of both personal and relational difficulties. Clinical research in this area focuses on aspects of communication and the way individuals perceive others in order to have a better understanding of the cognitive processes of adjusted couples (Deal, Wampler & Halverson, 1992; De La Ronde, 1997; Hurst, 2001; Luckey, 1960a, b) and to improve marital therapy (Childs & Hedges, 1980).

One of the theories that describes the structure and processes of interpersonal understanding is Kelly's (1955/1991) Personal Construct Theory (PCT; see Walker & Winter, 2007, for a review). The most well known and widely used instrument for exploring personal constructs is the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT; Fransella, Bell & Bannister, 2004; Saúl et al., 2012). The RGT aims to capture the idiosyncratic view of the person being assessed, including how he or she perceives others, but does not investigate relationships per se (Procter, 1985).

Several authors studied relationships by using an approach that integrates PCT and systemic theory. Procter (1981) and Feixas, Procter and Neimeyer (1993) have investigated the family as a construing system. Problems are explained with respect to the family constructs (also described as myths, premises and beliefs) which constrain the members' choices.

According to PCT, the study of interpersonal relationships is based on the *sociality* corollary: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may

play a role in a social process involving the other person” (Kelly, 1955/1991, p. 5). This phenomenon involves a continuous activity and it was defined by Kelly as “role-playing”. As Landfield (1988) said, in a relationship each member recognizes the other as a validating agent. In couples, construction processes are unique from one couple to another.

Construing how another person construes has been widely studied using different approaches in the realm of mind and cognition. Several authors investigated this phenomenon after Kelly (1955/1991) and created their theories on the matter. Laing, Phillipson and Lee (1966) termed it *metaperspective* and they defined it as “my view of other’s view of me”. They distinguished three levels of interpersonal perception: *direct perspective* (e.g., the man’s view of X), *metaperspective* (e.g., the man’s view of the woman’s view of X) and *meta-metaperspective* (e.g., the man’s view of the woman’s view of the man’s view of X). Flavell (1976, 1979) named it *metacognition* and Premack and Woodruff (1978) used the term *theory of mind*, which mainly refers to the activity of interpreting others in terms of their mental states and traits. Also some other authors such as Leslie (1987, cited in Procter, 2001) and Perner (1991) elaborated on these issues.

The study of this metaperceptive ability has taken an influential role in neurosciences in the last decades. In the early 1990's the *mirror neurons* were discovered, showing that recognition of others, including their actions and intentions, relies on our motor system. Mirror neurons correlate observed movements with those made by the person himself, demonstrating that these neurons play an important role in higher levels of perception and metaperception. It has even been proven that capturing the other’s emotional reactions is also related to several areas characterized by mirror properties (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2006). This may explain human

functions such as imitation and empathy. Moreover, a deficit in these neurons may be responsible for some important symptoms of autism (Iacoboni, 2009) such as the difficulty with metarepresentation. Other clinical implications have been postulated for the understanding and treatment of personality disorders, a very fruitful research line (see Dimaggio, Semerari, Carcione, Nicolò & Procacci, 2007).

### **Assessing Metaperception in Relationships**

Different authors described the importance of the study of metaperception in relationships. As stated by Laing et al. (1966, p. 33), “humans constantly think about others, and the way others think about them, and the way others think they think about others, etc”. This field of research seems to possess required qualities for understanding the way human relationships function. Hence, various instruments were created to assess these interpersonal processes of perception. Laing et al. (1966) created the Interpersonal Perception Method (IPM) to evaluate the similarities between two individuals in perceiving different topics. IPM analyses direct perspectives, metaperspectives and meta-metaperspectives by using direct questions (e.g., “Do you think that your partner thinks that you think that *you* love him?”). Moreover, other experimenters used different instruments to observe the couple’s ability to predict their partner’s perceptions using congruency of their simple perceptions and metaperceptions (De la Ronde, 1997; Lueken, 2005; Lukey, 1960b; Murstein, 1971). In addition, they described perceptions of similarity between partners’ vision of “self” and “partner” (Arias & O’Leary, 1985 cited in Fincham & Bradbury, 1990; Cook & Jones, 2002; Deal et al., 1992; Luckey, 1960a; Murstein, 1971; Solomon, 1986). For example, Solomon (1986) employed the Semantic Differential Questionnaire, which was outlined by Osgood and Suci (as cited in Solomon, 1986). He assessed

similarities between the partners in different given adjectives by comparing the “self”, “ideal self”, “partner”, and “ideal partner” elements. Murstein (1971) evaluated differences between partners in aspects related to social desirability, comparing the same elements that Solomon did, but by using the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS). Luckey (1960a, b) used the Interpersonal Check list to compare simple perceptions between couples concerning the same elements mentioned above.

