

PERSONAL IDIOM USE AND AFFECT REGULATION

IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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A DISSERTATION

IN

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. David Ivey, my advisor and dissertation committee chair, for his unending patience and guidance throughout the years of my doctoral studies. He has greatly influenced the therapist and researcher that I am today. I would also like to thank Dr. Tom Kimball for his thoughtful contributions to the project and his ability to hold me accountable to my true capabilities as a researcher. Dr. Narissra Punyanunt-Carter provided feedback essential to clarifying the project in such a way so that professionals across disciplines could relate to the final document. Her positive energy helped ease even the most anxiety-producing moments, and her excitement in the project was infectious.

I owe much of the success of this project to Dr. Sterling Shumway; his research on positive relational behaviors provided an avenue to translate my curiosity into respectable research questions. Similar to Dr. Ivey's influence on my development as a therapist and researcher, Dr. Shumway provided me the opportunity to take the raw skills of a graduate student and turn them into those of a professional. I will always be grateful for his confidence in my abilities, and for helping me learn to tolerate genuine ego-building comments.

I have been blessed with so many bright and loving friends, who also share in my success. Dr. Kelli Hays, Bobbi Miller, Dr. Laura Bryan, and others in the program have made this arduous journey much more enjoyable. Thank you for always being willing to accept me as I am, while not letting me forget what I am trying to achieve. I would also

like to thank my parents, sisters, grandparents and other family members for their patience and belief in my dreams.

Overall, I would like to recognize my husband, Eddy, and our beautiful daughter, Abigail Grace. Your constant encouragement and countless sacrifices finally paid off! Eddy, you have been such an example of what it means to be a true partner, lover, and friend. By seeing in me what I sometimes could not, you have given me strength to overcome some of the darkest moments of my life, so that we can now celebrate the fruits of *our* labor. On the wings of love together we will fly –

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Sound Marital House Theory	7
Optimal, Enduring, Loving Relationships	11
Idiom Use in Romantic Relationships	17
Hypotheses	26
III. METHODOLOGY	27
Design	27
Sample	27
Procedures	28
Measures	30
Analyses	40
IV. RESULTS	46
Hypotheses	46
Additional Study Results	49
V. DISCUSSION	63

Interpretation of Study Results	63
Correlates of Idiosyncratic Communication	64
CBR Subscales and Sound Marital House Questionnaire Correlates	66
Patterns of Idiosyncratic Communication Use	67
Examples of Idiosyncratic Communication	68
Clinical Implications	71
Clinical Applications of Measures	74
Interpretation of Results Using a Symbolic-Experiential Framework	74
Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research	76
REFERENCES	79
APPENDIX	
A: SURVEY AND MEASURES	85
B: CONSENT FORM AND HUMAN SUBJECTS DOCUMENTS	95

ABSTRACT

This study used self-report data to explore the key ingredients of positive sentiment override and other relational behaviors that contribute to the maintenance of positive sentiment in romantic relationships. Although marital and relationship satisfaction have been the topic of many studies, the ongoing high rates of divorce suggest there is still much to learn about how relationship satisfaction is achieved and maintained. A previously identified factor in the maintenance of satisfying relationships is a couple's ability to recapture a positive outlook after experiencing negative feelings associated with relational conflict. As an extension of such a focus in couple research, the present study examined how personal idioms and idiosyncratic language were related to positive relational behaviors and the ability to maintain a positive affective climate. Six positive relational behaviors (Ego Building Comments, Salutary Recognition, Revisiting Memories, Exciting Activities, Small Talk, and Feedback) were found to be significantly related to the components of Gottman's model of marital friendship and positive sentiment override. The frequency, purpose, and perceived influence of idiosyncratic communication were also explored. *Expressing affection to partner* and *being playful/having fun* were the most commonly cited reasons for utilizing idiosyncratic communication for both males and females; however, gender differences emerged for the remaining categories of use. Females indicated using idiosyncratic communication significantly more often than males when *asking for a favor*, *seeking affection from partner*, and as *partner nicknames*. Use of idiosyncratic communication

was overwhelmingly perceived as having a positive impact on the relationship, independent of frequency of use. Use of idiosyncratic communication was significantly related to feelings of closeness, knowledge of one's partner, feelings of fondness and admiration, bids for connection, and repair attempts.

To highlight the clinical implications of the study, the results were interpreted using a Symbolic-Experiential approach to relational therapy. Suggestions for future studies exploring the development and maintenance of an enduring positive relational climate are also included.

LIST OF TABLES

3.1	Demographic Characteristics of the Sample	42
3.2	Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables	44
4.1	Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Study Variables	52
4.2	Correlations of Study Variables Controlling for Relationship Length, Age, and Gender	54
4.3	Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Female's Study Variables	56
4.4	Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Male's Study Variables	58
4.5	Mann-Whitney U-tests for Idiom Frequency and Relational Measures by Gender	60
4.6	Mann-Whitney U-tests for Idiom Frequency and Relational Measures by Group	61
4.7	Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables by Group	62

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The current statistics on divorce rates are staggering. One-half to two thirds of all first marriages in the United States end in divorce, despite the widespread availability of relational counseling and the abundance of research on romantic relationships (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). Although marital and relationship satisfaction have been the topic of many studies, the ongoing high rates of divorce suggest that there is still much to learn about how relationship satisfaction is achieved and maintained. Previous studies focusing on the high rate of divorce have primarily examined distressed couples and negative relational behaviors; a new trend in relationship literature has emerged that delineates the need to identify healthy relationship patterns and behaviors (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). A key factor in maintaining satisfying relationships, identified through research, is a couple's ability to recapture a positive outlook after experiencing negative feelings associated with relational conflict (Gottman, 1999). As an extension of such a focus in couple research, the present study examined how personal idioms and idiosyncratic language were related to positive relational behaviors and the ability to maintain a positive affective climate.

It seems that many people today treat love and relationships as linear; we meet, fall in love, get married – and the story ends there, ideally with “happily ever after.” The current study adopts the view of love and relationships as dynamic systems; living entities that require ongoing nurturance and nourishment in order to thrive (compared to

simply surviving). Rituals of connection that begin during courtship must be renewed and reinvented throughout the life cycle of relationships. Floyd and Voloudakis (1999) assert that “affectionate communication is critical for the development, definition, and maintenance of personal relationships” (p. 371). Distressed couples often have few if any rituals to achieve positive emotional connection, leaving them starved for positive energy to devote to the relationship (Gottman, 1999). What happens to these rituals of connection?

Recently, the author discovered a list of words and messages couples had requested as engravings on their wedding bands online. Many of the phrases were traditional and nothing out of the ordinary, such as “I choose you” or “Eternally yours.” However, several were quite unusual and unique to the couple making the request, for example “5 squeezes” and “Shine and gravity.” Although nonsensical to most readers, these phrases were so meaningful to the couple that they chose to make them a permanent part of their wedding day and relationship. Of the 213 phrases listed, roughly 25% of the phrases included personal idioms and/or language that only the couple making the request could decode. These nonsensical words represented important rituals of connection unique to the couple alone.

Individuals in social groups often develop *personal idioms*, or words, phrases, and gestures that have unique meanings within the context of those relationships. The same is true for an intimate relationship between two people. Navran (1967) reported that satisfied couples tend to personalize their language and frequently use “words which have special meaning not understood by outsiders” (p. 175). Researchers believe this type of

communication aids in the development of group cohesion and group identity (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). For example, two female friends used the term “shasta” to refer to things that are cheap and half-hearted actions; a married couple used the phrase “go downtown” as an invitation for sex; and two male friends used the term “miglicked” to refer to someone who has no insight into his or her inappropriate behavior. In each of these cases, the meaning of the word or phrase is known only to the relational pair; use of this language acts as a reminder of their close connection. Use of idiosyncratic language often produces a specific emotional response, and may be used as a way to connect with one’s partner in a variety of contexts. Even professionals have their own jargon related to the field that may not be understood by people outside of that profession. Members of fraternities, sororities, prison inmates, and military groups are also known to rely heavily on idioms (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Idiosyncratic language acts as an identifier, or a way to separate/delineate “us” from “them.” In romantic relationships, the development and maintenance of a happy “us” is paramount.

How one’s relational partner is addressed even holds clues to the level of intimacy within that relationship. Altering someone’s name (e.g., Trish for Patricia) or giving them a nickname associated with their physical appearance, role, or activities (e.g., “Fast Eddy”) represents a different level of intimacy than using traditional terms of endearment (e.g., “Honey” or “Sweetheart”). The use of nonsensical terms, whose meaning is only understood by the relational partners, is often regarded as the most intimate way to address a partner. Use of these terms in public, such as “Booper” or “Schmoopy,” often causes embarrassment for both partners (Little & Gelles, 1975). The structure and form

of personal idioms reflects on the history of a relationship, as described in this quote from Bernstein (1964, p.60):

“...the speech of intimates is played out against the backdrop of assumptions common to the speakers, against a set of closely shared expectations; in short, it presupposes a “local cultural identity” which reduces the need for the speakers to elaborate their intent verbally and to make it explicit.”

In romantic relationships, idiomatic communication often takes the form of nicknames, expressions of affection, requests, and confrontations. For example, one couple described pulling on the partner’s nose to signal when criticism was getting out of hand (Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Gore, 1987). This is clearly an example of affect regulation. According to Hopper, Knapp, and Scott (1981), a relationship’s unique “color of intimacy” is derived from private idiomatic talk. In a study of over 1000 people ranging in age from 12 to 90 years, *personal communication* was identified as a central factor to perceptions of relational intimacy. *Personal communication* in this respect referred to behaviors such as sharing feelings, personal information, and secrets, using more non-verbal communication, and using specialized language developed by the relational pair alone (Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980).

Idiosyncratic language has been studied in the area of elder care, in which it usually relates to negative relationship outcomes (Caporael, 1981; Caporael, Lukaszewski, & Culbertson, 1983). It has also appeared in research of pet/pet owner relationships, in which it is interpreted as a positive relational feature (Hirsh-Pakek & Treiman, 1980; Mitchell, 2001). The use of a form of idiosyncratic language, described

as *Secondary Babytalk*, has been tentatively related to a secure attachment style in adult romantic relationships (Bombar & Littig, 1996). However, the function of personal idioms in developing and sustaining intimacy and commitment in adult romantic relationships is largely unstudied.

Romantic partners often have a unique style of communicating behaviorally, and use pet names during conversations. A change in countenance is often observable by outsiders, to the point of being able to identify who is partnered with whom. These communicative behaviors are often unique to the romantic relationship, or saved only for intimate others. This may be as simple as a special smile or as complex as a secret signal for when its time to leave a party. Partners can often gauge each other's moods instantaneously based on facial expressions or tone of voice. These cues act as signals for the need to regulate affect or express concern in nondistressed couples; they set the stage for rituals of connection. The ability to reduce negative affect and increase positive affect during conversation and conflict regulation is a key element to satisfying relationships (Gottman, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to explore and validate the key ingredients in positive sentiment override as proposed by Gottman (1999), to suggest other essential elements that contribute to positive sentiment, and to explore the role of idiosyncratic communication in creating a positive relational climate. Specifically, positive relational behaviors, as outlined by Shumway and Wampler (2002), were related to Gottman's model of marital friendship and positive sentiment override. Additionally, the

relationship of personal idiosyncratic communication to positive relational behaviors, feelings of closeness, and positive sentiment override was explored.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sound Marital House Theory

J. M. Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House theory of marriage provides a useful framework for the study of adult romantic relationships and idiosyncratic communication. The theory identifies two essential elements in successful marriages, both addressing the presence and management of affect: (1) an overall level of positive affect, and (2) an ability to reduce negative affect during conflict resolution (Gottman, 1999). In Gottman's theory, the ability of couples to manage affect successfully is determined by four key areas: the marital friendship, positive sentiment override, conflict regulation, and creating shared meaning. These four elements comprise a sound marital relationship. Each will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Marital Friendship

According to the Sound Marital House theory, marital friendship acts as the foundation of marital relationships. A strong, healthy marital friendship creates a positive relational climate in non-conflict contexts. The marital friendship provides the couple three opportunities to overcome negativity and create positive affect: (1) by maintaining "cognitive room" for one's partner, (2) expressing fondness and admiration, and (3) validating bids for interaction. Cognitive room refers to the amount of knowledge one holds about his or her partner, ranging from intimate information like greatest fears and

aspirations to seemingly mundane details such as favorite television shows, musicians, or soft drinks (Gottman, 1999). The Fondness and Admiration system represents the amount of respect and affection partners feel for each other, and how readily they express such feelings. Non-distressed couples easily recount, with positive affect, stories about special moments in their relationship. Distressed couples tend to share stories about their relationship that are filled with expressions of disappointment and negativity (Gottman, 1999). Gottman refers to the bid for connection as "...the fundamental unit of emotional communication." (p. 4, 2001). Bids for connection include any verbal or nonverbal message communicating a need to feel connected. Bids can be something as simple as a gesture or touch, or as direct as making a sexual request. Responding positively to bids, or turning towards one's partner, rather than turning away, reflects emotional connection in the marriage (Gottman, 1999).

Positive Sentiment Override

The role of affect in romantic relationships has been closely studied; affect is thought of by many as what makes or breaks a relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 1986; Griffin, 1993; Revenstorf, Vogel, Wegener, Hahlweg, & Schindler, 1980; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). In Gottman's (1999) view, a strong marital friendship acts as a source of positive affect, easily drawn on by the couple when needed. Weiss (1980) coined the phrase "positive sentiment override" after discovering that responses during relational interactions could be determined by a global dimension of affection or disaffection rather than relying solely on whether or not the behavior alone was positive or negative.

Gottman's Sound Marital House theory expands this by suggesting that Positive Sentiment Override and Negative Sentiment Override are expressed every day during ostensibly "normal" or "routine" couple interactions. Positive Sentiment Override occurs when a partner expresses negative affect, as perceived by outside coders, but it is received as a neutral message by the other partner. This suggests that the receiver recognizes the message as an important issue to their partner rather than a personal attack or criticism. In Positive Sentiment Override, positive thoughts and feelings about one's partner are so common and readily available that they override negative feelings. In Negative Sentiment Override, just the opposite occurs; a neutral message is perceived and interpreted as if it were negative (Gottman, 1999). One of many studies that support the concept of sentiment override is the work of Holtzworth-Munroe and Jacobson (1985). In this study of attributional activity, nondistressed couples were found to engage in relationship-enhancing attributions, and distressed couples tend to engage in distress-maintaining attributions. Overall, distressed couples seem to develop negative schemas about their partner's actions that are difficult to overcome (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). The ability of couples to maintain a climate of overall positive affect enables them to handle conflict in a way that prevents further escalation of negativity and potential injury to the relationship.

Conflict Regulation

Gottman (1999) uses the term conflict *regulation* rather than conflict *resolution*, because the process by which conflict is managed, and its associated affect, seems to

have more of an effect on relationship outcomes rather than whether or not the original conflict is resolved. Positive Sentiment Override provides the foundation for successful repair attempts that defuse negative affect during conflict and return the couple to their steady (positive) state. Repair attempts refer to any statement or action that prevents negativity from escalating out of control. Repair attempts are often unconscious, and occur when a discussion reaches a certain level of negativity that signals the need for repair. Couples who have a strong friendship can easily formulate repair attempts that will be meaningful to their partner, and Positive Sentiment Override greatly increases the chance that the repair attempt will be successful. The success or failure of repair attempts is one of the primary factors in whether or not a relationship will last (Gottman, 1999).

Creating Shared Meaning

The final element in Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House theory, Creating Shared Meaning, refers to the ability of partners to develop an "inner life" together; a relationship-specific culture complete with its own symbols and rituals, with each partner's roles and dreams being appreciated. The culture combines essential elements of each partner, and grows as each partner changes, including their values, ideals, and basic philosophies of life (Gottman, 1999). Couples create shared meanings across four basic areas: (1) rituals, (2) roles, (3) goals, and (4) symbols. Gottman (1999) suggests that exploring areas of shared meaning and creating new areas of shared meaning is an essential part of creative resolution of marital conflict. If properly developed, these metaphors, symbols, narratives, and dreams then reinforce the foundation of the

relationship, creating greater intimacy through the marital friendship (Gottman, 1999).

