COMMUNICATING POSITIVE ILLUSIONS DURING BIG FIGHTS IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS

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In dedication, in celebration. To my family, the ones I love the most.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication of positive illusions (PIs) during big fights in dating relationships. A communicative analysis of PIs was investigated. Both members of dating couples individually completed a survey that measured PIs, communication of PIs, and communication satisfaction. The results suggest that partners' PIs are strongly associated with one another, individuals communicate their PIs to a moderate degree during big fights in dating relationships, and individuals' PIs are strongly associated with their communication of PIs during big fights. Only limited support was found for the hypothesis that increases in the communication of PIs would be correlated with increases in communication satisfaction.

Several implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Positive illusions (PIs) have recently come to the forefront of social science research. According to Taylor and Brown (1988), people hold PIs about themselves and the world. People have a strong belief in their own abilities, feel as if they are able to exert control in the world, and are optimistic about the future. Taylor and Brown (1988) introduced PIs as a psychological concept, criticizing that previous literature only recognized illusions as characteristic of the mentally ill individual. They argued that PIs in the individual are normative of human thought (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Their conceptualization indicates that PIs are prevalent among people and predictive of overall mental health and psychological well being, including an overall positive mood, ability to care for others, and capacity for creative and productive work. According to Taylor and Brown (1988), PIs take little conscious effort by the individuals, which suggests that individuals naturally assimilate contradictory, negative, or ambiguous information to preexisting positive schemata about the self and world (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

The research on PIs has now turned from a focus on the effects of PIs in the individual to the role of PIs in relationships (Fowers, Veingard, & Dominicus, 2002; Martz, Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult, 1998; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). Investigations that examine PIs in relational contexts have shown that individuals with PIs tend to idealize their partners and have higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships (Murray et al., 1996a).

However, psychological research which supports the benefits of PIs in relationships (Martz Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult 1998; Murray & Holmes,
1997; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b;) neglected to examine the mechanism for how individuals' PIs can affect maintenance and satisfaction in relationships. In other words, the literature is consistent with its psychological roots, yet the current extension of PIs to relationships would greatly benefit from a communication analysis. Given this gap in the literature, a communication explanation for the benefits of PIs in relationships is offered. That is, the extent to which PIs are communicated during the relationship and their association with satisfaction will be investigated. In order to accomplish this objective, I will (a) define PIs, (b) examine the key relational outcomes associated with PIs, and (c) discuss the utility of examining the communication of PIs during turning points in relationships.

Positive Illusions

Taylor and Brown (1988, 1994) identify three fundamental components in their definition of positive illusions: (a) idealized self-perceptions, (b) exaggerated perceptions of control, and (c) unrealistic optimism. Individuals with PIs perceive themselves as superior to the average person, evaluate themselves more positively than other typical individuals, and appear to be more aware of their own strengths and assets and less aware of their weaknesses and faults. They perceive themselves as having greater control over events in their lives than they are actually likely to have. Additionally, they perceive the future as benign and favorable.

Idealized Positive Views of Self

People with PIs tend to have overly confident self-perceptions. Past research has supported that most individuals with PIs see themselves as better than the average person
and they see themselves as better than others see them (Murray & Homes, 1996; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Individuals hold these overly positive and illusive views in two ways. Individuals with PIs consider positive personality attributes as more descriptive of themselves than of the typical or average person. Similarly, negative personality attributes are considered as less descriptive of themselves, but more so of the average person. While individuals with PIs do tend to view themselves more positively than others and believe negative attributes to be less associated with themselves, it is unlikely for all individuals to be that way in reality. Thus, these overly positive views of self are illusory.

Individuals with PIs also extend this illusive view to those close to them, particularly intimate partners (Murray & Holmes, 1997). Those maintaining membership in this cohesive "in-group," benefit by being seen by the individual with PIs more positively in comparison to the average person. To illustrate how this and other PIs concepts occur in relationships, Ann and Nathan, two individuals involved in a romantic dating relationship, will be referred to. For example, in Ann and Nathan’s relationship, Ann, an individual with PIs, will see Nathan in a more positive light and as far better than any other average person.