In the PCT context, Procter (1985) adapted the metaelements (or metaperception elements) from Laing et al. (1966) into a grid designed for evaluating families, named the Family Grid (FG). The FG displayed constructs derived from family members’ individual grids. Therefore these constructs represented their own conceptual world and their *Family Construct System* (Procter, 1978, 1981). In the FG, Procter defined six measures derived from the comparison of simple perception elements (e.g., “son’s views of his mother”) and metaelements (e.g., “son’s perception of his mother’s view of him”) as rated on a set of shared constructs.

Other authors have adopted the grid method to use specific concepts that come from other approaches such as the psychoanalytic (Mendoza, 1985; Ryle, 1985) or the systemic approach (Hartman, 1988; Sánchez, 1988, both cited in Feixas et al., 1993). Differences between these grids depend on the nature of the elements (dyadic, simple, ideal, contextual and metaperspective), on the procedure (elicit constructs separately, together or in both forms), and on the measures. A summary of these grids can be found in Feixas et al. (1993).

In fact, several studies have been done using the grid to assess differences between adjusted and distressed couples (Childs & Hedges, 1980; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985; O’Loughlin, 1989; Ryle & Breen, 1972a, b). Furthermore, these studies have highlighted the therapeutic advantages

offered by administering the grid in the clinical setting to reach a greater understanding of the psychological processes that characterize the construction of the reality in a couple's life. In the present study, the description of the measures being used is presented in the context of the results obtained by previous investigations on the Quality of Couple's Relationship (QCR).

The aim of this article is to present a tool, the Couple's Grid (CG), created to assess the interpersonal process of construction (or perception) in couples and observe which of these mutual process are specific and unique to each relationship. The CG is a version of Procter's FG (1985). Both methods study interpersonal perception using the main constructs of each member, derived from their individual grids, in a joint common grid that is later rated individually (see below for details). Regarding the elements, both instruments permit the assessment of simple and metaperceptions but the CG contains only the couple and it includes the ideals of "self" and "partner" and their metaperceptions. Measurements are also similar since CG uses four adapted measures taken from the FG but the analyses to obtain them are different.

By exploring both partners' constructs and perceptions, the CG is intended to enter the phenomenological world of couples. Most importantly the CG offers the advantage of integrating a variety of measurements in a single instrument which will be illustrated using a single case study.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The couple selected to illustrate the CG technique was a young unmarried couple with no children, a 29-year-old man, Jordi (all names have been changed to protect privacy) and a 25-

year-old woman, Pilar. They had been engaged for three years and living together for the last four months. Both completed university studies and were working at the time of the assessment.

## **Procedure**

The couple was asked to consent to voluntary participation in a wider study on depression as part of the control group (Montesano, Feixas, Muñoz, Compañ, *in press*). The assessment consisted of two sessions. In the first one, which lasted about 90 minutes, two interviewers administered the RGT to each partner separately. In the second session, which lasted about 30 minutes, each partner completed the CG individually. Between the sessions, a trained investigator constructed the CG based on the two individual grids.

## **Construction of the Couple's Grid**

### **The Couple's Grid constructs**

The CG uses 20 constructs, characterized by two opposite poles, drawn from the individual grids of both partners in equal proportion. For that purpose, a selection of the personal constructs from each member is made by following a set of criteria, in the following order:

- 1) Important constructs, as rated by the respondent partner;
- 2) Symptomatic and/or discrepant constructs (constructs where there is a difference equal or bigger than 4 between the score of “self” and “ideal self”);
- 3) Constructs forming implicative dilemmas (Feixas, Saúl & Ávila, 2009);
- 4) Constructs which appear in both individual grids;

- 5) Constructs with high loadings reflected in the first principal component, as resulting from correspondence analysis of the grid.

### **The Couple's Grid elements**

The CG uses eight predetermined elements that cover two levels: four simple perception elements: “self”, “partner”, “ideal self” and “ideal partner”; and four metaperception elements: “What does your partner think about her/himself”, “What does your partner think about you”, “How would your partner like to be” and “How would your partner like you to be”.