This theory has been expanded in the current study to include all romantic relationships.

The Optimal, Enduring, Loving Relationship

Gottman's Sound Marital House theory outlines several elements he sees as necessary to create lasting, successful relationships. Other empirical studies have identified important characteristics in successful relationships as well; these studies are summarized in the following paragraphs. As previously stated, there seems to be more research on what is wrong with our relationships rather than what is right. To set the framework of exploring positive sentiment override, the following paragraphs will first summarize what authors have identified as components in optimal loving relationships, and then previous studies of idioms and idiosyncratic communication will be reviewed. For the purpose of this study, a romantic relationship is defined as "a love-based social connection built on commitment, passion, and intimacy" (Gamble & Gamble, 1998, p. 158).

Research on marriage and romantic relationships is not new. Broad studies of optimal relationships began with explorations of "marital adjustment" and "marital happiness" (e.g., Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Kirkpatrick, 1937; Locke, 1951; Terman, 1938). In an early study of "strong families," Stinnett and Sauer (1977) surveyed 99 families identified by county extension agents as having happy and satisfactory relationships between the marital partners and the parents and children. In order to be included in the study, the family members themselves also had to rate their relationships

similarly to the outside observers regarding happiness and satisfaction. Stinnett and Sauer (1977) identified four main characteristics present in these families: (1) expressions of appreciation, (2) desire to spend time together and participate in family activities, (3) positive communication patterns, and (4) commitment to a religious life style.

Across the literature regarding satisfying relationships, certain relational characteristics are identified repeatedly, and have therefore added to the conceptualization of the optimal relationship. Overall, relationships described as successful or satisfying are often characterized by deep involvement, caring, and appreciation for members (Aron & Aron, 1986). Lewis and Spanier's (1979) classic review of relationship satisfaction literature revealed five general attributes associated with marital quality: (1) positive regard, (2) emotional gratification, (3) effective communication, (4) role fit, and (5) amount of interaction. Markman (1981) found that more positive communication before marriage predicted happier marriages at a five year follow up, and that communication of affection is especially salient for relational quality. For example, Fiore and Swensen (1977) compared distressed and nondistressed couples on Swensen's categories of love behaviors. The distressed couples scored lower on all behaviors except unexpressed feelings (Fiore & Swensen, 1977).

Beyond basic communication abilities, Aron & Aron (1986) note that many studies demonstrate relationship benefits from greater positivity in areas such as speech and gestures, about life in general, in response to partner's complaints, regarding partner's personality, and greater perceived consensus (Cousins & Vincent, 1983;

Margolin & Wompold, 1981; Yelsma, 1981; as discussed in Aron & Aron, 1986). The available evidence suggests that the presence of positive affect by itself is not sufficient for sustaining relationship satisfaction; rather, it is the lack of negativity that may be more important (Gottman, 1999).

In order to develop a scale to measure positive relationship-maintaining behaviors, Shumway and Wampler (2002) conducted an extensive review of relevant literature and identified six specific behaviors believed to be important to relationship satisfaction. The six behaviors were as follows: (1) greeting and calling the partner by name, (2) talking to the partner about common events, (3) praising the partner, (4) sharing memories, (5) doing things together, and (6) giving appropriate feedback (Shumway & Wampler, 2002, p. 313). Notably, five of the six behaviors focus specifically on communication between partners.

The importance of positive, affectionate communication in the successful maintenance of relationships is highlighted by the work of Punyanunt-Carter (2004). In a study of 200 married and dating individuals, Punyanunt-Carter (2004) found that supportive affective communication was significantly related to communication satisfaction, and communication satisfaction was related to relationship satisfaction. Supportive affectionate communication referred to such behaviors as complimenting one's partner, giving praise, helping with problems, and acknowledging birthdays (Punyanunt-Carter, 2004). These findings support those reported by Shumway and Wampler (2002), and echo elements of Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House.

Research Support for Marital Friendship

Empirical support for the importance of Gottman's (1999) three aspects of marital friendship abound. For example, one of the most common reasons given for why couples divorce is "feeling unloved" in the relationship. In a 1992 study, nearly 80% of divorcing couples cited gradually growing apart and losing a sense of closeness and feeling unloved and unappreciated as their reason for divorcing. Severe conflict was cited by 40% of couples; only 25% of couples blamed infidelity (Gigy & Kelly, 1992). Couples simply stop learning about each other, and give away "cognitive room" and energy to other people or things. Expressions of gratitude and affection erode, leaving partners feeling unloved and empty. Infidelity is often more of a symptom of emotional disengagement in the marriage rather than a cause. Findings from Gigy & Kelly's (1992) study support the importance of the marital friendship and demonstrate how outwardly simple relational attributes are crucial in maintaining relationships.

In a study of successful long-term marriages (40 years and longer) researchers have identified numerous characteristics that couples view as foundational in their long-term relationships. Although being friends with one's marital partner is not always paramount, it is a common theme throughout and is often within the upper four on these lists (Fenell, 1993; Lauer et al., 1990; Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

The importance of friendship/companionship in romantic relationships is also addressed by Hendrick & Hendrick (1993). Across three separate studies of young adult romantic relationships, Hendrick & Hendrick (1993) found that individuals view their experiences of love as multidimensional; subjects indicated there was a strong friendship

component to love as well as passion in personal accounts of their love experiences. Although previous attention to romantic relationships viewed passion and companionship as being consecutive (Berscheid & Walster, 1978), such that friendship/companionship strengthens as passion wanes, the findings of Hendrick and Hendrick (1993) suggest the friendship component of romantic love does not develop later in a relationship, but instead is present early on and may even precede the development of romantic love. Passion and romantic friendship are concurrent rather than being consecutive as once thought; maintaining a satisfying relationship requires both.

From the perspective of viewing love and relationships as attempts to expand the self, Aron and Aron (1986) theorize that individuals will maintain a relationship as long as it is perceived to promote self expansion. Self-expansion, in their definition, occurs when one person includes aspects of another. The original self is not overwritten, but rather augmented. In a close relationship, a person has not only their own set of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge as resources, but also the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge of their partner. Aron & Aron (1986) use the metaphor of two overlapping circles to illustrate their theory; as two people become closer, the circles overlap more, but also enlarge to accommodate more of the other. Relationships are maintained as long as the person continues to include more aspects of their partner. Aspects integrated later in a relationship tend to be subtle, or are new aspects of the partner as he/she develops (Aron & Aron, 1986). Self-expansion theory seems very similar to and highlights the importance of Gottman's (1999) concept of maintaining cognitive room for one's partner.

Research on successful romantic relationships now includes explorations of a variety of specific relational behaviors and processes, most of which have up until recently been overlooked. For example, studies on teasing (Bollmer et al., 2003; Horvath, 2004), small talk (Shumway & Wampler, 2002), use of idioms (Bruess & Pearson, 1993), and even baby talk between partners (Bombar & Littig, 1996) are becoming prevalent in the literature. These studies, reviewed in greater detail below, support Gottman's (1999) view that relational success is rooted in the day-to-day, moment-by-moment, outwardly unimportant interactions between partners. Everything communicates something, whether positive or negative.

In a study exploring gender and cultural differences in romantic courtship scripts, study participants were asked to rank-order a list of fifteen romantic behaviors (Quiles, 2003). Male and female subjects from Puerto Rico were very similar in their rankings; American male and female subjects differed significantly on what was considered the most and least romantic behaviors. American males rated *Kissing* and *Making Love* as the first and second most romantic behaviors, respectively. American females rated *Cuddling* and *Saying "I love you"* as first and second most romantic behaviors. Puerto Rican participants (male and female) ranked *Kissing* as the most romantic behavior (Quiles, 2003). Study participants were also invited to write down any other romantic behaviors not already included on the list. Interestingly, there was overlap between the American and Puerto Rican samples. Nine additional romantic behaviors were identified by study participants: (1) *Expressions of caring and kindness*, (2) *Gazing at the stars/moon*, (3) *Leaving loving and caring notes*, (4) *Taking baths/showers together*, (5)

Taking a scenic car drive, (6) Walking on the beach, (7) Watching the sunset/sunrise, (8) Listening and talking intimately, and (9) Playful teasing/flirting. Unfortunately, there are no examples of what the study participants meant by *talking intimately* or *playful teasing*. However, these romantic behaviors may be considered to be some type of idiosyncratic communication and were highlighted by this sample as an important aspect of romantic/courtship behaviors.

Idiom Use in Romantic Relationships

Measures of courtship behaviors and positive relational behaviors are well grounded in the literature, and yet they could describe almost any positive relationship, romantic or not. Personal idiosyncratic communication is included in the current study to narrow the focus of relational behaviors, and to highlight the intimate level of the relationships reported on by study participants. Gottman's (1999) depiction of a "sound marital house" seems to be missing the flavor of a passionate connection. We have no direct way to measure the "chemistry" or "sparks" between partners, that have little to do with sexuality, but instead the depth of connection and belief in that connection. Altman and Taylor (1973) suggest that idiosyncratic communication incorporates unique paralinguistic, facial, and nonverbal cues whose meaning is understood and created by the dyad. In this view, idiosyncratic communication either augments verbal disclosure or can substitute for it. Idiosyncratic communication is representative of the unique relational culture co-constructed by the couple, and the energy drawn from such a connection. Punyanunt-Carter (2004) reported that individuals in dating relationships

engaged in significantly higher rates of verbal and nonverbal communication compared to married individuals, but married individuals engaged in significantly higher rates of supportive affectionate communication, which was related to relationship satisfaction. This suggests that quality, not quantity, of relational communication is most salient to relationships.

In an early two-part study of personal idioms, Hopper, Knapp, and Scott (1981) discussed how relational rules and norms are negotiated and defined by the private expressions and gestures of intimate partners. To explore the nature and development of couples' personal idioms, part one of the study reviewed interview data from fifty individuals. Interviewers were trained to elicit examples of the idiosyncratic communication used in the participant's marital relationships. From their responses, eight categories of the functions of personal idioms emerged. The most frequently reported type of personal idiom was the use of *Partner nicknames* (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Nineteen of the fifty respondents gave examples of how they address their partner, including "Boo," "Toots," "Spaghetti Head," and "Kitten-Snuffy." How one's relational partner is addressed illustrates the level of intimacy within that relationship. Altering someone's name (e.g., Kel for Kelli) or giving them a nickname associated with their physical appearance, role, or activities (e.g., "Shorty") represents a different level of intimacy than using traditional terms of endearment (e.g., "Baby" or "Sweetheart"). The use of nonsensical terms, as found in the Hopper et al. study, whose meaning is only understood by the relational partners, is often regarded as the most intimate way to address a partner. Use of these terms in public, such as "Toots" or "Bogabear," often

causes embarrassment for both partners and discomfort for those around them (Little & Gelles, 1975).

The second most frequently used category of personal idioms was labeled as *Expressions of affection* (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott 1981). These phrases were used to express love, compliments, or reassurance/comfort. For example the phrase “So much” and “Hunch nickel” meant “I love you” to two interviewees. The word “flow” was a compliment for one couple, referring to a flowing source of beauty. Interviewees also identified using nonverbal language to express affection; one interviewee reported signaling “I love you” by pulling the right ear lobe. Another interviewee reported twitching his nose to let his partner know that she was special (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott 1981).

Labels for Others outside of the relationship was the third most common category of personal idioms in Hopper and colleagues’ study. The meaning of these terms were often derogatory or uncomplimentary, allowing the partners to communicate what otherwise might be socially inappropriate in a public place. Examples of this type of personal idiom include using the name “Mr. Finch” to label a person trying to compensate for small size; the name “Motz” was used to indicate a slow, disorganized person.

Personal idioms used as *Confrontations* was the fourth category developed by Hopper et al. (1981). This category hints at how idioms and idiosyncratic language may be used to regulate affect in relationships. For several study participants, an idiom was used to show displeasure or criticism of the partner’s behavior. Although this category

was labeled *Confrontations* by the researchers, the actual behaviors seem anything but; for example, the nonverbal act of twisting one's wedding ring was used to signal "don't do that" for one participant and their partner (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). This seems to be an indirect, less threatening way to show dissatisfaction with one's partner while potentially avoiding other negative emotions or an escalation of conflict.

Other categories, in order of frequency, included *Requests and Routines*, *Sexual References and Euphemisms*, *Sexual Invitations*, and *Teasing Insults*. The researchers distinguished *Teasing Insults* from *Confrontations* depending on the motive behind the idiom; *Teasing Insults* were used in the context of play (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). The results of the first part of this study validate the existence of unique language forms cultivated by relational partners, for use solely within the context of their romantic relationships (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). It is interesting to notice that married individuals across the lifespan (sample I ranged from 20 to 76 years of age) engage in this type of relational communication.

Part two of Hopper et al.'s (1981) study strove to confirm the categories discovered in the first study, and to further explore patterns of idiom use. The second study employed a much larger sample; 224 members of 112 cohabitating couples were recruited to participate in audio-taped interviews. Within the interviews, 495 idioms were identified, all of which were classifiable using the eight categories previously identified, with 95% agreement between coders. Idioms identified in part two of the study were also categorized as being external or private in orientation. Of the 495 personal idioms identified, 281 were private and 214 were external. For the purpose of

their study, private personal idioms were defined as those that were only used in private or secret contexts, were only used by the marital pair, and/or did not represent common usage in everyday conversation (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Additionally, personal idioms were categorized as having either a positive, negative, or neutral effect on the relationship by the participants. Seventy-five percent of idioms were perceived as having a positive impact on the relationship by *both* partners. Five percent were perceived as having a negative impact by one partner. Negative ratings were due to idioms being perceived as irritating, embarrassing, as those associated with arguments, or as those that often led to an argument. The remainder of personal idioms were rated as having a neutral relational impact; participants reported their impact was determined on the context and motive in which they were used. One-hundred thirty seven idioms were nonverbal, such as pulling an ear lobe to indicate “I love you” (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981).

In an attempt to replicate and extend Hopper et al.’s (1981) study, Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Gore (1987) examined the association of idiomatic communication with sentiments of love, liking, commitment, and closeness. Over six-hundred personal idioms were identified by their subjects; of these, roughly 68% were reportedly used fairly often to very often. Fifty percent of the idioms were rated as having a positive influence on the relationship, 33% had a neutral effect, and 3% were seen as having a negative effect on the relationship. Their findings compliment those of Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, (1981); nicknames, teasing insults, and sexual invitations were the most common types of idioms identified by this sample. For both males and females, the total

number of idioms used in the relationship was significantly related to measures of love, commitment, and closeness. Bell et al. (1987) reports that this relationship was especially strong for personal idioms with sexual undertones. The authors conclude that personal idioms function in bonding two individuals within heterosexual relationships, as well as assisting couples in projecting an undivided social identity; publicly used idioms were interpreted as tools for effective teamwork. Similar to Hopper and colleagues, Bell et al. (1987) suggest that couples create personal idioms only after a minimal amount of relational intimacy has developed, and thereafter, idioms facilitate a deepening of intimacy. The findings of this study highlight the influence that personal idiosyncratic communication may have on positive sentiment override, and its relationship to the components of Gottman's (1999) marital friendship.

In an examination of idiom use over the life cycle, Bruess and Pearson (1993) identified the use of idiosyncratic communication in couples ranging from married less than five years through those married over fifty years. For both husbands and wives, marital satisfaction was positively correlated to the total number of idioms used in the relationship. Bruess and Pearson (1993) report that the use of idiosyncratic communication gradually declined the longer a couple was married, but types and patterns of use generally remain constant, with nicknames and expressions of affection being the primary sources of idioms across four marital stages. An interesting derivation from this trend is demonstrated by the significant increase in the use of idioms as sexual invitations in Stage Three couples. This demonstrates the importance of play in maintaining satisfying marriages (Bruess & Pearson, 1993). Another explanation for this

finding comes from considering the definition of a “Stage Three” couple: Mid-life couples with children in school and still living at home, approximately ages 6 to 18. Given the common cultural taboo of seeing parents as sexual, it is the current author’s assertion that new idioms may have been created out of necessity, by study participants striving to maintain their identity as lovers while also attending to the role of parent. Bruess and Pearson (1993) suggest the overall decline in idiom use may be due to their long-term use rendering them as common, rather than unique or idiosyncratic as they once were. Thus, although they may be less salient, the nicknames, phrases, and expressions of affection still serve important functions across relationship stages.