_Grandiose Perceptions of Control_

Beyond having overly confident views of self, individuals with PIs also engage in illusive perceptions involving an overly positive belief of ability to control external events. PIs involve an individual’s belief that they can control something to a greater extent than how it is currently being controlled. It is their personal, additional effort that can affect the outcome which is generally believed to be more positive than negative.
Research suggests that people with PIs have beliefs of control that are often greater than what can be justified (Taylor & Brown, 1988). When people with PIs foresee they are able to achieve a particular outcome and then make the accomplishment as predicted, they tend to overestimate the degree to which their role was a determining factor. For example, when Nathan is very happy in the relationship, Ann, his partner and an individual with PIs, may attribute it to her new behavior of always making sure she asks Nathan about his day. Nathan may be happier and Ann may be more aware of inquiring about Nathan’s day, but Ann’s behavior is not necessarily the major cause of Nathan’s happiness and the couple’s overall satisfaction. However, Ann may assume that Nathan’s happiness was due to her new behavior and given this assumption, Ann’s perceived degree of control is illusory.

**Unrealistic Optimism**

McKenna (1993) makes a clear distinction between the illusion of control and the illusion of optimism. The illusion of control locates the source of the expected outcome in terms of personal control, while the illusion of optimism refers to a generalized expectancy for positive outcomes independent of the source of the outcomes. People with PIs tend to have overly positive perceptions of the future, believing that the future will be better than the past or present.

Individuals, in general, are more likely to have future orientations as compared to past or present orientations (Gonzales & Zimbardo, 1985). As such, it is not abnormal for individuals to base their perceptions on the future (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Research also suggests that individuals are optimistic by nature. When future orientations and optimism
are combined, individuals with PIs have hopeful views of the future. Individuals without PIs may be future oriented though they may not be optimistic about the future.

When individuals with PIs were asked what their chances were of experiencing an automobile accident (Robertson, 1977) and being a victim of a crime (Perloff & Fetzer, 1986), they believed themselves to be less likely than their peers to experience such events. On a lighter note, non-marital romantic relationship partners may be more likely to plan for upcoming major events, such as engagement, rather than focus on major events of the past, such as their first kiss. With the future comes the illusory belief that things will be mostly positive, casting an illusive image to all that is forthcoming. For example, Ann, an individual with PIs, might believe that her relationship with Nathan will exceed her expectations upon marriage in the coming years. Because the future is not predictable, Ann's presupposition that the future will be better despite actually knowing it will, is illusory.

Important Distinctions

Research supports the three fundamental components of PIs (Murray & Holmes, 1996a, 1996b; Murray & Homes, 1997; Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994), suggesting idealized positive views of self, grandiose perceptions of control, and unrealistic optimism all are necessary attributes of people with PIs. Before proceeding, distinctions from the definitional parameters of PIs previously discussed is due.

Just as it is normative of individuals to engage in PIs (Taylor & Brown, 1988), there is also a common tendency for individuals to believe that misfortunes of others are their own fault. In part, this is due to the just world hypothesis, a reflection of individuals' wanting to live in a world that appropriates outcomes for actions (Lerner,
1965). When individuals are held responsible for their misfortunes, this assumes that individuals had some degree of control and influence in their outcomes. The just world hypothesis may be similar but is not isomorphic to the concept of PIs, as this hypothesis is only a reflection of the unrealistic optimism component, a partial representation of the three components essential to the make up of PIs. To further clarify, individuals with PIs believe that they are less likely than their peers to experience negative events so they overestimate the favorability of their own future.

An individual's idealized positive view of self should not be mistaken for narcissism. Narcissism, similar to PIs, is psychological in nature. Initially examined as an exaggerated "self-focus" (Derber, 1979), narcissism is characterized by grandiose perceptions of self-importance, exploitation, exhibitionism, and impersonal relationships.