Once we have both the constructs and the elements of the CG which has been created *ad hoc* for a particular couple, each member has to rate elements according to each construct using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means *very* for the left pole of the construct, and 7 *very* for the right pole of the construct.

Figure 1 shows the CG of Pilar which expresses her point of view. She receives the title “Partner 1” (P1), while Jordi receives the name “Partner 2” (P2). The elements derived from her grid are coded from 1 to 8 and they are represented in a symbolic way (e.g., Pilar’s “self” is “P1→P1”). Jordi’s CG is identical but the elements taken from his grid are coded from 9 to 16. In his CG, the focal point will be his so the elements would be represented in an opposite direction.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

### **Analysis of the Couple's Grid**

The analysis of the CG is performed by comparing the scores given to different elements using Euclidean Distances (ED), the distance between two points derived from the Pythagorean Theorem:  $ED_{(x,y)} = \{[\sum_i(x_i - y_i)^2]^{1/2}/[MD(C^{1/2})]\}100$ ,  $x$  and  $y$  being the compared elements;  $MD$  being the Maximum Difference (which in a Likert scale from 1 to 7  $MD$  is 6 points); and  $C$  representing the total number of constructs ( $C = 20$ ). The result of the ED formula gives a value with a range of 0 to 100. To simplify the process of interpretation, we reverse the ED's scores to indicate Inter-Elements Similarity (IES), with the following formula:  $IES = 100 - ED$ . That is to say, high values (close to 100) represent a high level of similarity between compared elements, while low values (close to 0) reflect a low one.

## **Measures**

Comparing all elements between themselves makes it possible to obtain 64 variables. These variables provide information according to two criteria: a) the type of analysis, that can be: *intrapersonal*, when comparing elements of one individual grid; and *interpersonal*, when comparing elements of both partners' grids; and b) the nature of the compared elements, that can be comparison of simple perception elements, comparison of metaperception elements or comparison between simple and metaperception elements. Nevertheless, for this study only those variables which were considered relevant to the QCR were selected. Thus, we included 17 variables grouped in six measures using a similar nomenclature to that of Procter's (1985) FG. In the CG, four out of six measures described by Procter were adapted to assess couples: *Perceived Similarity*, *Commonality*, *Comparison of Self-concepts and Ideals*, and *Sociality*. The CG adds two other ones: *Metaperceived Similarity* and *Assumed Similarity* (Papp, Kouros & Cummings, 2010). It is possible to obtain an IES score for each variable and for each partner, and a Total IES

score for each measure and each partner, except on the measure of Comparison of Self-concepts and Ideals in which a single score is given for both partners. The different measures and selected variables are described hereafter.

### ***Perceived Similarity***

This measure compares simple perception elements from the intrapersonal analysis. Procter (1985) used this measure represented as:  $A \rightarrow X / A \rightarrow Y$ . In the CG, high scores of IES signify high perceived similarity. Three of the six available variables were selected:

*Perceived similarity of self and partner* (PS1) compares simple perception elements of “self” and “partner” from the same perceiver ( $P1 \rightarrow P1 / P1 \rightarrow P2$ ). That gives information about perception of similarity that the individual has regarding the partner. Some studies with versions of the RGT (Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985) and other measurements (Arias & O’Leary, 1985, cited in Fichman & Bradbury, 1990; Deal et al., 1992; Luckey, 1960 a, b) found that this variable was an indicator of satisfaction in a couple relationship.

*Perceived similarity of self and ideal self* (PS2) compares simple perception elements of “self” and “ideal self” from the same perceiver ( $P1 \rightarrow P1 / P1 \rightarrow P1i$ ). This variable, identical to the “self and ideal-self discrepancy” measure of RGT, is considered to be an indicator of self-esteem (Arnold, 1988; Dada, Feixas, Compañ & Montesano, 2012; Watson & Watts, 2001). Although the relation between this variable and the QCR has yet to be proven, Murstein (1971) and Solomon (1986) found that partners tend to be similar in their levels of self-esteem.

*Perceived similarity of partner and ideal partner* (PS3) compares simple perception elements of “partner” and “ideal partner” from the same perceiver ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 / P1 \rightarrow P2i$ ). PS3

indicates the level of satisfaction an individual experiences with the spouse and, therefore, it can be seen as an indicator *per se* of QCR, although no studies have illustrated yet the connection between these measures.