Development of Personal Idioms

The majority of personal idioms develop during the period of dating and up to the first three years of marriage, with fewer idioms being created thereafter (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Idioms developed during the early years of a relationship are linked to memorable events, both pleasant and unpleasant. Others arose as an attempt to solve a problem or as secret signals to use in public, such as when to leave a party. These origins support the premise that personal idioms are used as reminders of relational expectations and suggest their use in affect regulation. Idioms also originate from linguistic distortions such as slurred words or baby talk. In the Hopper et al. study, one participant described the evolution of an idiom: “In college we used to say ‘peat-heart’ which later became ‘peep’ and now is ‘peepee’” (1981, p. 27). The inspiration for idioms after the

third year of marriage were most often tied to significant events in the couples' history, such as a surgery, learning a new language, or other life event.

Gender differences in personal idiom use have been reported. Men were credited with developing the majority of idioms in the Hopper et al. (1981) study, but females in this sample were credited with developing the most personal idioms used as *Confrontations*. This again suggests the use of personal idioms to regulate affect, in that women use them to comment negatively on their partner's behaviors indirectly, perhaps in an attempt to avoid an argument.

Another source of personal idioms is linguistic distortions of common words, such as slurring two words together or using a higher-pitched, baby-talk type of pronunciation, sometimes referred to as *secondary babytalk*. Several studies have looked at the use of secondary babytalk (SBT) by caregivers addressing care-receivers, such as nursing home personnel and patients (Caporael, 1981; Caporael, Lukaszewski, & Culbertson, 1983). SBT by pet owners to their pets has also been explored (Hirsh-Pasek & Treiman, 1982; Mitchell, 2001). SBT to houseplants and other cherished objects has also been documented (Baron, 1989). SBT in romantic relationships differ from SBT in other relationship forms (mother-child, caregiver-care receiver, pet owner – pet) because it is usually reciprocal rather than uni-directional. Few studies have explored this phenomenon in adult romantic relationships, even though it has been highlighted in the popular media through television sitcoms, comic strips, and even stand up comic routines. Bombar and Littig (1996) established the occurrence of this phenomenon in adult friendships and romances, and reported on its relationship to attachment style. In

their study, roughly 75% of respondents reported using SBT in adult relationships, with the highest incidence occurring in romantic relationships. Examples of secondary babytalk provided by study participants include “Hewo! I wuv you, Jellybean,” “I love you lots and lots, bunches and bunches!” and “Give me a hug, my little sweetie” (Bombar & Littig, p 146). Frequency of SBT was positively correlated with relationship seriousness, satisfaction, love, and degree of sexual involvement, leading Bombar and Littig (1996) to conclude the more often partners utilize SBT, the more secure they felt about the relationship and had a stronger and more intimate attachment to their partner. This held true for both men and women; Bombar and Littig (1996) found no significant gender difference in frequency of use of SBT. Their findings suggest individuals who use SBT with friends or romantic partners were overall more secure and less avoidant in their style of attachment (Bombar & Littig, 1996). By providing basic information regarding SBT, the study opens interesting questions regarding how SBT and idiosyncratic communication functions in relationships. Bombar and Littig (1996) summarized the potential importance of SBT by concluding:

The abandonment of ‘normal’ adult roles – namely, being assertive in requesting that one’s own needs be met while simultaneously being willingly vulnerable, nurturant, endearing, and silly – may prove to be more facilitating, or even necessary, for intimate personal connection than many people think. (p. 156)

Hypotheses

Given the propositions of Gottman's Sound Marital House theory and the findings of previous research on idiosyncratic communication, the following hypotheses were examined:

1. Personal Idiosyncratic Communication (PIC) will be negatively related to Negative Sentiment Override, as measured by Gottman's (1999) Negative Perspective questionnaire.
2. PIC will be positively related to the components of Gottman's (1999) marital friendship:
 - 2a. PIC will be positively related to Fondness and Admiration.
 - 2b. PIC will be positively related to Cognitive Room.
 - 2c. PIC will be positively related to Turning Toward behaviors.
3. PIC will be positively related to successful Repair Attempts.
4. PIC will be positively related to closeness, as indicated by the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale.
5. PIC will be positively related to positive relational behaviors, as measured by the Couple Behavior Report (CBR).
6. Positive relational behaviors, as measured by the CBR, will be negatively related to Negative Sentiment Override.
7. PIC will be reported as occurring more often in private settings than public settings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study examined a unique group of variables thought to be influential in the process of positive sentiment override in romantic relationships. The exploratory, correlational design examined the extent to which the variables of interest are associated, or “covary” (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Nelson, 1996; Snyder & Magrum, 1996). Correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between idiosyncratic communication, positive sentiment override, and the other variables of interest. Zero-order correlational techniques were used within the preliminary analysis to guide subsequent data analyses (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996).

Sample

After receiving approval from the University Internal Review board, 142 study participants were recruited from graduate and undergraduate Human Sciences and Exercise and Sports Sciences courses, the Texas Tech University Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic, and two local churches. Sampling procedures consisted of convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Nelson, 1996). In order to be considered as subjects, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and currently involved in a romantic relationship. Subjects were asked to identify whether or not they were currently receiving counseling or therapy at the time of data collection.

Of the 142 participants, 20% were from community sources, and 80% were drawn from the University population. The sample was comprised of 105 (74%) females and 37 (26%) males. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 67 years; the average age of females was 22.4 years, and the average age of males was 26.2 years. The sample was largely Caucasian (81.1%), with Hispanic / Mexican American (10.5%), African-American (2.1%), American Indian (1.4%), Asian (1.4%), and Biracial (2.8%) ethnicities also being represented. The majority of the sample described their sexual orientation as “heterosexual” (97.9%) and their relationship status as “dating” (65.7%). The remaining participants indicated they were living with their partner (5.6%), engaged (6.3%), in their first marriage (18.2%), or remarried (3.5%). The average relationship length was 3.6 years, ranging from less than one month to 41 years; 16% of the sample reported having at least one child. Additional sample demographic information, such as religious affiliation and education, can be found in Table 3.1.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, and the limited amount of information available pertaining to idiosyncratic communication in adult romantic relationships, an individual level of analysis was adopted in order to gain essential preliminary information about this unique form of communication. Suggestions for future research, discussed in Chapter V, should build on the current results and incorporate a dyadic level of analysis.

Procedures

The researcher identified two university instructors and obtained permission to solicit participation in their classes. The researcher offered to make a short presentation

in each class after data is collected, so that participation in the study can be associated with current course material.

To recruit subjects from the community population, individuals at two churches and a University Family Therapy Clinic were invited to participate in the study. Community subjects, other than those drawn from the University Family Therapy Clinic, were provided two pre-addressed, postage-paid envelopes (one for the survey, one for the consent form) to use when returning their completed survey.

Subjects were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. The study was described as “a study exploring communication patterns in close relationships.” After consent was obtained and confidentiality of the data was explained, participants completed the self-report survey including the measures described below. Participants were instructed to answer questions based on their current romantic relationship. The survey took an average of twenty minutes to complete. Participants had the opportunity to request and receive the results of the study, and were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any point without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, consent forms were separated from the surveys at the time of data collection, and individual data was identified only by a unique number. All hard copies of data collected were stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the data analysis. Additionally, no identifying information, other than basic demographic variables, were included in the electronic database.

Variables of Interest

The primary variable of interest to the study was personal idiosyncratic communication. Five variables were drawn from Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House theory: sentiment override, fondness and admiration, cognitive room, turning toward one's partner, and repair attempts. Additionally, positive relational behaviors and perceived closeness were considered.

Measures

Couple Behavior Report (CBR)

Positive relational behaviors were measured using the Couple Behavior Report (Shumway & Wampler, 2002). The CBR is a 36-item scale designed to assess behaviors shown to be crucial in maintaining a romantic relationship. Six sub-scales are contained within the CBR: Ego-Building Comments, Salutary Recognition, Expanding Shared Memories, Exciting Activities, Feedback, and Small Talk. Operational definitions and example sub-scale items are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

The first sub-scale, *Ego-Building Comments*, is defined as praising the partner for what she/he does and for who she/he is. Items representing this scale include statements like "My partner and I help each other feel unique in our relationship" and "My partner and I can tell each other about the things we like in our relationship." In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability; reliability for the Ego Building Comments subscale was .86.

Acknowledging one's partner throughout the day through verbal and nonverbal means is referred to as *Salutary Recognition*. This sub-scale incorporates statements such as "We show that we are happy to see each other by the things we do and say" and "When we arrive home, we don't notice each other or seem to care." Cronbach's alpha for the Salutary Recognition subscale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of .75.

Expanding Shared Memories includes recalling and discussing "old times" shared together. Examples of this scale include "We don't talk about memories from our past" and "We're happy just to sit and reminisce about our life together." This subscale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

The *Exciting Activities* sub-scale is defined as participating together in activities that each partner enjoys. This is reflected in the following example scale items: "My partner and I do exciting things together" and "Our relationship is boring." Reliability for the Exciting Activities subscale was .86 (Cronbach's alpha).

Mutual honesty between partners, especially appropriate encouragement and correction, is measured by the *Feedback* sub-scale. This sub-scale incorporates statements such as "It is hard to know where we stand in our relationship" and "We have a hard time expressing approval or disapproval regarding the other's behavior." Cronbach's alpha for the Feedback subscale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of .86.

The final sub-scale, *Small Talk*, is defined as taking time to talk with one's partner about things that she/he wants to discuss, while avoiding topics that are more emotionally charged during that time. Representative scale items include "My partner and I aren't

good at showing interest in what the other is saying” and “My partner and I just don’t seem to have much to say to each other.” Reliability for this subscale was measured at .84 (Cronbach’s alpha).

The CBR was completed by rating each statement on a 1 to 6 Likert-type scale ranging from (1) Strongly Agree to (6) Strongly Disagree. Before testing the hypotheses, CBR scale items were recoded in the database so that higher subscale scores indicate a higher frequency of that particular positive behavior. Twelve of the 36 items are reverse-scored. Beyond subscale totals, an overall total CBR score was also calculated in order to classify subjects in to distressed relationship / non-distressed relationship groups. Cronbach’s alpha for the total CBR scale was .96 in the current study.

In previous research, overall CBR scores accurately predicted attachment group membership on the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS, Collins & Read, 1990), signifying predictive validity. Concurrent validity of the CBR was demonstrated by significant correlations between overall CBR scores and two well-known measures of relationship satisfaction, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KANSAT, Schumm et. al., 1986). Evidence for content and construct validity is discussed at length in Shumway and Wampler’s (2002) article. Cronbach’s alphas for each subscale are as follows: Ego-Building Comments, .91; Salutary Recognition, .96; Shared Memories, .88; Exciting Activities, .91; Feedback, .83; and Small Talk, .91. Cronbach’s alpha for the total CBR scale was reported as .98 (Shumway & Wampler, 2002).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

To assess overall affect, and to augment Gottman's (1999) Negative Perspective Questionnaire, the PANAS self-report questionnaire was used. The PANAS is a short, self-report questionnaire focusing on one's mood at a specified point in time (i.e. right now, today, past week, generally) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS includes two 10-item scales that measure positive and negative affect. The measure consists of a list of 20 adjectives (10 positive, 10 negative) that were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "very slightly or not at all" to (5) "extremely." Words such as "upset," "inspired," "irritable," and "interested" are included in the measure. Watson et al. (1988) report the PANAS demonstrates high internal consistency and is stable over a 2-month time period, with test-retest reliabilities ranging from .54 to .68 on the positive affect scale and .39 to .71 on the negative affect scale across multiple time frames. Watson et al. (1988) suggest stability coefficients are generally high enough to suggest that the scales can be used as trait measures of affect. In previous research, Cronbach's alpha for the Positive Affect scale ranged from .86 to .90, and from .84 to .87 for the negative affect scale; reliability was reported as unaffected by the various time frames that can be used with the measure. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for the Positive Affect scale was .88 and .78 for the Negative Affect scale.

Construct validity of the PANAS is demonstrated by high correlations between the negative and positive affect scales and measures of anxiety, depression, and general psychological distress (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). For example, the PANAS negative affect scale is robustly and positively correlated ($r=.58$) with the Beck

Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck et al., 1961). Additionally, the BDI shows a strong, negative correlation ($r = -.36$) with the positive affect scale of the PANAS. Detailed evidence of factorial validity is also available (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Information gathered from the PANAS was used to augment the relationship-specific information regarding affect measured by Gottman's (1999) Negative Perspective questionnaire.

Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS)

To measure perceived relational closeness, the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale was used (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The IOS has demonstrated test-retest reliability and convergent validity with the Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989) and the Sternberg (1986/1988) Intimacy Scale. A single-item, pictorial measure, the IOS is intended to gauge interpersonal connectedness (Aron et al., 1992). Respondents select the figure that best describes their relationship from a set of seven paired circles depicting different degrees of overlap. According to the authors, the figures were designed so that the total area of each figure is constant; as the area of overlap increases, so does the diameter of the circle. Additionally, the degree of overlap progresses linearly, creating a seven-step, interval-level scale (Aron et al., 1992). Research suggests that individuals in close relationships act as if some or all aspects of the partner are partially the individual's own; the individual may perceive the self as including resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the other; this is the basis of the IOS (see Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Since it is

impossible to conduct a standard internal consistency analysis with a single item measure, the scale authors tested reliability using an alternate-form reliability check by using two versions (circles and diamonds) of the IOS. Using this method, the IOS returned an overall alpha of .93, in subgroups, alphas were .87 for family relationships, .92 for friendships, and .95 for romantic relationships (Aron et. al, 1992). Additionally, test-retest reliability over a 2 week period revealed an overall correlation of .83, and .86 to .89 for subgroups. Given the design of the current study, there is no way to measure reliability of the IOS for the current study population. However, the scale authors have compiled comprehensive information on the reliability and validity of the IOS as a measure of perceived relational closeness.

To further explore how respondents interpret the figures used in the IOS, Aron et al. (1992) conducted two studies, one using a sample of undergraduate students and another using a sample of retired professional women; participants were asked to describe what the diagrams meant to them. Across the two samples, five categories emerged from the responses: 1) feeling close, 2) behaving close, 3) connectedness, 4) independence/identity, and 5) similarity. Connectedness was the most common response, with 86% of undergraduates and 67% of retired women interpreting the IOS in this way. No significant references to loss of identity or loss of self were associated with the IOS; overall it was interpreted as a positive relational indicator.

Gottman's Sound Marital House Questionnaires

To assess theoretical constructs incorporated in the Sound Marital House Theory, Gottman (1999) designed a set of 15 questionnaires to “offer a detailed snapshot of the couple’s perception of each level of the Sound Marital House” processes (p.118). For the purpose of this study, five of the fifteen questionnaires were used. Three questionnaires dealing with the marital friendship, (Love Maps, Fondness and Admiration, Turning Toward or Away), one assessing sentiment override (Negative Perspective), and one assessing the success of repair attempts (Repair Attempts) were chosen. Each is described in detail below.

Love Maps. The Love Maps questionnaire is comprised of 20 items that measure the amount of “cognitive room” for one’s partner, that is, how much partners know about one another. Statements such as “I can name my partner’s best friends,” “I know my partner’s major current worries,” and “I can tell you some of my partner’s life dreams” are included in the measure. Subjects rated these statements as being true or false for their relationship. For each “true” response, a score of 2 was given, and a score of 1 was given for each “false” response. Higher total scores indicated greater amounts of knowledge about one’s partner. Using Cronbach’s alpha, reliability was measured as .76 for the Love Maps questionnaire.