Conversational narcissism denotes an individual as having an overly unrealistic sense of self-importance and excludes their conversational partner (Vangelisti, Knapp & Daly, 1990), making a shift from individual narcissism to an introduction to the role of narcissism in relationships. Individuals do not have to be narcissistic by nature in order to experience PIs, as PIs are not used to take focus off of the relational partner. Rather, the partner can be included in the illusion as part of the relationship, and, as discussed, benefit from the attentiveness of illusion versus the neglect of narcissism.

Thus, it can be said the just world hypothesis and conversational narcissism are limited in their representation of PIs. First, while the just world hypothesis is similar to the optimism component of PIs, it fails to recognize the idealized views of self and grandiose perception of control components, thereby making it distinct from PIs. Second, while conversational narcissism reflect the idealized views of self component of PIs, it
fails to recognize the grandiose perception of control and optimism components. Given this, these two concepts are distinct from the definition of PIs and should not be interpreted as isomorphic. Now that these distinctions have been made, I will next review the PIs literature and the relational outcomes associated with PIs.

Positive Illusions and Associated Relational Outcomes

PIs have been found to influence perceptions of relationships, relational partners, and the future of relationships (Martz, Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult, 1998). Instrumental in relationship initiation, development, and maintenance, PIs have been found to be associated with several relational outcomes. Three pivotal themes in this research were the association between PIs and (a) satisfaction, (b) protection from threat, and (c) uncertainty reduction.

Satisfaction

PIs have been positively related to relational satisfaction (Murray & Holmes, 1996b). Murray et al. (1996b) suggest that PIs are critical features of satisfaction in dating and marital relationships. During initial stages of relationships, partners report high levels of satisfaction. Intimates who idealized their partners reported feeling happy. When women and men both projected positive regard onto their partner, both partners responded with higher levels of satisfaction (Murray & Holmes, 1997). This may be due to the fact that, although close relational partners know one another's actual faults and virtues, they are still able to accept and love one another given the presence of PIs. Both married and dating partners reportedly were happier in their relationships when idealization of their partners occurred (Murray et al., 1996a). Individuals with PIs and experienced high levels of satisfaction in their relationship also reported increased levels
of communication quality and adjustment and stability of close relationships (Martz, Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult, 1998; Murray & Holmes, 1993). Idealizations in a relationship start by a partner’s view of reality. Another way positive illusions contribute to idealization is that the higher one partner is idealized, any negative behavior that partner communicate could be perceived as less negative than it really is (Murray et al., 1996b).

Protection from Threat

PIs have also been shown to act as a transformational force that wards off later disappointments and protects intimates from decreasing satisfaction and increasing conflicts (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a). One example of an external threat that may cause the deterioration of the relationship is conflict (Seigert & Stamp, 1994). When conflicts do occur, intimates who idealize one another with PIs are more likely to find excuses for partners’ transgressions that minimize the significance of the misdeeds and prevent minor issues from escalating (Bradbury & Fincham, 1989; 1990).

PIs used to diminish the threat of relational jealousy is another example of how they might serve to protect the relationship. Romantic jealousy, composed of thoughts, emotions, and actions (White & Mullen, 1989), is one of the most powerful perceived threats to romantic relationships that most people experience at some point in their lives (Cramer, 2001; Guerrero & Eloy, 1992). Research suggests that relationships in which partners are jealous are more likely to break up and dissolve (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1993). However, relationships which experience jealousy can be accommodated for by PIs. When an individual “finds excuses” for their partner’s behavior (“Oh, he will snap out of it,” “She is just attracted to him, not in love with him”), the severity of the jealousy and
jealousy provoking act is diminished due to the buffering PIs. Ultimately, what would be potentially harmful effects of the jealousy are reduced by PIs, allowing the relationship to continue.