### ***Metaperceived Similarity***

This measure compares metaperception elements of one partner (intrapersonal analysis), hence, the way he/she construes the partner's constructions. These variables may capture the degree of success of one partner in guessing the other partner's simple perceptions. High scores on the IES scale indicate that the partner perceived elements in a similar way. Two of the six available variables were chosen:

*Metaperceived similarity of self and ideal self* (MS1) is calculated by using the metaperception elements "What does your partner think about her/himself?" and "How would your partner like to be?" ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2i$ ). It provides information about the partner's self-esteem, as viewed by the spouse.

*Metaperceived similarity of partner and ideal partner* (MS2) is calculated by using the metaperception elements "What does your partner think about you?" and "How would your partner like you to be?" ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1i$ ). It provides information about the perception of partner's satisfaction with the spouse.

### ***Assumed Similarity***

Assumed Similarity describes the extent to which a spouse's rating of their partner corresponds to how much they themselves felt the same (Papp et al., 2010). Laing et al. (1966) also defined this measure as *perceived empathy* or *feeling understood*. These terms were

measured as the absolute difference between a person's view of some aspect of their lives and how they think someone else perceives their view of that aspect (cf. Cramer & Jowet, 2010). In the CG, this measure is evaluated with the comparison between simple and metaperception elements of one individual (intrapersonal analysis), and generates 16 variables for each partner. However, only four variables can assess the assumed similarity between the same elements. Higher values of IES imply higher level of assumed similarity.

*Assumed similarity of self (AS1)* is calculated by using the simple perception element of "self" and the metaperception element of "What does your partner think about you" ( $P1 \rightarrow P1$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1$ ). It informs about the assumed similarity in construing the perceiver's "self". The correlation between self-scores and assumed spouse scores has been related to marital satisfaction (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966)

*Assumed similarity of partner's self image (AS2)* is calculated by using the simple perception element of "partner" and the metaperception element of "What does your partner think about her/himself?" ( $P1 \rightarrow P2$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2$ ). It informs about the assumed similarity in construing the partner's "self".

*Assumed similarity of ideal self (AS3)* is calculated by using the simple perception element of "ideal self" and the metaperception element of "How would your partner like to be?" ( $P1 \rightarrow P1i$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2i$ ). It informs about the assumed similarity in construing the "ideal self".

*Assumed similarity of ideal partner (AS4)* is calculated by using the simple perception element of "ideal partner" and the metaperception element of "How would your partner like you to be?" ( $P1 \rightarrow P2i$  /  $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1i$ ). It informs about the assumed similarity in construing the "ideal partner".

Although we did not find studies linking these measures and QCR it seems logical to hypothesize that assumed similarity in “ideal self” and “ideal partner” can be an indicator of a good relationship.

### ***Commonality***

The commonality corollary of Kelly’s theory (1955/1991) states that “to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person”. Procter (1985) defined commonality in the FG as the comparison between the points of views of two family members (X and Y) about another member (A), and he represented it graphically as:  $X \rightarrow A / Y \rightarrow A$ . This measure gives us the “actual agreement” of two people (Procter, 1978). In CG, the comparison of two different points of view can be applied only to the element "self" of each partner. The corresponding interpersonal variable is:

*Commonality on view of self (C1)* is calculated by using two simple perception elements: “self” of one member’s grid (the one being perceived) and “partner” from the other grid ( $P1 \rightarrow P1 / P2 \rightarrow P1$ ). It measures the amount of agreement between the constructions of one partner’s self. Some studies have demonstrated the level of satisfaction from a relationship is greater as the congruence between the partner’s perception and his/her own perception is higher (De la Ronde, 1997; Luckey, 1960b; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985).

### ***Comparison of Self-concepts and Ideals***

Variables in this category measure the similarity of the concepts of “self”, “ideal self” and “ideal partner” between partners. Procter (1985) only used this measure to compare between

each member's view of "self" and he represented it as:  $X \rightarrow X / Y \rightarrow Y$ . It is the only set of variables of the CG which provide a single score for both members. This interpersonal analysis gives factual information on whether the compared concepts are perceived as similar. Three of the four possible variables were chosen:

*Comparison of self-concepts* (CSI1) reports the level of similarity on the "self" concept between partners ( $P1 \rightarrow P1 / P2 \rightarrow P2$ ). Regarding the QCR, Tharp (1963, as cited in Ryle & Breen, 1972a), Cook and Jones (2002) using the Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky as cited in Cook & Jones, 2002) and other studies using other measures (Creamer & Campbell, 1988; Gaunt, 2006) found that greater similarity between partners' self-concepts was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction.