Fondness and Admiration. Basic affection for one’s partner was measured by the Fondness and Admiration questionnaire. Similar to the Love Maps questionnaire, it includes 20 statements to which participants indicate being true or false of their relationship. Example scale items include “When we are apart, I often think fondly of

my partner,” “I feel loved and cared for in this relationship,” and “I can easily tell you why I am with my partner.” For each “true” response, a score of 2 was given, and a score of 1 was given for each “false” response. Higher total scores indicate greater amounts of perceived fondness and admiration in the relationship. Cronbach’s alpha for the Fondness and Admiration questionnaire was .92.

Turning Toward or Away. To assess the success of bids for connection, Gottman (1999) utilizes the Turning Toward or Away measure. This measure is comprised of 20 statements to which respondents indicate are either true or false in their relationship. Representative items from this scale include “We enjoy doing even the smallest things together, like folding laundry or watching TV,” “My partner tells me when he/she has had a bad day,” and “My partner is usually interested in hearing my views on things.” For each “true” response, a score of 2 was given, and a score of 1 was given for each “false” response. Higher total scores indicate a higher frequency of successful bids for connection between partners. Reliability for the Turning Toward or Away questionnaire was .89 (Cronbach’s alpha).

Negative Perspective. The Negative Perspective scale assesses whether or not the couple tend to use positive sentiment override or negative sentiment override. This scale instructs subjects to think about the last 2 to 4 weeks in the relationship, or a recent discussion of a relational issue. Subjects then answer true or false to 20 statements. Negative sentiment override is reflected in items such as “I felt hurt,” “I felt unjustly criticized,” “I felt like getting even,” and “I felt misunderstood.” For each “true” response, a score of 2 was given, and a score of 1 was given for each “false” response.

Higher total scores indicate a pattern of negative sentiment override. Reliability for the Negative Perspective questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .92.

Repair Attempts. The effectiveness and perceived success of repair attempts was evaluated by the Repair Attempts scale. This scale instructs participants to respond either true or false to 20 statements describing what happens during attempts to resolve conflict. Representative scale items include "Even when we argue, we can maintain a sense of humor," "We can be affectionate even when we are disagreeing," "Teasing and humor usually work with my spouse for getting over negativity," and "When I apologize, it usually gets accepted by my partner." For each "true" response, a score of 2 was given, and a score of 1 was given for each "false" response. Higher total scores indicate successful repair attempts and the ability to return to a positive state in the relationship despite conflict or disagreements. Reliability for the Repair Attempts questionnaire was measured at .87 using Cronbach's alpha.

To make the scale items inclusive to unmarried study participants, the word "spouse" was replaced with "partner" on certain scale items. Gottman (1999) reports that the Sound Marital House questionnaires are "strongly related to Lock-Wallace marital satisfaction, the Weiss-Cerreto divorce proneness scale, and the SCL-90 psychopathology checklist" (p. 375). As previously described, all Sound Marital House questionnaire items are completed by indicating a "True" or "False" response to statements about their relationship. Snyder & Rice (1996) assert that the alternate choice (true-false/yes-no) answer format can be advantageous over multiple-choice designs, in that they are easier to administer and score, and take up less space in surveys. Additionally, an appropriate

number of true-false items within a measure generally create enough variance to score the measure in a way that the data can be considered continuous, interval level data for analysis (Snyder & Rice, 1996; Wesman, 1971).

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic information, such as the subject's age, sex, race, relationship status, educational status, and relationship duration were assessed using several one-item measures. Additionally, questions regarding the overall use of idiosyncratic communication in romantic relationships were included. For the purpose of this study, idiosyncratic communication was defined as "*Words, phrases, gestures, and/or nonsensical terms whose meaning is unique to the context of the romantic relationship*" based on Hopper, Knapp, and Scott's 1981 research on personal idioms. Following a brief description of idiosyncratic communication, questions regarding the frequency of use, context, and purpose related to idiosyncratic communication were listed in the survey instrument. Questions were modeled after examples provided from other studies of idiosyncratic communication and secondary baby talk previously reviewed in chapter two. In addition to forced-choice questions, subjects were also given the opportunity to provide written examples of their idiosyncratic communication. This qualitative data was used to ensure that subjects were reporting on idiosyncratic communication; example responses drawn from the survey are included in chapter V.

Means and standard deviations of the dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 3.2. Copies of the study survey, including all measures, are included in Appendix A.

Analyses

Preliminary Analysis

In order to provide a rich description of the study sample, demographic variables such as age, sex, major of study, relationship status, relationship length, race, income, education level, etc. were evaluated using descriptive statistics.

Hypotheses 1 through 6

Hypotheses 1 through 6 were evaluated using correlational techniques. Snyder and Mangrum (1996) suggest that correlational techniques are a useful first step in understanding phenomena. A Spearman's Rho correlation matrix of all variables was used to guide subsequent analyses; Spearman's Rho is a nonparametric statistical analysis used for samples that are not normally distributed. As suggested by the preliminary correlation matrix, partial correlational methods were used to further explore relationships between variables as outlined in Chapter IV. Partial correlations demonstrate the strength of association between two variables, while adjusting for the effects of one or more additional variables on the original variables of interest (Snyder & Mangrum, 1996). Although hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 6 utilize scales whose items were measured as dichotomies (true/false), Snyder and Mangrum (1996) support the use of this

data as interval level as long as the underlying construct being measured is continuous in nature.

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 was evaluated by using an independent samples t-test. The t-test is a common method used to evaluate the difference between two means or values (George & Mallery, 2000).

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

Characteristic	Males (n=37)	Females (n=105)	Total Sample (N=142)
Mean Age (years)	26.2	22.4	23.4
Religion			
Catholic	8.1	15.2	13.3%
Protestant	51.4	49.5	49.7%
Non-Denominational	21.6	28.6	26.6%
Latter-Day Saint	8.1	1.0	2.8%
None	8.1	4.8	5.6%
Education			
HS Degree or less	2.7	1.0	1.4%
Some College	73	91.4	86.6%
Bachelor's Degree	16.2	2.9	6.3%
Graduate Student	--	2.9	2.1%
Graduate Degree	8.1	2.0	3.5%
Relationship Status			
Dating	64.9	66.7	65.7%
Living Together	2.7	6.7	5.6%
Engaged	2.7	7.6	6.3%
First Marriage	27.0	15.2	18.3%
Remarried	2.7	3.8	3.5%

Table 3.1

Continued

Characteristic	Males (n=37)	Females (n=105)	Total Sample (N=142)
Annual Income			
Less than \$10,000	43.2%	62.9%	57.3%
\$10,000 to \$19,000	21.6%	19%	19.6%
\$20,000 to \$29,000	13.5%	4.8%	7.0%
\$30,000 to \$39,000	0%	1.9%	1.4%
\$40,000 to \$49,000	2.7%	2.9%	2.8%
\$50,000 to \$59,000	2.7%	1%	1.4%
\$60,000 to \$69,000	2.7%	1.9%	2.1%
\$70,000 and above	13.5%	4.8%	7.0%

Table 3.2

Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables.

Variable		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Idiom Frequency	Male	37	5.19	2.37
	Female	105	6.04	1.92
	Total	142	5.82	2.07
IOS	Male	37	4.70	1.71
	Female	104	5.52	1.41
	Total	141	5.30	1.53
Love Maps	Male	37	36.62	3.43
	Female	105	37.96	2.12
	Total	142	37.61	2.58
Fondness and Admiration	Male	37	37.78	4.30
	Female	105	38.73	2.88
	Total	142	38.48	3.32
Turning Toward	Male	37	37.67	3.40
	Female	105	38.45	2.97
	Total	142	38.25	3.10
Negative Perspective	Male	37	26.40	5.68
	Female	105	26.15	5.47
	Total	142	26.21	5.50
Repair Attempts	Male	37	35.51	4.65
	Female	105	36.58	3.86
	Total	142	36.30	4.09
PANAS Positive Affect	Male	37	33.10	5.70
	Female	105	34.25	7.72
	Total	142	33.95	7.25
PANAS Negative Affect	Male	37	13.27	4.36
	Female	105	14.86	4.18
	Total	142	14.45	4.27

Table 3.2

Continued

Variable		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
CBR Total Score	Male	37	173.60	28.46
	Female	105	183.94	23.04
	Total	142	181.25	24.88
CBR Subscales				
Ego Building Comments	Male	37	28.10	4.65
	Female	105	30.11	4.37
	Total	142	29.59	4.51
Salutary Recognition	Male	37	32.21	5.28
	Female	105	33.27	3.30
	Total	142	33.00	3.92
Expanding Memories	Male	37	27.13	5.72
	Female	105	29.26	4.91
	Total	142	28.71	5.20
Exciting Activities	Male	37	29.83	4.82
	Female	105	30.78	4.97
	Total	142	30.53	4.93
Feedback	Male	37	26.95	6.53
	Female	105	29.39	5.46
	Total	142	28.75	5.84
Small Talk	Male	37	29.35	5.00
	Female	105	31.11	4.62
	Total	142	30.65	4.77

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 through 6 were tested using Spearman's Rho correlation techniques, and Hypothesis 7 was tested using a t-test. Additional post-hoc analyses are described after the initial hypothesis results.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Personal Idiosyncratic Communication (PIC) would be negatively related to Negative Sentiment Override, as measured by Gottman's (1999) Negative Perspective questionnaire. Interestingly, this hypothesis was not supported; PIC was negatively correlated with Negative Perspective, but the strength of the relationship was not significant. A significant correlation was found between the more global measure of negative affect, the PANAS Negative Affect scale, and PIC for females ($r = -.303, p < .01$), but this relationship did not hold true for males or for the total sample. This unexpected result is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. A correlation matrix of all study variables can be found in Table 4.1

Hypothesis 2 predicted that PIC would be positively related to the components of Gottman's (1999) marital friendship. This hypothesis was supported, PIC was significantly positively correlated with Fondness and Admiration ($r = .386, p < .001$), Cognitive Room ($r = .364, p < .001$), and Turning Toward behaviors ($r = .265, p < .001$). The relationship between PIC and the components of marital friendship strengthened after accounting for length of relationship, gender, and age. Using partial correlational

techniques to control for the effects of length of relationship, gender, and age, the correlation between PIC and Fondness and Admiration increased to $r = .408$ ($p < .001$), Cognitive Room increased to $r = .517$ ($p < .001$), and Turning Toward behaviors increased to $r = .336$ ($p < .001$). Partial correlations between study variables after controlling for length of relationship, age, and gender can be found in Table 4.2 for the total sample, Table 4.3 for females, and Table 4.4 for males.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that PIC would be positively related to Repair Attempts, was partially supported. PIC was weakly correlated with Repair attempts, $r = .249$, $p < .01$, after controlling for the effects of length of relationship, gender, and age. However, when looking at the relationship between PIC and Repair attempts for males and females specifically, the correlation weakened further and was no longer significant.

Hypothesis 4, predicting that PIC would be positively related to closeness as measured by the Inclusion of Other in Self scale (IOS), was supported for the total sample ($r = .433$, $p < .001$) as well as for females ($r = .358$, $p < .001$) and males ($r = .568$, $p < .001$) separately. The relationship between these variables in the total sample strengthened after controlling for length of relationship, gender, and age, $r = .464$, $p < .001$. Frequency of idiosyncratic communication was related to greater feelings of relational closeness for both men and women in the sample.

Hypothesis 5, which predicted that PIC would be related to positive relational behaviors as measured by the Couple Behavior Report (CBR), was supported. Total CBR scores were positively correlated with PIC ($r = .394$, $p < .001$). This relationship was only slightly strengthened after controlling for length of relationship, age, and gender

($r = .409, p < .001$). PIC was also significantly correlated with each of the six CBR subscales; Ego Building Comments ($r = .301, p < .001$), Salutary Recognition ($r = .335, p < .001$), Expanding Shared Memories ($r = .381, p < .001$), Exciting Activities ($r = .312, p < .001$), Feedback ($r = .398, p < .001$), and Smalltalk ($r = .352, p < .001$).

Hypothesis 6 stated that positive relational behaviors, as measured by the CBR, would be negatively related to Negative Sentiment Override. This hypothesis was supported; Negative Sentiment Override was significantly inversely correlated with CBR total Scores ($r = -.356, p < .001$). This relationship strengthens when length of relationship, gender, and age are controlled ($r = -.382, p < .001$), and was supported for females ($r = -.340, p < .001$) and males ($r = -.439, p < .01$) separately. Negative Sentiment Override was significantly correlated with only five of the CBR subscales after controlling for length of relationship, gender, and age; Ego Building Comments ($r = -.374, p < .001$), Salutary Recognition ($r = -.341, p < .001$), Exciting Activities ($r = -.269, p < .01$), Feedback ($r = -.424, p < .001$), and Smalltalk ($r = -.402, p < .001$). Interestingly, Negative Sentiment Override was not significantly related to Expanding Shared Memories.

Hypothesis 7 predicted that PIC would be reported as occurring more often in private settings than in public settings. This hypothesis was supported; participants reported using idiosyncratic communication significantly more often in private settings ($M = 2.89$) than public settings ($M = 2.18$), $t(1,141) = 33.88, p < .001$.

Additional Study Results

To further investigate the variables of interest, post-hoc analyses were run to explore gender differences and differences between individuals in distressed and non-distressed relationships.

Because of unequal group size, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare males and females on frequency of idiom use, reasons and context of use, feelings of closeness, positive relational behaviors, and the elements of Marital Friendship. Females reported higher frequency of personal idiom use than males, but this difference was not significant ($p = .06$). Females had significantly higher scores on the IOS, indicating they perceive their relationships as closer than males in this sample, $Z = -2.55, p = .01$. Males and females differed significantly on two of the Sound Marital House questionnaires; Love Maps and Turning Toward. Females scored higher on the Love Maps questionnaire ($Z = -2.35, p = .019$), which reflects the amount of knowledge or “cognitive room” one holds for one’s partner. Females also scored higher on the Turning Towards questionnaire ($Z = -2.25, p = .024$), which reflects the success of bids for connection. Females scored significantly higher than males on four of the CBR sub scales; Ego Building Comments ($Z = -2.49, p = .013$), Expanding Shared Memories ($Z = -2.22, p = .027$), Small Talk ($Z = -2.31, p = .021$), and Feedback ($Z = -2.25, p = .024$). Females also scored higher on the CBR total score ($Z = -2.15, p = .032$). These results are consistent with the view of women as “kin keepers” or as being primarily responsible for the maintenance of relationships; however, due to the difference in group size, this interpretation is preliminary and should be retested in future studies. The results of this

nonparametric analysis of variance are presented in Table 4.5; means and standard deviations of the study variables by gender is presented in Table 3.2.