*Comparison of ideal self-concepts* (CSI2) reports the similarity of the "ideal self" concept between partners ( $P1 \rightarrow P1i / P2 \rightarrow P2i$ ). LaPrelle, Insko, Cooksey and Graetz (1991) found a strong level of attraction among partners that had similar self-ideals.

*Comparison of ideal partner-concepts* (CSI3) reports the similarity of the "ideal partner" concept between partners ( $P1 \rightarrow P2i / P2 \rightarrow P1i$ ). We did not find any study relating the latter two variables with QCR. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that two people who pursue the same ideals can have a better understanding of each other.

### ***Sociality***

Sociality refers to traditional measures which have been presented as "accuracy" or empathy measures. It has been also used with different terms, such as *empathic accuracy* by Ickes and Simpson (as cited in Papp et al., 2010), *accurate empathy* (Cramer & Jowett, 2010) and

*understanding* (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Laing et al., 1966; Mendoza, 1985). They defined it as the ability of one partner to correctly infer the thoughts and feelings of the other. In the CG we measure this ability of one partner by comparing his/her metaperception elements with the simple perception elements of the perceived spouse. High scores in sociality are generally considered as indicators of a “good” relationship (De la Ronde, 1997; Lueken, 2005; Mast & Ickes, 2007; Mendoza, 1985; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985; Procter, 1985). Hence, in CG higher scores of IES indicate higher accuracy in perceiving the constructions made by the partner. This comparison is interpersonal and explicitly evaluates the ability to predict the construction processes of another person, as Kelly noted (1955/1991) in the sociality corollary. The main variables of sociality in the CG are:

*Accuracy of the perception of partner’s self image* (S1) uses the metaperception element “What does your partner think about her/himself?” and the simple perception element “self” displayed by the other partner's point of view ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2$  /  $P2 \rightarrow P2$ ), evaluating the ability to predict the way the partner constructs his/her self.

*Accuracy of the perception of partner’s view of self* (S2) uses the metaperception element “What does your partner think about you?” and the simple perception element “partner” displayed by the other partner's point of view ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1$  /  $P2 \rightarrow P1$ ), evaluating the ability to predict the partner’s view of self.

*Accuracy of the perception of partner’s ideal self* (S3) uses the metaperception element “How would your partner like to be?” and the simple perception element “ideal self” displayed by the other partner's point of view ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P2i$  /  $P2 \rightarrow P2i$ ), evaluating the ability to predict the partner’s ideal self.

*Accuracy of the perception of partner's ideal partner* (S4) uses the metaperception element “How would your partner like you to be” and the simple perception element “ideal partner” from the predicted partner, to predict the partner’s “ideal partner” ( $P1 \rightarrow P2 \rightarrow P1i$  /  $P2 \rightarrow P1i$ ).

## Case

INSERT FIGURE 2

The couple chosen to illustrate the CG, Jordi and Pilar, reported rather similar results (IES scores above 50) (see Figure 2). However, there were small differences between some variables that seem to possess a level of interest.

Considering the intrapersonal measure of Perceived Similarity, the scores show that both partners perceived the other as similar (PS1), they had a high level of self-esteem (PS2), and both were satisfied with their spouse (PS3). However, the scores of Jordi are greater on these three variables.

Results on the Metaperceived Similarity variables show that both partners perceived that the other had a high level of self-esteem (MS1) and was satisfied with the partner (MS2). However, Jordi's scores were higher on both variables.

Results on Assumed Similarity show that both partners perceived the other's perceptions as similar to their own perceptions (TAS). Jordi perceived his “self” and his vision of Pilar's “self” as more similar than she did (AS1 and AS2). In contrast, Pilar perceived her “ideal self” and “ideal partner” as more similar than he did (AS3 and AS4).

Considering the interpersonal analysis, the measure of Commonality shows that the pair perceived their own “self” as similar to how it was construed by the partner (C1). Therefore, there was a high level of commonality in both construction of partner’s “self”.

Regarding the Comparison of Self-concepts and Ideals variables, high scores indicate that the couple construed their self-concepts and ideals in a similar way. The concepts on which the degree of agreement was higher, from highest to lowest level, were: “ideal partner” (CSI3); “ideal self” (CSI2); and “self” (CSI1). This may reflect that the partners were more similar in construing ideals than in the construction of “self”.

On Sociality variables, scores indicate that both partners could construe their partner’s constructions with a similar level of accuracy. However, Jordi construed at a more precise level the way his partner construed her “self” (S1), how she construed his “self” (S2) and the way she would like to be (S3). In contrast, Pilar was more accurate in construing her partner’s “ideal partner” (S4).

Moreover, from the combination of the different variables we can infer a deeper interpretation of these results. As an example, taking into account the observed scores, if we combine MS2-P1/ PS3-P2 we can deduce that Pilar perceived that he was less satisfied than he really was (MS2-P1/ PS3-P2) and if we combine MS2-P2/ PS3-P1, we can deduce that Jordi perceived that she was more satisfied than she actually was. However, more data analysis must be done to confirm these observations.

It should be noted that these results are only descriptive. In general it seems that both Jordi and Pilar had an appropriate perception of their partner’s construction of “self” and “partner” and there were not big differences in accuracy level between them. Taking into account the total

scores of each measure, we can see that Jordi obtained higher scores on all measures of the CG. Hence, he perceived more similarity between elements and was more accurate in predicting Pilar's constructions, except in construing partner's "ideal partner" and in the assumed similarity of "ideal self" and "ideal partner". Finally, it seems that the couple was more in accord in the vision of "ideal self" and "ideal partner" than on "self" concept.

### **Discussion**

As this case study demonstrates, the CG enables the collection of diverse information about interpersonal perception. A priori, and based on available knowledge, we chose to reduce the number of measures explored and selected those more relevant for the QCR literature. On these measures, the couple had high scores on all variables of the CG. These results allow us to speculate a high relationship satisfaction because the perceived constructions of self were similar (PS1) (Arias & O'Leary, 1985, cited in Fichman & Bradbury, 1990; Deal et al., 1992; Luckey, 1960a, b; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985), and they had high levels of self-esteem (PS2) (Murstein, 1971). They assumed a similarity between their two "selves" (AS1 and AS2) (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966). There was a high commonality in perceiving the way the other was (C1) (De la Ronde, 1997; Luckey, 1960b; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985). They construed in a similar way the "self" (CS11) (Cook & Jones, 2002; Tharp, 1963, cited in Ryle & Breen, 1972a) and the "ideal self" (CS12) (LaPrelle et al., 1991). Finally, they were able to predict accurately their partner's construction of "self" (S1), "partner's self" (S2), "ideal self" (S3) and "ideal partner" (S4) (De la Ronde, 1997; Lueken, 2005; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985).

Regarding the other variables included in this analysis, it could be beneficial to investigate their relation with QCR. For example, perceived similarity of partner and ideal partner (PS3) can be used as a subjective indicator of satisfaction with the spouse.

Moreover, a deeper analysis could be done by comparing intrapersonal with interpersonal measures. These comparisons would enable us to contrast each partner's perceptions with the "reality" and obtain more objective information about the adjustment of interpersonal perception of the couple.

The CG could offer many possibilities as an instrument designed for clinical or research uses. In Procter's words "the grid was designed originally as a method of asking questions in therapy. Since then it has become more a method of obtaining answers in research. It is presumably only permissible to criticize the latter" (1978, p. 196). One advantage of the CG is that it encompasses most of the measures obtained with other grids created to evaluate couples, such as similarity and empathy in the Double Dyad Grid (Ryle & Breen, 1972a, b); comparison of (meta)perceptions of real/ideal elements in the grid of Childs and Hedges (1980); assessing the understanding between partners as in Mendoza's (1985) Exchange Grid; and predicting the partner's construction of the spouse (O'Loughlin, 1989; Neimeyer & Hudson, 1985).

The couple presented in this paper were not in a clinical situation or in any kind of conflict, so the results represented a relatively well-adjusted couple. In the clinical setting, the assessment of interpersonal perception in relationships might be one of the major strengths of this instrument. The clinician can obtain useful information (e.g., the partners' constructions of "self" and how partners' constructions are mutually predicted) that otherwise would require several sessions of therapy. Moreover, this information is based on the perceptions of each partner,

avoiding the bias derived from the perceived constructions introduced by the therapist. The content analysis of these constructs could be useful in psychotherapy in order to track the Family Construct System (Procter, 1978, 1981) and to find discrepancies in specific meanings. This qualitative information could also be used to elaborate the objectives of the therapy in conjunction with the couple. Moreover, the CG could be a very useful way to assess therapeutic change in interpersonal perception measures with the scores of IES, the magnitude of these changes, as well as changes in the content of perception (differences in score for each construct). Furthermore, intra and interpersonal analysis could grasp the change in both senses: individually and as a couple.