To explore possible group differences according to relationship distress, subjects were categorized into distressed (Group = 1) and non-distressed (Group = 2) relationship groups according to their total CBR score. A total CBR score of 160 or less indicates inadequate levels of positive relational behaviors according to the creators of the CBR (Shumway & Wampler, 2002), so this cut-off score was used to differentiate between subjects in potentially distressed and non-distressed relationships. After examining patterns of data, CBR cut-off scores offered a more accurate indication of relational distress than relying on participation in individual or couples counseling alone. Using this criteria, 19 subjects were categorized as being in distressed relationships (Group 1, 6 males, 13 females) and 123 were categorized as being in non-distressed relationships (Group 2, 31 males, 92 females). Mann-Whitney U-tests were used to determine if there were significant differences in variable means by group. This statistic was chosen due to the large difference in group size. As expected, the two groups differed significantly on several variables. Participants in non-distressed relationships reported significantly higher frequencies of personal idiom use ($Z = -2.95, p = .003$), and perceived the use of PIC as having a more positive influence on the relationship than subjects in the distressed relationship group ($Z = -2.47, p = .014$). Unsurprisingly, Group 2 (non-distressed) scored significantly higher than Group 1 on all of the Sound Marital House measures; Love Maps ($Z = -4.74, p = .000$), Fondness and Admiration ($Z = -5.51, p = .000$), Turning Towards / Bids for Connection ($Z = -5.97, p = .000$), and Repair Attempts ($Z = -5.25, p =$

.000). Group 2 also scored significantly lower on the Negative Perspective questionnaire, ($Z = -3.10, p = .002$). A similar pattern was found for the CBR total ($Z = -7.00, p = .000$) and subscale scores, Ego Building Comments ($Z = -6.36, p = .000$), Salutary Recognition ($Z = -6.41, p = .000$), Expanding Shared Memories ($Z = -6.21, p = .000$), Exciting Activities ($Z = -6.18, p = .000$), Feedback ($Z = -6.01, p = .000$), and Smalltalk ($Z = -6.87, p = .000$). Interpretations of the significant differences between the groups on the CBR subscales should take into consideration that the groups were defined using CBR total scores. However, future investigations of clinical /distressed and non-clinical groups to underscore the importance of the CBR's positive relational behaviors are encouraged. Group 2 also scored significantly higher on the IOS than Group 1, ($Z = -3.91, p = .000$), as one would expect. The results of this nonparametric analysis of variance are presented in Table 4.6; means and standard deviations of the study variables by group are presented in Table 4.7.

Group 1 and Group 2 did not differ significantly on age, education, income, relationship status, or relationship length. The two groups did not differ significantly on the PANAS Negative Affect scale, but Group 2 did report significantly higher levels of overall positive affect as measured by the PANAS Positive Affect scale ($Z = -2.54, p = .011$). This finding supports Gottman's (1999) supposition that it is not necessarily the *absence* of negative affect that is important in relationships, but rather the presence of sufficient positive affect to defuse negative affect.

Table 4.1

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PIC	1.000	.433**	.364**	.386**	.265**	-.045	.219**	.217**
2. IOS	.433**	1.000	.409**	.526**	.324**	-.035	.279**	.234**
3. Love Maps	.364**	.409**	1.000	.525**	.337**	-.105	.300**	.202*
4. Fondness	.386**	.526**	.525**	1.000	.510**	-.223**	.465**	.142
5. Turn Toward	.265**	.324**	.337**	.510**	1.00	-.278**	.494**	.194*
6. Negative Per.	-.045	-.035	-.105	-.223**	-.278**	1.000	-.464**	-.017
7. Repair Attempt	.219**	.279**	.300**	.465**	.494**	-.464**	1.000	.102
8. PANAS –Pos	.217**	.234**	.202*	.142	.194*	-.017	.102	1.000
9. PANAS –Neg	-.211*	-.125	.005	-.071	-.061	.185*	-.070	.027
10. Ego Building	.301**	.470**	.445**	.570**	.573**	-.341**	.569**	.339**
11. Salutary Rec.	.335**	.478**	.217**	.472**	.444**	-.232**	.414**	.294**
12. Memories	.381**	.538**	.545**	.478**	.467**	-.115	.389**	.381**
13. Activities	.312**	.432**	.380**	.393**	.510**	-.231**	.403**	.330**
14. Feedback	.398**	.465**	.601**	.585**	.497**	-.385**	.423**	.330**
15. Small Talk	.352**	.468**	.424**	.537**	.637**	-.385**	.532**	.277**
16. CBR – Total	.394**	.555**	.527**	.601**	.618**	-.356**	.546**	.385**

* Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4.1

Continued

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. PIC	-.211*	.301**	.335**	.381**	.312**	.398**	.352**	.394**
2. IOS	-.125	.470**	.478**	.538**	.432**	.465**	.468**	.555**
3. Love Maps	.005	.445**	.217**	.545**	.380**	.601**	.424**	.527**
4. Fondness	-.071	.570**	.472**	.478**	.393**	.585**	.537**	.601**
5. Turn Toward	-.061	.573**	.444**	.467**	.510**	.497**	.637**	.618**
6. Negative Per.	.185*	-.341**	-.232**	-.115	-.231**	-.385**	-.385**	-.356**
7. Repair Attempt	-.070	.569**	.414**	.389**	.403**	.423**	.532**	.546**
8. PANAS –Pos	.027	.339**	.294**	.381**	.330**	.330**	.277**	.385**
9. PANAS –Neg	1.000	-.173*	-.190*	-.014	-.101	-.240**	-.120	-.170*
10. Ego Building	-.173*	1.000	.711**	.618**	.644**	.701**	.780**	.885**
11. Salutary Rec.	-.190*	.711**	1.000	.486**	.566**	.531**	.685**	.753**
12. Memories	-.014	.618**	.486**	1.000	.606**	.572**	.591**	.764**
13. Activities	-.101	.644**	.566**	.606**	1.000	.577**	.695**	.816**
14. Feedback	-.240**	.701**	.531**	.572**	.577**	1.000	.704**	.829**
15. Small Talk	-.120	.780**	.685**	.591**	.695**	.704**	1.000	.891**
16. CBR – Total	-.170*	.885**	.753**	.764**	.816**	.829**	.891**	1.000

* Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4.2

Correlations of Study Variables Controlling for Relationship Length, Age, and Gender.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PIC								
Correlation	1.000	.464	.517	.408	.336	-.020	.249	.166
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.814	.003	.054
2. IOS								
Correlation	.464	1.000	.522	.612	.517	-.082	.419	.157
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.346	.000	.068
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	.517	.522	1.000	.632	.606	-.086	.500	.144
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.320	.000	.094
4. Fondness								
Correlation	.408	.612	.632	1.000	.840	-.317	.693	.081
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.349
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	.336	.517	.606	.840	1.000	-.296	.675	.140
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.103
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	-.020	-.082	-.086	-.317	-.296	1.000	-.469	-.058
Sig. (2-tailed)	.814	.346	.320	.000	.000	.	.000	.504
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	.249	.419	.500	.693	.675	-.469	1.000	.075
Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.386
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	.166	.157	.144	.081	.140	-.058	.075	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.054	.068	.094	.349	.103	.504	.386	.
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	-.187	-.186	.043	-.122	-.084	.260	-.149	.001
Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.030	.623	.157	.332	.002	.082	.989
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	.326	.492	.567	.624	.665	-.374	.662	.269
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	.327	.560	.481	.682	.621	-.341	.586	.189
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.028
12. Memories								
Correlation	.401	.556	.631	.531	.588	-.141	.521	.335
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.102	.000	.000
13. Activities								
Correlation	.239	.386	.375	.495	.571	-.269	.471	.228
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.007
14. Feedback								
Correlation	.433	.562	.639	.686	.629	-.424	.598	.236
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.006
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	.337	.488	.535	.679	.739	-.402	.669	.199
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.020
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	.409	.597	.639	.723	.746	-.382	.685	.288
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001

Table 4.2

Continued

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. PIC								
Correlation	-.187	.326	.327	.401	.239	.433	.337	.409
Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.000	.000	.000	.005	.000	.000	.000
2. IOS								
Correlation	-.186	.492	.560	.556	.386	.562	.488	.597
Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	.043	.567	.481	.631	.375	.639	.535	.639
Sig. (2-tailed)	.623	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
4. Fondness								
Correlation	-.122	.624	.682	.531	.495	.686	.679	.723
Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	-.084	.665	.621	.588	.571	.629	.739	.746
Sig. (2-tailed)	.332	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	.260	-.374	-.341	-.141	-.269	-.424	-.402	-.382
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	.102	.002	.000	.000	.000
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	-.149	.662	.586	.521	.471	.598	.669	.685
Sig. (2-tailed)	.082	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	.001	.269	.189	.335	.228	.236	.199	.288
Sig. (2-tailed)	.989	.002	.028	.000	.007	.006	.020	.001
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	1.000	-.241	-.234	-.045	-.154	-.245	-.176	-.213
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.005	.006	.599	.073	.004	.040	.013
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	-.241	1.000	.697	.695	.630	.736	.821	.893
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	-.234	.697	1.000	.579	.558	.673	.751	.820
Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
12. Memories								
Correlation	-.045	.695	.579	1.000	.554	.656	.678	.821
Sig. (2-tailed)	.599	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
13. Activities								
Correlation	-.154	.630	.558	.554	1.000	.545	.696	.780
Sig. (2-tailed)	.073	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
14. Feedback								
Correlation	-.245	.736	.673	.656	.545	1.000	.759	.867
Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	-.176	.821	.751	.678	.696	.759	1.000	.919
Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	-.213	.893	.820	.821	.780	.867	.919	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

Table 4.3

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Female's Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PIC								
Correlation	1.000	.358	.299	.365	.212	-.103	.164	.239
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.002	.000	.030	.295	.094	.014
2. IOS								
Correlation	.358	1.000	.270	.495	.241	-.005	.208	.284
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.006	.000	.014	.960	.034	.003
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	.299	.270	1.000	.531	.304	-.064	.217	.184
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.006	.	.000	.002	.517	.026	.061
4. Fondness								
Correlation	.365	.495	.531	1.000	.433	-.188	.444	.182
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.055	.000	.064
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	.212	.241	.304	.433	1.000	-.227	.480	.284
Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.014	.002	.000	.	.020	.000	.003
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	-.103	-.005	-.064	-.188	-.227	1.000	-.452	-.047
Sig. (2-tailed)	.295	.960	.517	.055	.020	.	.000	.632
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	.164	.208	.217	.444	.480	-.452	1.000	.136
Sig. (2-tailed)	.094	.034	.026	.000	.000	.000	.	.165
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	.239	.284	.184	.182	.284	-.047	.136	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.003	.061	.064	.003	.632	.165	.
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	-.303	-.237	-.026	-.074	-.044	.204	-.082	.010
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.016	.795	.454	.653	.037	.406	.917
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	.275	.480	.403	.546	.516	-.318	.513	.398
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	.364	.511	.191	.423	.382	-.213	.406	.324
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.051	.000	.000	.029	.000	.001
12. Memories								
Correlation	.284	.483	.510	.458	.381	-.096	.349	.480
Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.000	.000	.329	.000	.000
13. Activities								
Correlation	.248	.376	.344	.380	.471	-.218	.358	.384
Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.000	.000	.000	.000	.026	.000	.000
14. Feedback								
Correlation	.373	.448	.578	.542	.464	-.354	.371	.382
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	.315	.474	.378	.512	.588	-.358	.485	.347
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	.356	.531	.497	.574	.559	-.340	.490	.457
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Note: $n = 105$.

Table 4.3

Continued

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. PIC								
Correlation	-.303	.275	.364	.284	.248	.373	.315	.356
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.005	.000	.003	.011	.000	.001	.000
2. IOS								
Correlation	-.237	.480	.511	.483	.376	.448	.474	.531
Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	-.026	.403	.191	.510	.344	.578	.378	.497
Sig. (2-tailed)	.795	.000	.051	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
4. Fondness								
Correlation	-.074	.546	.423	.458	.380	.542	.512	.574
Sig. (2-tailed)	.454	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	-.044	.516	.382	.381	.471	.464	.588	.559
Sig. (2-tailed)	.653	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	.204	-.318	-.213	-.096	-.218	-.354	-.358	-.340
Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.001	.029	.329	.026	.000	.000	.000
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	-.082	.513	.406	.349	.358	.371	.485	.490
Sig. (2-tailed)	.406	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	.010	.398	.324	.480	.384	.382	.347	.457
Sig. (2-tailed)	.917	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	1.000	-.264	-.227	-.044	-.131	-.317	-.156	-.212
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.006	.020	.655	.184	.001	.111	.030
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	-.264	1.000	.720	.593	.633	.711	.784	.881
Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	-.227	.720	1.000	.495	.564	.516	.701	.746
Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
12. Memories								
Correlation	-.044	.593	.495	1.000	.574	.590	.561	.761
Sig. (2-tailed)	.655	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
13. Activities								
Correlation	-.131	.633	.564	.574	1.000	.559	.684	.800
Sig. (2-tailed)	.184	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
14. Feedback								
Correlation	-.317	.711	.516	.590	.559	1.000	.702	.841
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	-.156	.784	.701	.561	.684	.702	1.000	.889
Sig. (2-tailed)	.111	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	-.212	.881	.746	.761	.800	.841	.889	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

Note: n= 105

Table 4.4

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Male's Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PIC								
Correlation	1.000	.568	.473	.407	.342	.106	.323	.099
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.003	.012	.038	.532	.051	.562
2. IOS								
Correlation	.568	1.000	.739	.583	.448	-.144	.412	.079
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.005	.395	.011	.641
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	.473	.739	1.000	.490	.364	-.194	.472	.156
Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.	.002	.027	.250	.003	.356
4. Fondness								
Correlation	.407	.583	.490	1.000	.655	-.325	.476	-.055
Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.000	.002	.	.000	.050	.003	.747
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	.342	.448	.364	.655	1.000	-.474	.492	-.178
Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.005	.027	.000	.	.003	.002	.292
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	.106	-.144	-.194	-.325	-.474	1.000	-.494	.097
Sig. (2-tailed)	.532	.395	.250	.050	.003	.	.002	.566
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	.323	.412	.472	.476	.492	-.494	1.000	-.065
Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.011	.003	.003	.002	.002	.	.704
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	.099	.079	.156	-.055	-.178	.097	-.065	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.562	.641	.356	.747	.292	.566	.704	.
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	-.138	-.002	-.034	-.169	-.243	.113	-.170	-.025
Sig. (2-tailed)	.414	.992	.840	.317	.147	.504	.313	.885
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	.284	.346	.470	.576	.678	-.380	.674	-.047
Sig. (2-tailed)	.088	.036	.003	.000	.000	.021	.000	.782
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	.288	.411	.271	.620	.610	-.259	.422	.144
Sig. (2-tailed)	.084	.012	.105	.000	.000	.122	.009	.395
12. Memories								
Correlation	.587	.584	.589	.472	.606	-.217	.428	.034
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.003	.000	.198	.008	.839
13. Activities								
Correlation	.481	.562	.517	.404	.621	-.272	.517	.099
Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.001	.013	.000	.103	.001	.559
14. Feedback								
Correlation	.324	.465	.599	.669	.576	-.497	.536	.096
Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.004	.000	.000	.000	.002	.001	.570
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	.422	.398	.494	.555	.724	-.510	.653	-.073
Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.015	.002	.000	.000	.001	.000	.668
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	.448	.563	.589	.638	.765	-.439	.641	.043
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.000	.000	.000	.007	.000	.802

Note: $n = 37$

Table 4.4

Continued

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. PIC								
Correlation	-.138	.284	.288	.587	.481	.324	.422	.448
Sig. (2-tailed)	.414	.088	.084	.000	.003	.051	.009	.005
2. IOS								
Correlation	-.002	.346	.411	.584	.562	.465	.398	.563
Sig. (2-tailed)	.992	.036	.012	.000	.000	.004	.015	.000
3. Love Maps								
Correlation	-.034	.470	.271	.589	.517	.599	.494	.589
Sig. (2-tailed)	.840	.003	.105	.000	.001	.000	.002	.000
4. Fondness								
Correlation	-.169	.576	.620	.472	.404	.669	.555	.638
Sig. (2-tailed)	.317	.000	.000	.003	.013	.000	.000	.000
5. Turn Toward								
Correlation	-.243	.678	.610	.606	.621	.576	.724	.765
Sig. (2-tailed)	.147	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
6. Negative Per.								
Correlation	.113	-.380	-.259	-.217	-.272	-.497	-.510	-.439
Sig. (2-tailed)	.504	.021	.122	.198	.103	.002	.001	.007
7. Repair Attempt								
Correlation	-.170	.674	.422	.428	.517	.536	.653	.641
Sig. (2-tailed)	.313	.000	.009	.008	.001	.001	.000	.000
8. PANAS –Pos								
Correlation	-.025	-.047	.144	.034	.099	.096	-.073	.043
Sig. (2-tailed)	.885	.782	.395	.839	.559	.570	.668	.802
9. PANAS –Neg								
Correlation	1.000	-.138	-.256	-.053	-.157	-.157	-.252	-.266
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.415	.127	.758	.353	.353	.132	.112
10. Ego Building								
Correlation	-.138	1.000	.632	.586	.610	.570	.704	.788
Sig. (2-tailed)	.415	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
11. Salutary Rec.								
Correlation	-.256	.632	1.000	.419	.557	.536	.571	.712
Sig. (2-tailed)	.127	.000	.	.010	.000	.001	.000	.000
12. Memories								
Correlation	-.053	.586	.419	1.000	.741	.478	.638	.773
Sig. (2-tailed)	.758	.000	.010	.	.000	.003	.000	.000
13. Activities								
Correlation	-.157	.610	.557	.741	1.000	.591	.716	.857
Sig. (2-tailed)	.353	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
14. Feedback								
Correlation	-.157	.570	.536	.478	.591	1.000	.712	.783
Sig. (2-tailed)	.353	.000	.001	.003	.000	.	.000	.000
15. Small Talk								
Correlation	-.252	.704	.571	.638	.716	.712	1.000	.894
Sig. (2-tailed)	.132	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
16. CBR – Total								
Correlation	-.266	.788	.712	.773	.857	.783	.894	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.112	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

Note: n = 37

Table 4.5

Mann-Whitney U tests for Idiom Frequency and Relational Measures by Gender.