In the research setting, variables offered by CG enable us to quantify and analyze useful information for interpersonal perception research. Future studies could evaluate with the CG the interpersonal construction process in distressed couples or couples where one partner is suffering a disorder such as depression. It would be also interesting to use it to evaluate the efficacy of couple therapy.

The main disadvantages of this technique are related to the administration process because of the amount of time required, the personal resources and the time of assessment. The number of variables and the analysis might be another limitation and requires researchers trained with this tool and clear aims of the study.

In conclusion, the CG can be considered to be a valuable instrument if the cost in terms of time and complexity can be afforded. The CG has high potential for improving knowledge of the interpersonal construction processes of couples and for contributing to enhancing the quality of their relations.

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Name: Pilar (P1)

Date:

1 <u>Constant</u>	<u>Inconstant</u>
2 <u>Responsible</u>	<u>Irresponsible/ Yob</u>
3 <u>Respectful</u>	<u>Abusive</u>
4 <u>Idealist</u>	<u>Conformist</u>
5 <u>Happy</u>	<u>Unhappy</u>
6 <u>Calm</u>	<u>Alarmist</u>
7 <u>Methodical</u>	<u>Chaotic / Disorganized</u>
8 <u>Joyful / spontaneous</u>	<u>Serious</u>
9 <u>Sober</u>	<u>Clingy</u>
10 <u>Decisive</u>	<u>Indecisive / Scary</u>
11 <u>Relax</u>	<u>Conflictive</u>
12 <u>"To speak about it"</u>	<u>"Let it slide"</u>
13 <u>Egoist</u>	<u>Loyal/ Considerate</u>
14 <u>Jealous</u>	<u>Trusting</u>
15 <u>Mature</u>	<u>Immature</u>
16 <u>Extrovert (sociable)</u>	<u>Introverted</u>
17 <u>Distant</u>	<u>Transparent</u>
18 <u>Near</u>	<u>Closed</u>
19 <u>Technological</u>	<u>Traditional</u>
20 <u>Strict (in relationship)</u>	<u>Lax</u>

P1 → P1	P1 → P2	P1 → P1i	P1 → P2i				P1 → P2 → P2	P1 → P2 → P1	P1 → P2 → P2i	P1 → P2 → P1i
1	2	3	4				5	6	7	8
5	3	3	3				5	3	2	3
2	5	2	2				5	2	3	3
2	4	2	2				2	1	4	2
2	6	4	3				6	2	2	4
2	2	2	2				2	5	3	2
3	2	3	3				2	5	3	3
5	4	3	3				5	5	4	4
5	2	2	2				3	5	3	3
5	2	5	5				3	7	2	3
6	4	3	2				5	7	2	3
2	1	2	2				2	2	4	2
2	5	3	3				7	1	3	4
6	5	6	6				6	6	5	5
3	7	5	5				6	3	7	5
2	5	2	2				5	2	2	2
6	2	2	2				5	5	2	4
6	2	5	6				2	3	4	7
2	6	2	2				6	2	6	2
6	2	4	4				2	6	2	3
5	6	5	5				5	6	5	5

1. Very    2. Quite    3. Slightly    4. Middle point    5. Slightly    6. Quite    7. Very

Figure 1. Example of the Couple's Grid of Partner 1 (Pilar). In this case, Pilar (P1) is the perceiver and Jordi (P2) is the one being perceived. Elements are represented in eight columns by a number and a symbol. From 1 to 4 are the simple perceptions: 1) P1→P1: Self; 2) P1→P2: Partner; 3) P1→P1i: Ideal self; 4) P1→P2i: Ideal partner. Elements from 5 to 8 are the metaperceptions: 5) P1→P2→P2: What does your partner think about her/himself?; 6) P1→P2→P1: What does your partner think about you?; 7) P1→P2→P2i: How would your partner like to be?; 8) P1→P2→P1i: How would your partner like you to be? Constructs are selected from the individual grids of each partner and they are related with elements using a 7-point Likert scale represented in the line below the grid, where 1 means *very* for the left pole of the construct, and 7 *very* of the right pole of the construct. The