Variable	Z	p
Idiom Frequency (PIC)	-1.878	.060
IOS	-2.548	.011
Love Maps	-2.347	.019
Fondness and Admiration	-1.896	.058
Turning Towards	-2.251	.024
Negative Perspective	-.178	.859
Repair Attempts	-1.458	.145
PANAS Positive Affect	-1.024	.306
PANAS Negative Affect	-2.544	.011
CBR Total Score	-2.148	.032
CBR Subscales		
Ego Building Comments	-2.492	.013
Salutary Recognition	-1.542	.123
Expanding Memories	-2.218	.027
Exciting Activities	-1.218	.223
Feedback	-2.250	.024
Small Talk	-2.306	.021

Note. Males $n = 37$, Females $n = 105$.

Table 4.6

Mann-Whitney U-tests for Idiom Frequency and Relational Measures By Group.

Variable	Z	p
Idiom Frequency (PIC)	-2.948	.003
IOS	-3.905	.000
Love Maps	-4.738	.000
Fondness and Admiration	-5.512	.000
Turning Towards	-5.966	.000
Negative Perspective	-3.099	.002
Repair Attempts	-5.252	.000
PANAS Positive Affect	-2.538	.011
PANAS Negative Affect	-.829	.407
CBR Total Score	-7.004	.000
CBR Subscales		
Ego Building Comments	-6.355	.000
Salutary Recognition	-6.410	.000
Expanding Memories	-6.210	.000
Exciting Activities	-6.176	.000
Feedback	-6.006	.000
Small Talk	-6.873	.000

Note. Group 1 ($n = 19$) = Distressed, Group 2 ($n = 123$) = Non-distressed.

Table 4.7

Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables by Group.

Variable		Mean	SD
Idiom Frequency	Group 1	4.32	2.52
	Group 2	6.05	1.91
IOS	Group 1	3.68	2.00
	Group 2	5.56	1.29
Love Maps	Group 1	34.16	4.07
	Group 2	38.15	1.77
Fondness and Admiration	Group 1	33.39	6.40
	Group 2	39.28	1.42
Turning Toward	Group 1	32.94	5.29
	Group 2	39.07	1.39
Negative Perspective	Group 1	30.63	6.81
	Group 2	25.54	4.97
Repair Attempts	Group 1	30.11	5.57
	Group 2	37.26	2.81
PANAS Positive Affect	Group 1	30.79	5.64
	Group 2	34.45	7.37
PANAS Negative Affect	Group 1	15.11	3.90
	Group 2	14.35	4.33
Ego Building Comments	Group 1	22.16	4.43
	Group 2	30.74	3.28
Salutary Recognition	Group 1	26.32	4.76
	Group 2	34.03	2.53
Expanding Shared Memories	Group 1	20.00	5.73
	Group 2	30.06	3.57
Exciting Activities	Group 1	22.53	5.50
	Group 2	31.77	3.48
Feedback	Group 1	19.21	6.26
	Group 2	30.23	4.16
Small Talk	Group 1	21.79	4.65
	Group 2	32.02	3.00
CBR Total Score	Group 1	132.00	20.97
	Group 2	188.86	14.65

Note. Group 1 ($n = 19$) = Distressed, Group 2 ($n = 123$) = Non-distressed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Humans need and desire positive relationships (Hanna, 2000). The present study strove to identify how such positive relationships are developed and maintained by exploring the relationship of idiosyncratic communication and positive relational behaviors with elements of Gottman's (1999) Marital Friendship and Positive Sentiment Override. Using Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House theory as a guide, hypotheses were developed with the intent of identifying specific relational behaviors that could be associated with overcoming negative affect in relationships. In the following discussion, results are compared to existing literature on personal idiosyncratic communication and are interpreted using Symbolic-Experiential theory of therapy to highlight the potential clinical implications of the study findings. The strengths and limitations of the study as well as directions for future research are addressed.

Interpretation of Study Results

Overall, the results of the study suggest that idiosyncratic communication and Shumway and Wampler's (2002) positive relational behaviors are not only supportive of Gottman's (1999) concept of positive sentiment override, but may also be influential in its creation and maintenance.

Correlates of Idiosyncratic Communication

Use of idiosyncratic communication was significantly correlated to the elements of Gottman's (1999) Marital Friendship; cognitive Room (love maps), bids for connection (turning toward), and fondness and admiration. Since the most common reason PIC is used is to express affection to one's partner, the relationship between use of idiosyncratic communication and bids for connection can easily be understood.

Idiosyncratic communication may function as shortcuts for connecting with one's partner. Hopper, Knapp and Scott (1981) discussed how personal idioms are often created in relation to major life events; such idioms provide a direct path to accessing these special memories, and the associated positive affect. The strong relationship between PIC and the Expanding Shared Memories subscale of the CBR in the current study underscore Hopper et al.'s (1981) findings.

Idiosyncratic communication was also significantly related to perceptions of successful repair attempts; repair attempts are more likely to be effective in an atmosphere of Positive Sentiment Override. Successful repair attempts have the potential to neutralize negative relational patterns (Gottman, 1999), and set the stage for productive conflict regulation according to Gottman's Sound Marital House theory.

Surprisingly, idiosyncratic communication was not related to Negative Sentiment Override (negative perspective). This finding is better understood after considering how the study participants perceived the influence of idiosyncratic communication on their relationship. For those who reported using idiosyncratic communication, 76.5% viewed it as having a positive influence on their relationship, similar to the results reported by

Hopper et al. (1981). The remaining 23.5% viewed idiosyncratic communication as having a neutral relational influence. No one in the current study indicated that this type of communication had a negative influence on their relationship.

The results of the study suggest personal idioms function as repair attempts for the majority of study participants. However, it may be that other positive relational behaviors and positive sentiment override must be in place in order for personal idioms to fulfill this function, and the idioms used must still have a special connotation rather than being routine. The tendency for personal idioms to become routine over the course of a relationship, as described by Bruess and Pearson (1993), may account for some individuals viewing it as having a neutral relational influence.

Similar to the results of Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Gore (1987), use of idiosyncratic communication was related to feelings of closeness as measured by the IOS; the relevance of this finding is augmented by the strong relationships between idiosyncratic communication and positive relational behaviors measured by the CBR. Idiosyncratic communication was significantly related to all six of the CBR subscales, Ego Building Comments, Salutary Recognition, Expanding Shared Memories, Exciting Activities, Feedback, and Small Talk, as well as the CBR total score. Idiosyncratic communication usage was most strongly related to the Feedback and Expanding Shared Memories subscales (respectively). The Feedback subscale focuses on providing appropriate encouragement and correction, so the relationship between this CBR subscale and use of idiosyncratic communication again points to its possible function as relational repair attempts. The strength of the relationship with the Expanding Shared Memories

subscale over other subscales was somewhat unexpected, but is reasonable in light of Hopper, Knapp and Scott's (1981) findings on how personal idioms are created in relation to major life events, as previously discussed.

CBR Subscale and Sound Marital House Questionnaire Correlates

Many of the sound marital house questionnaires were significantly correlated with the CBR subscales, which is expected since they measure facets of similar relational constructs. The strength and direction of these correlations alludes to the possibility that certain relational skills (CBR) may support specific relational outcomes (sound marital house questionnaires). However, given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study, the following discussion of the results is tentative and should be used primarily to inspire ideas for further studies on the topic.

The Love Maps questionnaire was robustly positively correlated with the Feedback and Expanding Shared Memories CBR subscales. This finding suggests that in order to provide feedback in an appropriate manner, and talk about positive memories, individuals must create and maintain sufficient cognitive room for their partner.

Fondness and Admiration was strongly positively correlated with many of the CBR subscales, but Ego Building Comments and Feedback stood out from the rest. This association makes intuitive sense; identifying the positive characteristics your partner possesses (or lack thereof) would naturally influence feelings of affection. And, it is much easier to identify positives about one's partner when you're feeling affectionate towards them.

Turning Towards, or bids for connection, was closely related to Small Talk. Since many bids for connection often begin with verbal dialogue, mastering this relational skill may be an essential part of showing interest in and devoting time to one's partner. Small Talk and Ego Building Comments were both strongly related to perceptions of successful Repair Attempts, a critical component in positive sentiment override and the long-term maintenance of relationships according to Gottman (1999).

Additional relational behaviors or skills that may deflect negative sentiment override are suggested by the significant, inverse relationships between Negative Perspective and Small Talk, Feedback, and Ego Building Comments. Unfortunately, the results of this study do not provide enough information to determine whether or not these skills are enough to correct negative sentiment override, but they do support the possibility of specific relational behaviors being protective or prophylactic in nature.

Patterns of Idiosyncratic Communication Use

Further information on how idiosyncratic communication functions in romantic relationships can be drawn from looking at the reasons cited for its use and the context in which it is used. Of subjects who reported using idiosyncratic communication, over 65% reported equal use of idioms between themselves and their partners; this type of interaction occurred primarily in private settings. The most common reasons identified by study participants for using idiosyncratic communication were *expressing affection to partner* and *being playful/having fun*. This finding differs from those of Hopper et al., 1981, who found that partner nicknames were the most frequently reported category of

idiom. For the current sample, reasons for using idiosyncratic communication, in order from most frequently used to least frequently used, are as follows: 1) expressing affection to partner, 2) being playful/having fun, 3) saying hello or goodbye, 4) partner nicknames, 5) seeking affection from partner, 6) teasing, 7) asking for a favor, 8) sexual invitations / references, 9) labels for others, 10) to solve conflict, and 11) to obtain information. One study participant wrote in an additional reason for using idiosyncratic communication: “So that my parents won’t know what we are talking about.” This speaks to the use of idiosyncratic communication as a way to differentiate “us” from “them” and highlights its use as a specialized language understood by the relational pair alone.

Examples of Idiosyncratic Communication

Study participants were given the opportunity to write examples of the idiosyncratic communication used in their romantic relationships. Surprisingly, the majority of participants (over 60%) did provide examples. To again illustrate the intimate nature of most idiosyncratic communication, some participants wrote “I’d rather not say” instead of listing examples of their idiosyncratic communication or simply leaving the section blank. In the paragraphs below, specific examples of idiosyncratic communication are discussed according to the type of idiosyncratic communication they represent.

Attempts to Regulate Partner Behavior. Some of the examples of idiosyncratic communication provided by study participants were terms that acted as a form of

“relational shorthand” to redirect or regulate partner behavior. A female participant reported calling her boyfriend “princess” when she thinks he is acting too much like a girl; another female participant listed calling her husband “Fred” (as in Fred Flintstone) and “Yanno,” (name of a friend who always exaggerates) when he exhibits similar behaviors. Another example of this form of idiosyncratic communication was “dontbemeantome” (all one word). Similar to the idiosyncratic communication described by Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Gore (1987), these are clear examples of using idiosyncratic communication in an attempt to modify the partner’s behavior or communication style in a seemingly humorous, non-defensive manner. This suggests that idiosyncratic communication, whether verbal or nonverbal, may be an effective tool to regulate affect.

Nicknames. The majority of idiosyncratic communication examples represented partner nicknames. Beyond the expected *Sweetheart* and *Honey*, participants shared nicknames such as *popeye*, *darlin’*, *Mousie*, *baby goat*, *bean sprout*, *velvet*, *moonpie*, *Toddrina*, *babydoll*, *dogman*, *thumper*, and *dove boy*. Many nicknames were phonological derivations of real names or words, as described in Hopper, Knapp, & Scott (1981), such as *Bufface* (Buttface), *Hal* (short for Holly), *MattyWatty*, and *cwazyfoo* (crazy fool).

Sexual References and Invitations. Personal idioms used as sexual references were not reported with the same frequency as in other studies (Bell et al., 1987; Hopper et al., 1981). However, many of the examples written by study participants were related to sexual invitations or nicknames based on sexual characteristics. Several everyday

phrases used as sexual invitations were identified, such as “Let’s go get ice cream,” “Do you want to play baseball,” “Did you want to kiss me?” and “Let’s play Scrabble.”

Nicknames with sexual connotations included *sexy legs*, *sexy thang*, *sex kitten*, and *licker of my clit*. Less common phrases and terms given as examples of sexual invitations included “KY time” and “hookeelau.” Examples of nonverbal sexual invitations were also given; one participant listed repetitive finger taps as being an invitation for sex; the faster the tapping, the more urgent the desire. Scratching the partner’s stomach as an invitation to “fool around” was another example of nonverbal idiosyncratic communication used as a sexual invitation.

Nonverbal Idiosyncratic Communication. A few of the examples provided by subjects were descriptions of nonverbal signals, such as pinching to mean the other person looks nice. Other examples of nonverbal idiosyncratic communication include winking or squeezing partner’s hand to say “I love you,” and grabbing an ear to signal that it was time to leave a party. One participant described more elaborate nonverbal signals; three taps and one rub was used to say “I love you forever,” and successive finger taps were an invitation for sex.

Secondary Babytalk and Nonsensical Terms. Bombar and Littig (1996) described a special sub-type of idiosyncratic communication they labeled as *secondary babytalk*. Secondary babytalk is described as phonetic distortions of common words, such as slurring two words together or using a higher-pitched, baby-talk type of pronunciation. This type of idiosyncratic communication was surprisingly common in the examples provided by subjects. Some subjects simply wrote “random baby talk” or “general baby

talk” instead of giving specific examples. Other participants provided explicit examples of secondary baby talk by carefully spelling out their idiosyncratic communication in a way that matched its pronunciation. Examples include *wuv*, *pweeze*, *lu u* (love you), *wittlebabee*, *bubbies*, *me sawwwy* (I’m sorry), *pees* (please), *nenney* (Jenny), *andon* (Brandon), and *hawow* (hello).

When listing nonsensical terms, most participants also included a brief definition, so that their category could easily be determined. However, some words were listed without an explanation, and therefore their origin and reason for use remain a mystery. Examples of these nonsensical terms and phrases include “Munch,” “Oink Oink Oink,” “I’m going to waffle you,” “Tukuburrow,” “Grummy,” “touches,” and “Joeanddaisy.” Regardless of how these terms and phrases are used, they highlight the fact that romantic partners create a relationship-specific culture, complete with its own unique language. The results of this study suggest that the more complete and complex the relational culture is (complete with its own cultural knowledge, rituals, and language), the better off the relationship is, as demonstrated by the significant positive correlations between idiosyncratic communication, positive relational behaviors, and Gottman’s Sound Marital House questionnaires.

Clinical Implications

As previously discussed, an overwhelming majority of participants perceived idiosyncratic communication as having a positive influence on their relationship. This finding differs somewhat from those of Hopper, Knapp, & Scott (1981), who discussed

the low frequency in which partners identified the same idiom or defined an idiom in the exact same way. In Hopper's (et al., 1981) study, a small percentage of nicknames, recalled by both husbands and wives, were identified as terms of endearment by the husband, but as insults or criticism by the wife. This suggests a possible downside to relying on personal idioms for expressing needs, expectations, and dissatisfaction in relationships. Unsuccessful bids for connection and failed repair attempts may be the result of ambiguous idiosyncratic communication; a partner's message may easily be misconstrued and a concern may go unresolved.

Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Gore (1987) suggest that idioms are created early in relationships, and facilitate a deepening of intimacy. In clinical settings, exploring a couple's use of idiosyncratic language, including its creation and evolution over the course of the relationship, might be useful. Such a conversation may reveal information similar to that gained from asking couples to tell the story of how they met. Clarifying the emotional meaning of idiosyncratic communication, and having partners verbalize the definition of idiomatic terms could be helpful to couples as they move towards more open and direct discussions about emotion. If couples indicate frequent use of idiosyncratic communication, therapists might consider helping couples learn more direct communication approaches, such as "I" statements, identify when each approach is appropriate, and screen for emotional flooding. Additionally, the balance of power in relationships should be explored, especially when only one partner utilizes idiosyncratic communication.

In addition to assessing the use of personal idioms, utilizing the CBR as a way to identify areas of growth may be a useful and practical way to define therapeutic goals. It has been the experience of the current author that the relational skills measured by the CBR are easily translated into in-session enactments and homework activities. The presence of these behaviors in relationships creates an environment of safety and mutual respect that provides a framework for more intricate (and possibly threatening) interventions that require greater vulnerability from partners.

Individuals and couples in therapy often express a desire for their relationships to be “like it used to be when we were dating.” To activate the development of renewed intimacy, it may be helpful to prescribe playful dialogue and the creation of personal idioms. Idiosyncratic communication may also double for signs of emotional security in relationships, which then functions to further strengthen emotional intimacy. This possibility deserves attention in future studies. Helping couples identify their unique idioms and positive aspects of their relational culture creates energy and hope in the relationship, which can be an invaluable detour when progress in therapy seems to be waning. Although the study results show a strong relationship between idiom frequency and closeness, affection, and positive relational behaviors, the exact nature of this relationship cannot be fully understood without further study. As with all therapeutic techniques, these suggestions are not appropriate for all couples. They are not recommended for couples experiencing relational violence or abusive communication.

Clinical Applications of Measures

This study provides preliminary information on the reliability of five of Gottman's Sound Marital House questionnaires. Despite having dichotomous response choices, the scales had acceptable levels of reliability, lending some statistical credence to the intuitive attraction of these measures for many clinicians. The information provided by these measures compliments that of the CBR and IOS by tying information together in a format that may be more palatable to some clients; especially those that enjoy or would benefit from outside reading and written homework assignments.

When time is limited, as it often is in clinical settings, the CBR and IOS may be more advantageous than the Sound Marital House questionnaires for reasons beyond their psychometric superiority. The CBR provides a non-threatening, simple measure of relational skills that support positive sentiment. The IOS scale is also a useful clinical tool that quickly assesses how close clients perceive their relationship to be currently, and can also be used to visually indicate where they would like to be. Future studies verifying the current author's views of the usefulness of these measures in clinical settings would be advantageous.

Interpretation of Results Using a Symbolic-Experiential Framework

Due to its focus on creativity, the importance of intimacy and love, and the expression of affect, the Symbolic-Experiential framework lends itself well to understanding how personal idiosyncratic communication functions in couples and families. This approach outlines ten specific objectives for therapy; use of idiosyncratic

communication in five of these objectives is readily identified: 1) Developing a sense of family nationalism, 2) Strengthening the sense of family boundaries, 3) Developing a healthy separation of the generations, 4) Empowering the family to learn how to play, and 5) Developing a cycle of separation and rejoining (Keith & Whitaker, 1982). According to this approach, families (and couples) have their own mythology, verbal history, and sets of stories; sex, passion, and playfulness are acknowledged as important ingredients in healthy families. According to Whitaker, “Sex is more open and fun if it involves all the generations. One of the best ways is by sexual joking” (Keith & Whitaker, 1982, p. 50). Just the examples of idiosyncratic communication provided by participants in this study, and their overall perception of its positive influence, suggests alignment with Whitaker’s view. As previously discussed, the second most common reason for using idiosyncratic communication in the current study was *being playful / having fun*. Idiosyncratic language may afford couples and families the opportunity to play with each other and approach normally taboo subjects (such as sex) in a less threatening way, similar to Whitaker’s technique of modeling fantasy alternatives, that expand the family’s emotional life without a threat of real violence or real sexual acting out (Napier & Whitaker, 1978). One study participant’s comment on why they use idiosyncratic communication, “So that my parents won’t know what we are talking about,” can represent the use of idiosyncratic communication as a way to differentiate “us” from “them;” a healthy separation of the generations.

Another major contributor to the Experiential approach to therapy is Virginia Satir (Satir, 1967). Satir’s focus on the importance of affect and appropriate means in

which to express emotion provides another avenue for understanding the use and importance of idiosyncratic communication not only in romantic relationships, but in any close relationship. Satir emphasized open communication and genuine emotional “experiencing;” dysfunctional relationships are defined as overly rigid and emotionally sterile (Satir, 1972). The use of personal idioms as a means of opening up the expression of affect, and the importance of such, is highlighted by her view.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The correlational design of the study fulfilled the descriptive and exploratory purpose of the study, and has provided much information in which to delineate future research on the topic. However, any inferences drawn from the results must be viewed as tentative until further studies can confirm or clarify the conclusions.

The information gained from this study may not be applicable to all groups, since the majority of the study population was drawn from a university setting. Although the relationships between the variables were robust, any generalizations should be tentative until further research can replicate the results using a more diverse sample.

In an effort to draw a wide variety of participants, the study methodology included plans to collect data from multiple sources. However, the majority of the sample was drawn from a university population and overrepresented heterosexual, Caucasian subjects who were relatively happy in their current relationships. This lack of clinical / distressed individuals, and the large proportion of female subjects, made it difficult to compare subgroups on the variables of interest. Although the sample contained some ethnic and religious diversity, most ethnic and religious minority groups

were not appropriately represented. Additionally, the majority of participants were dating rather than married. The mean relationship length for the total sample was 3.6 years; future studies should actively pursue participants in long-term relationships to provide a more accurate view of how idiosyncratic communication is utilized by partners throughout the course of relationships.

A final limitation of the study was its reliance on individual data. Although the individual focus was a prudent approach given the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study, the results generate more curiosity and questions regarding personal idiosyncratic communication than were answered through testing the hypotheses.

To address these limitations, and to answer the new questions raised by the study results, future research would benefit from utilizing couples to further explore the role of idiosyncratic communication in romantic relationships, and formally compare distressed and non-distressed couples, males and females, and different ethnic groups. Now that the occurrence of this phenomenon has been established in relationships of varying duration and forms, future studies can be more confident in expanding their population base and methodology. The meaningfulness of idiosyncratic communication to its creators, and the depth of the topic lends itself well to further exploration using qualitative techniques of inquiry. A long-term study, focusing on how relationship satisfaction and usage of personal idioms change over the developmental course of relationships, would be beneficial. If couples rely heavily on idiosyncratic communication, do they do so at the expense of utilizing more direct modes of communicating needs and desires? And if so, can they sustain relational well-being without developing direct forms of communicating

relational needs and desires? It would also be interesting to look at idiosyncratic communication across ethnic backgrounds, to see if unique patterns emerge.

In summary, use of idiosyncratic communication was related to positive relational behaviors and positive sentiment override. Since idiosyncratic communication was reported by individuals in a wide range of relationship types and duration, it may be influential in the creation and maintenance of positive sentiment override. Idiosyncratic communication was most closely related to the fondness and admiration aspect of marital friendship. According to Gottman's Sound Marital House theory, a strong marital friendship provides a specific platform in which positive sentiment override can occur, thus highlighting the need to recognize idiosyncratic communication as influential on relational affect.

Despite the limitations of the current study, the findings expand our knowledge of personal idiosyncratic communication and highlight its contribution to the development and maintenance of positive affect in relationships. Marriage and Family Therapists would benefit from continued exploration of this newly recognized expression of healthy intimacy.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY AND MEASURES

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY. The research document you are about to fill out will provide important information on the development and maintenance of romantic relationships. You will be asked to share your perception of your current or most recent romantic relationship. This information will be used to benefit therapeutic work with couples and will increase our understanding of communication processes in romantic relationships.

While completing the survey, please remember:

- ✓ We want YOUR opinions and feelings; please do not discuss your answers with others.
- ✓ There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions; give the first answer that comes to your mind.
- ✓ Any information you share on the survey will be confidential; no identifying information will be shared.
- ✓ If you want to explain any of your answers, feel free to write comments anywhere on the survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, or would like to know the study outcomes, please contact Nichole Morelock at 743-2820 ext. 269 or Nichole.Morelock@ttushc.edu.

PLEASE TEAR OFF AND KEEP THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS!

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF:

What is your gender? 1. Male
 2. Female

What is your current age? _____ years

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- 1. Completed high school
- 2. Freshman in college
- 3. Sophomore in college
- 4. Junior in college
- 5. Senior in college
- 6. Completed Bachelor's degree
- 7. Graduate Student
- 8. Completed Master's degree
- 9. Completed Doctorate degree

Major area of Study: _____

What is your religious preference?

- 1. Catholic
- 2. Protestant
- 3. Non-denominational
- 4. Latter-Day Saint (Mormon)
- 5. Other (specify) _____
- 6. Jewish
- 7. None

What is your sexual orientation?

- 1. Heterosexual
- 2. Gay / Lesbian
- 3. Bisexual

What is your current annual income?

- 1. Less than \$10,000
- 2. \$10,000 – \$19,999
- 3. \$20,000 – \$29,999
- 4. \$30,000 – \$39,999
- 5. \$40,000 – \$49,999
- 6. \$50,000 – \$59,999
- 7. \$60,000 – \$69,999
- 8. \$70,000 or above

What is your racial or ethnic origin?

- 1. American Indian or Alaska Native
- 2. Asian or Pacific Islander
- 3. African-American / Black
- 4. Caucasian / White
- 5. Mexican-American / Hispanic
- 6. Biracial: _____
- 7. Other: _____

What is your current relationship status?

- 1. Single, never married, not dating
- 2. Single, divorced or separated
- 3. Single, widowed
- 4. Dating
- 5. Living together
- 6. Engaged to be married
- 7. Married, first marriage
- 8. Married, second or third marriage

How long have you been in your current relationship? _____

- or -

If you are currently single, how long was your last romantic relationship? _____

How long ago did it end? _____

Do you have any children?

- 1. No
- 2. Yes → How many? _____

Are you currently receiving counseling or therapy?

- 1. Yes
 - 2. Couples Counseling
 - 3. Individual Counseling
- 4. No

In your relationship, how often are personal idioms used in PUBLIC?

1. Never 2. Some of the time 3. Most of the time 4. All of the time

In your relationship, how often are personal idioms used in PRIVATE?

1. Never 2. Some of the time 3. Most of the time 4. All of the time

In your relationship, who uses more personal idioms, you or your partner?

1. Myself 2. Equal use 3. My Partner

How are/were idioms used in your relationship? The following list includes reasons people sometimes use personal idioms. Please circle a number between 1 and 5 that reflects why personal idioms were used in your relationship.



ALL OF THE
TIME MOST OF THE
TIME SOME OF THE
TIME SELDOM NEVER

1. Expressing affection to partner	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teasing	1	2	3	4	5
3. Being playful; having fun	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sexual invitations or references	1	2	3	4	5
5. Partner Nicknames	1	2	3	4	5
6. Names / Labels for others	1	2	3	4	5
7. Asking for a favor	1	2	3	4	5
8. Seeking affection from partner	1	2	3	4	5
9. Saying hello or goodbye	1	2	3	4	5
10. Solving a conflict	1	2	3	4	5
11. To obtain information	1	2	3	4	5

Were there any other reasons you used idioms in your relationship not listed above?

- No
 Yes → Please list any additional reasons: _____

Overall, how does the use of personal idioms influence your relationship?

1. Negative influence on the relationship
 2. Neutral influence on the relationship
 3. Positive influence on the relationship

Please list examples of the personal idioms used in your relationship. Please include any changes from expected pronunciations, for example, wuv (love), pweeze (please), or punkin'(pumpkin). Feel free to write on the back of the page if you need more space.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP

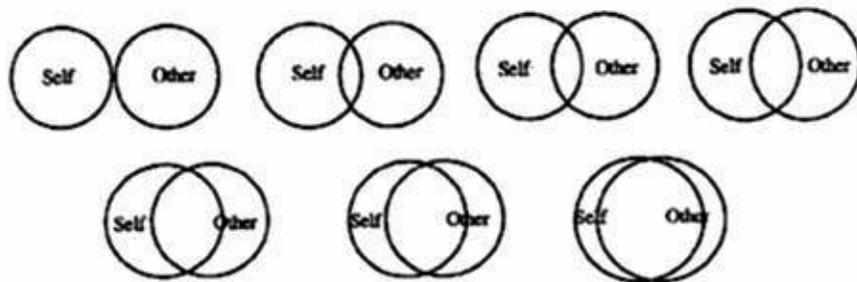
The following sections pertain to your current or most recent romantic relationship. Please read the instructions for each section closely so that your relationship can be accurately represented.

LOVE MAPS <i>Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.</i>			
1.	I can name my partner's best friend.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
2.	I can tell you what stresses my partner is currently facing.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
3.	I know the names of some of the people who have been irritating in my partner's current life.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
4.	I can tell you some of my partner's life dreams.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
5.	I am very familiar with my partner's religious beliefs and ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
6.	I can tell you about my partner's basic philosophy of life.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
7.	I can list the relatives my partner likes the least.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
8.	I know my partner's favorite music.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
9.	I can list my partner's three favorite movies.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
10.	My partner is familiar with my current stresses.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
11.	I know the three times that have been most special in my partner's life.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
12.	I can tell you the most stressful thing that happened to my partner as a child.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
13.	I can list my partner's major aspirations and hopes in life.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
14.	I know my partner's major current worries.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
15.	My partner knows who my friends are.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
16.	I know what my partner would want to do if he or she suddenly won the lottery.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
17.	I can tell you in detail my first impressions of my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
18.	Periodically, I update my knowledge of my partner's world.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
19.	I feel that my partner knows me pretty well.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
20.	My partner is familiar with my hopes and aspirations.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False

FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION.			
1.	I can easily list the three things I most admire about my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
2.	When we are apart, I often think fondly of my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
3.	I often find some way to tell my partner "I love you."	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
4.	I often touch or kiss my partner affectionately.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
5.	My partner really respects me.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
6.	I feel loved and cared for in this relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
7.	I feel accepted and liked by my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
8.	My partner finds me sexually attractive.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
9.	My partner turns me on sexually.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
10.	There is fire and passion in the relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
11.	Romance is something our relationship definitely still has in it.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
12.	I am really proud of my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
13.	My partner really enjoys my achievements and accomplishments.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
14.	I can easily tell you why I am dating/married to my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
15.	If I had to do it all over again, I would date/marry the same person.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
16.	We rarely go to sleep without some show of love or affection.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
17.	When I come into a room, my partner is glad to see me.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
18.	My partner appreciates the things I do in this relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
19.	My partner generally likes my personality.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
20.	Our sex life / physical affection is generally satisfying.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False

IOS SCALE

Please circle the picture below which best describes your current or most recent romantic relationship.