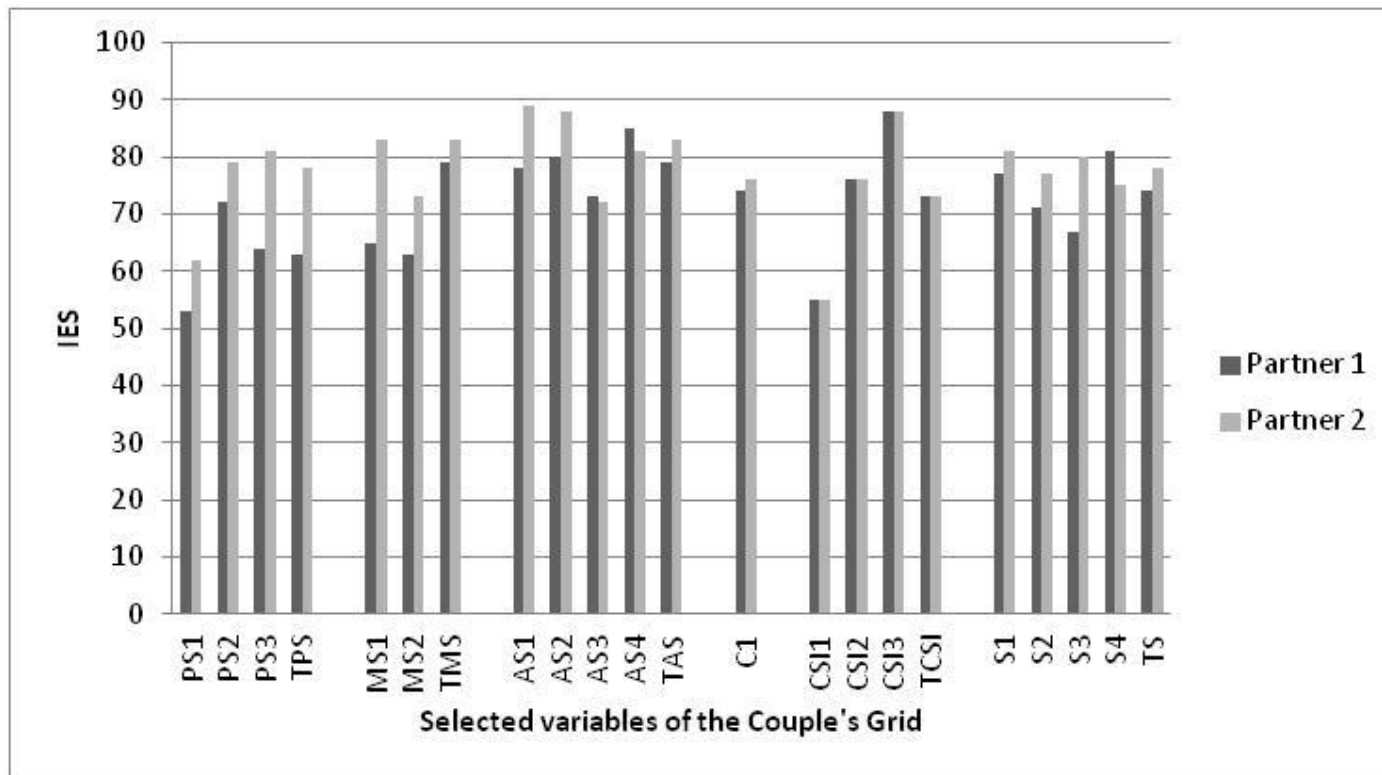


Figure 2. Scores of Inter-Elements Similarity (IES) between partners in the variables of the Couple's Grid for the case example of a control group. The selected variables are coded as: PS1 = Perceived similarity of self and partner; PS2 = Perceived similarity of self and ideal self; PS3= Perceived similarity of partner and ideal partner; TPS= Total of Perceived Similarity; MS1 = Metaperceived similarity of self and ideal self; MS2 = Metaperceived similarity of partner and ideal partner; TMS= Total of Metaperceived Similarity; AS1 = Assumed similarity of partner view of self; AS2 = Assumed similarity of partner's self image; AS3 = Assumed similarity of ideal self; AS4 = Assumed similarity of ideal partner; TAS: Total of Assumed Similarity; C1= Commonality on view of self; CSI1 = Comparison of self-concepts; CSI2 = Comparison of ideal self-concepts; CSI3 = Comparison of ideal partner-concepts; TCSI = Total of Comparison of Self-concepts and Ideals; S1 = Accuracy of the perception of partner's self image; S2 = Accuracy of the perception of partner's view of self; S3 = Accuracy of the perception of partner's ideal self; S4= Accuracy of the perception of partner's ideal partner; TS = Total of Sociality. In this case, Partner 1 is Pilar and Partner 2 is Jordi.