TURNING TOWARD OR AWAY <i>Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.</i>			
1.	We enjoy doing even the smallest things together, like folding laundry or watching TV.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
2.	I look forward to spending my free time with my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
3.	At the end of a day my partner is glad to see me.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
4.	My partner is usually interested in hearing my views on things.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
5.	I really enjoy discussing things with my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
6.	My partner is one of my best friends.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
7.	When we go out, the time goes very quickly.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
8.	I think my partner would consider me to be a very close friend.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
9.	We love just talking to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
10.	We always have a lot to say to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
11.	We have a lot of fun together in our everyday lives.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
12.	We are spiritually very compatible.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
13.	We tend to share the same basic values in life.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
14.	We like to spend time together in similar ways.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
15.	We really have a lot of interests in common.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
16.	We have many of the same dreams and life goals.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
17.	We like to do a lot of the same things.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
18.	Even though our interests are somewhat different, I enjoy my partner's interests.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
19.	Whatever we do together we usually tend to have a good time.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
20.	My partner tells me when he or she has had a bad day.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVE <i>For the following section, think about A RECENT DISCUSSION OF A RELATIONSHIP ISSUE.</i>			
IN THE RECENT PAST IN MY RELATIONSHIP, GENERALLY:			
1.	I felt hurt.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
2.	I felt misunderstood.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
3.	I thought, "I don't have to take this."	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
4.	I felt innocent of blame for the problem discussed.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
5.	I thought to myself, "Just get up and leave."	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
6.	I was angry.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
7.	I felt disappointed.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
8.	I felt unjustly accused.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
9.	I thought, "My partner has no right to say those things."	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
10.	I was frustrated.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
11.	I felt personally attacked.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
12.	I wanted to strike back.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
13.	I felt like I was warding off a barrage.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
14.	I felt like getting even.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
15.	I wanted to protect myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
16.	I took my partner's complaints as slights.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
17.	I felt like my partner was trying to control me.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
18.	I thought that my partner was very manipulative.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
19.	I felt unjustly criticized.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
20.	I wanted the negativity to just stop.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False

REPAIR ATTEMPTS			
<i>DURING OUR ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT:</i>			
1.	We are good at taking breaks when we need them.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
2.	When I apologize, it usually gets accepted by my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
3.	I can say that I am wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
4.	I am pretty good at calming myself down.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
5.	Even when arguing, we can maintain a sense of humor.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
6.	When my partner says we should talk to each other in a different way, it usually makes a lot of sense.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
7.	My attempts to repair our discussions when they get negative are usually effective.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
8.	We are pretty good listeners even when we have different positions on things.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
9.	If things get heated, we can usually pull out of it and change things.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
10.	My partner is good at soothing me when I get upset.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
11.	I feel confident that we can resolve most issues between us.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
12.	When I comment on how we could communicate better, my partner listens to me.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
13.	Even if things get hard at times, I know we can get past our differences.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
14.	We can be affectionate even when we are disagreeing.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
15.	Teasing and humor usually work with my partner for getting over negativity.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
16.	We can start all over again and improve our discussions when we need to.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
17.	When emotions run hot, expressing how upset I feel makes a real difference.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
18.	Even when there are big differences between us, we can discuss these.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
19.	My partner expresses appreciation for nice things I do.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
20.	If I keep trying to communicate, it will eventually work.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False

COUPLE BEHAVIOR REPORT

For the following items, please circle a number between 1 and 6 that best reflects your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement *as it relates to your current or most recent romantic/marital relationship*. There are no right or wrong answers.

		1 STRONGLY AGREE	2 AGREE	3 SOMEWHAT AGREE	4 SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	5 DISAGREE	6 STRONGLY DISAGREE		
				<i>STRONGLY AGREE</i>	<i>AGREE</i>	<i>SOMEWHAT AGREE</i>	<i>SOMEWHAT DISAGREE</i>	<i>DISAGREE</i>	<i>STRONGLY DISAGREE</i>
1.	My partner and I help each other feel unique in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6		
2.	When my partner and I get together after a long day, we say hello to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6		
3.	My partner and I talk about the special things we have done in the past	1	2	3	4	5	6		
4.	My partner and I do things together that are fun	1	2	3	4	5	6		
5.	It is hard to know where we stand in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6		
6.	My partner and I talk only when we want to discuss important matters	1	2	3	4	5	6		
7.	We can correct each other without a lot of hurt feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6		
8.	We just don't seem to remember to say hello to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6		
9.	When my partner and I get together, we enjoy talking about our favorite memories	1	2	3	4	5	6		
10.	Fun activities are a priority in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6		
11.	We have a hard time expressing approval or disapproval regarding the other's behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6		
12.	We regularly sit and talk about things we both enjoy	1	2	3	4	5	6		
13.	When my partner or I make a mistake, we try to encourage each other in a positive way	1	2	3	4	5	6		
14.	We show that we are happy to see each other by the things we say and do	1	2	3	4	5	6		
15.	We look at pictures and scrapbooks and remember the "good old days" in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6		
16.	Our relationship is boring	1	2	3	4	5	6		
17.	My partner and I find it hard to know what the other is thinking and feeling	1	2	3	4	5	6		
18.	We each enjoy listening to what the other has to say	1	2	3	4	5	6		

		1 STRONGLY AGREE	2 AGREE	3 SOMEWHAT AGREE	4 SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	5 DISAGREE	6 STRONGLY DISAGREE
		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
19.	My partner and I can tell each other about the things we like in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	When we arrive home, we don't notice each other or seem to care	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	Talking with my partner is like talking about "old times" with a good friend	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	I wish I was part of a relationship where we did more fun things together	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	We are both clear about where we stand in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6
24.	My partner and I aren't good at showing interest in what the other is saying	1	2	3	4	5	6
25.	My partner and I praise each other for the things we do well	1	2	3	4	5	6
26.	My partner and I say hello to each other in verbal and nonverbal ways throughout the day	1	2	3	4	5	6
27.	We don't talk about important memories from our past	1	2	3	4	5	6
28.	Fun activities are not a priority in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6
29.	We set aside time just to talk about "every day" things	1	2	3	4	5	6
30.	My partner and I just don't seem to have much to say to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	In our relationship, we tell each other when one of us does something good	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	We often hug or kiss when we see each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
33.	We're happy just to sit and reminisce about our life together	1	2	3	4	5	6
34.	My partner and I do exciting things together	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	We can express our true feelings in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6
36.	When we talk about things, we each seem to understand what the other is feeling	1	2	3	4	5	6

THANK YOU! YOUR TIME AND PATIENCE IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM AND
HUMAN SUBJECTS DOCUMENTS

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to be a participant in a research project titled “Personal Idiom Use and Affect Regulation in Romantic Relationships.” Dr. David Ivey of the Department of Applied and Professional Studies at Texas Tech University is in charge of the study. Dr. Ivey can be contacted at (806) 742-5050. You may also contact Nichole Morelock, M.S., who is responsible for carrying out the procedures of the study, at (806) 743-2820 ext. 269.

The purpose of this project is to explore how satisfying, successful romantic relationships are developed and maintained. The results of this study will benefit Marriage and Family therapists and other mental health professionals as they work with couples struggling with relational problems.

If you agree to be a subject, you will be asked to complete a survey that includes questions about your current or most recent romantic relationship and questions about your age, income, and other basic information. Therefore, no risks or harm to you is anticipated. Your participation is voluntary; you will not be paid for your participation. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study should take no more than 20 minutes of your time.

Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. No one, other than Dr. Ivey and Nichole Morelock will see your answers; completed surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your survey responses will be put into a computer database without your name, so that no information will be tied back to you.

Nichole Morelock or Dr. Ivey can answer any questions you have about the study. For questions about your rights as a subject or about injuries caused by this research, contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, 79409, or call (806) 742-3884.

By signing my name below, I certify that I have read this form and that all of my questions have been answered. I understand that completion of the survey is voluntary and that I may end my participation at any time.

Signature of Subject

Date

This consent form is not valid after November 30, 2005.

**Texas Tech University
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Services
203 Holden Hall/MS 1035
742-3884**

August 9, 2005

Dr. David Ivey
Applied & Professional Studies (APS)
Mail Stop: 1162

Regarding: 500085 Personal Idiom Use and Affect Regulation in Romantic Relationships

Dr. David Ivey:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the proposal referenced above on August 9, 2005.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review, but any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects should be reported to the IRB, before they are implemented, in the form of a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review.

Extension of exempt status for exempt projects that have not changed is automatic. You should inform the Secretary of the Committee when the exempt research is completed (at least via response to yearly reminders) so that the file can be archived.

Best of luck on your project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard P. McGlynn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard P. McGlynn, Chair
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

PERSONAL IDIOM USE AND AFFECT REGULATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Catherine Nichole Morelock

I. RATIONALE

The current statistics on divorce rates are staggering. One-half to two thirds of all first marriages in the United States end in divorce, despite the widespread availability of relational counseling and the abundance of research on romantic relationships (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). Although marital and relationship satisfaction have been the topic of many studies, the ongoing high rates of divorce suggest that there is still much to learn about how relationship satisfaction is achieved and maintained. Previous studies focusing on the high rate of divorce have primarily examined distressed couples and negative relational behaviors; a new trend in relationship literature has emerged that delineates the need to identify healthy relationship patterns and behaviors. A key factor in maintaining satisfying relationships, identified through research, is a couple's ability to recapture a positive outlook after experiencing negative feelings associated with relational conflict (Gottman, 1999). As an extension of such a focus in couple research, the present study will examine how personal idioms and idiosyncratic language are related to positive relational behaviors and the ability to maintain a positive affective climate. The ability to reduce negative affect and increase positive affect during conversation and conflict regulation is a key element in satisfying relationships (Gottman, 1999).

Research on successful romantic relationships now includes explorations of a variety of specific relational behaviors and processes, most of which have up until recently been overlooked. For example, studies on teasing (Bollmer et al., 2003; Horvath, 2004), small talk (Shumway & Wampler, 2002); use of idioms (Bruess & Pearson, 1993), and even baby talk between partners (Bombar & Littig, 1996) are becoming prevalent in the literature. These studies, reviewed in greater detail below, support Gottman's (1999) view that relational success is rooted in the day-to-day, moment-by-moment, outwardly unimportant interactions between partners. Everything communicates something, whether positive or negative.

In romantic relationships, idiomatic communication often takes the form of nicknames, expressions of affection, requests, and confrontations. In a study of over 1000 people ranging in age from 12 to 90 years, *personal communication* was identified as a central factor to perceptions of relational intimacy. *Personal communication* in this respect referred to behaviors such as sharing feelings, personal information, and secrets, using more non-verbal communication, and using specialized language developed by the relational pair alone (Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980). Use of idiosyncratic language often produces a specific emotional response, and may be used as a way to connect with one's partner in a variety of contexts. Even professionals have their own jargon related to the field that may not be understood by people outside of that profession. Members of fraternities, sororities,

prison inmates, and military groups are also known to rely heavily on idioms (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Idiosyncratic language acts as an identifier, or a way to separate/delineate “us” from “them.” In romantic relationships, the development and maintenance of a happy “us” is paramount.

Idiosyncratic language has also been studied in the area of elder care, in which it usually relates to negative relationship outcomes (Caporael, 1981; Caporael, Lukaszewski, & Culbertson, 1983). It has also appeared in research of pet/pet owner relationships, in which it is interpreted as a positive relational feature (Hirsh-Pakek & Treiman, 1980; Mitchell, 2001). The use of a form of idiosyncratic language, described as *Secondary Babytalk*, has been tentatively related to a secure attachment style in adult romantic relationships (Bombar & Littig, 1996). However, the function of personal idioms in developing and sustaining intimacy and commitment in adult romantic relationships is largely unstudied.

The purpose of this study is to explore and validate the key ingredients in positive sentiment override as proposed by Gottman (1999), to suggest other essential elements that contribute to positive sentiment, and to explore the role of idiosyncratic communication in creating a positive relational climate. Specifically, positive relational behaviors, as outlined by Shumway and Wampler (2002), will be related to Gottman’s model of marital friendship and positive sentiment override. Additionally, the relationship of personal idiosyncratic communication to positive relational behaviors, feelings of closeness, and positive sentiment override will be explored.

II. SUBJECTS

a. Specific Population:

Approximately 150 study participants will be recruited from graduate and undergraduate Human Sciences and Communication courses. A small clinical sample of roughly 50 participants will also be recruited from the Texas Tech University Family Therapy Clinic. In order to be considered as subjects, participants must be at least 18 years of age, and either currently involved in a romantic relationship or involved in a romantic relationship within the past year. Additional participants will be recruited via personal solicitation from community sites if necessary, to accumulate a sufficient number of subjects. Potential community sites include St. Matthew United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church of Lubbock, Texas.

b. Recruitment: Oral Presentation. “I would like to invite you to participate in a study exploring the development and maintenance of romantic relationships. I am looking for volunteers who are currently involved in a romantic relationship, or who have been in a romantic relationship within the past year. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to complete a survey that will ask you questions about your current or most recent romantic relationship. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

III. PROCEDURES

a. Procedures:

The researcher will identify instructors of graduate and undergraduate classes, and will obtain permission to solicit participation in their classes. The researcher will offer to make a short presentation in each class after data is collected, so that participation in the study can be associated with current course material.

Subjects will be asked to voluntarily participate in the study. The study will be described as “a study exploring the development and maintenance of romantic relationships.” After consent is obtained and confidentiality of the data is explained, participants will complete the self-report survey. Participants will be instructed to answer questions based on either their current romantic relationship or a previous romantic relationship. The survey will take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. Participants will have the opportunity to request and receive the results of the study, and will be informed that they can withdraw their participation at any point without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, consent forms will be separated from the surveys at the time of data collection, and individual data will be identified only by a unique number. All hard copies of data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the data analysis. Additionally, no identifying information, other than basic demographic variables, will be included in the electronic database.

b. Potential Risks:

No physical or social risk to study participants is anticipated. Privacy risks will be greatly minimized by the procedures of confidential data collection and storage described above. Participants may experience mild psychological distress while completing the survey, since some items focus on how often certain negative emotions are experienced (i.e., “scared,” “nervous,” or “ashamed”). Additionally, there is the potential risk of discomfort while responding to survey statements evaluating the participant’s romantic relationship, such as “Our relationship is boring” and “It is hard to know where we stand in our relationship.” Such items may uncover deficiencies in the participant’s romantic relationship. However, the majority of the survey items are positive in nature, since a primary goal of the study is to explore positive relational behaviors. This focus may balance any potential risks of more critically worded survey items. To minimize and/or negate the slight risk of mild psychological distress, participants will be informed that they can end their participation in the study at any time; any data collected from them will either be destroyed or returned to the participant at the time of their withdrawal

from the study. Study participants will be encouraged to contact the researchers at the phone numbers listed in their copy of the consent form if they wish to discuss any unforeseen negative reactions related to their involvement in the study. Since the researchers are professionals in the field of marriage and family therapy, any concerns should be easily resolved through a telephone call between the participant and researcher. If any negative reactions cannot be resolved by speaking with the researchers, participants will be given a referral for services, including the sliding-fee scale, to the Texas Tech University Family Therapy Clinic.

c. Potential Benefits:

Participants may benefit from their involvement in this study. By taking time to evaluate their romantic relationship, participants may identify new areas of strength in the relationship. Even if relational deficiencies are discovered, the non-confrontational manner in which these deficiencies are identified encourage growth in that area.

IV. ADVERSE EVENTS AND LIABILITY

Risks beyond those encountered in everyday life are not anticipated due to participating in the study. However, to minimize and/or negate such risks, the following procedures will be followed:

- 1) Subjects will be reminded that their participation is completely voluntary, and informed that they can end their participation in the study at any time. If a participant chooses to withdraw from the study, any data collected from them will either be destroyed or returned to the participant at the time of their withdrawal.
- 2) Study participants will be encouraged to call the researchers if they wish to discuss any unforeseen negative reactions related to their involvement in the study. Since the researchers are professionals in the field of marriage and family therapy, any concerns should be easily resolved through a telephone call between the participant and researcher. If any negative reactions cannot be resolved by speaking with the researchers, participants will be given a referral for services, including the sliding-fee scale, to the Texas Tech University Family Therapy Clinic.
- 3) To protect the confidentiality of study participants, consent forms will be separated from the surveys at the time of data collection. Individual data will be identified using a unique number that is unrelated to the participant. No identifying information, other than basic demographic variables, will be included in the electronic database. All hard copies of completed surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the data analysis.

ATTACHMENTS: Consent Form and Survey Instrument

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