Uncertainty Reduction

Research also shows PIs in close relationships play an important role in individual’s decisions to pursue and persist in relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b; Taylor & Brown, 1998). Enduring, persisting relationships may have low levels of uncertainty given the presence of PIs. PIs are beneficial because idealizations of a romantic partner provide a template for constructing a sense of conviction that resolves tension between commitments and doubts (Murray & Holmes, 1993). When doubt or uncertainty occurs in the relationship, PIs are instrumental in reducing the uncertainty so that the relationship may progress rather than be negatively affected by uncertainty.

Similarity. Previous research supports that there is a strong relationship between attitude similarity and attraction. When individuals experience similarity toward relational partners, they are more motivated to act in an affiliative manner and establish relational rapport as opposed to someone who is perceived to be dissimilar (Capella & Palmer, 1990). According to Byrne’s attraction paradigm, attitude similarity involves reinforcement (Byrne, 1997). When individuals discover they share similar attitudes with a stranger, uncertainty is reduced and social validation positively reinforces their behavior that leads to attraction.

Much research supports that attitudes of relational partners in romantic relationships are more similar than dissimilar (Capella & Palmer, 1990; Feingold, 1988; Hatfield & Rapson, 1992; Sunnafrank, 1992). Byrne (1997) showed that similar attitudes
acted as rewards while dissimilar attitudes acted as punishments. Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) found that the influence of value agreement during the beginning month of relationships was strongly associated to similarity and attraction. In addition, researchers Levinger and Breedlove (1966) found that while spouses were attitudinally similar to one another, they assumed even greater similarity to their partner than actually existed.

Just as individuals are attracted to others they perceive as similar in interpersonal relationships, so may be the case for individuals with PIs. It is likely then that individuals with PIs will be most attracted to other individuals with PIs. For example, Ann, an individual with PIs, may be most attracted to Nathan, another individual with PIs. Just as individuals may be attracted to others who they perceive as similar to themselves, they may also be less attracted to individuals they do not perceive as similar to themselves. Ann would be less attracted to Tyler, an individual with no PIs, as she would not perceive him to be similar to her. Thus, when PIs are shared by individuals who are attracted to each other, a relationship that develops with these PI may emerge.

**Social and emotional contagion.** As previously discussed, individuals with PIs perceive themselves as similar and attracted to other individuals with PIs. In order to be perceived as similar and attractive by others, people have a tendency to conform to the desired perceptions of what it is to be similar and attractive, changing their behaviors if their current behavior is dissimilar to what is desired (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Furthermore, this change in behavior can also reduce uncertainty in the relationship. An individual without PIs who wants to be perceived as similar and attractive to an individual with PIs might intentionally change his or her previous behavior to match the behavior of the individual with PIs.
PIs may also be related to the contagion concept. It might be speculated that individuals with PIs should have high levels of influence over other individuals. Behaviors of social and emotional contagion can be related to PIs in two ways. First, individuals, in general, tend to “catch” others emotions (as they would “catch” a common cold). Individuals wishing to be seen as similar and attractive to those individuals with PIs whom they desire a relationship with would catch the PIs of their potential partner (Hatfield et al., 1994). For example, if Ann, an individual with PIs, places emotional emphasis on romantic love, Nathan will do the same in order to behave as an individual with PIs. Second, individuals tend to mimic others. For example, Nathan wants to be perceived as a potential mate by Ann, an individual with PIs. Thereby, Nathan will adopt behaviors seen desirable by Ann in order to be perceived as an individual with PIs.

Second, PIs may also result from an individual with PIs “infecting” an individual without PIs by contagion. Hatfield et al. (1994) suggest that for an individual to be able to infect others with emotions they must feel (or appear to feel) strong emotions and be able to express those emotions to their partner. This research may be compatible with the argument for PIs and contagion, whereby individuals with PIs must acknowledge their PIs and communicate them in order for them to be influential in a relationship. Additionally, in order for individuals with PIs to be attracted or perceived as similar to other individuals, potential partners must engage in more similar behavior for the PIs to maintain degrees of cohesiveness as a result of the contagion.

Communicative Analysis

While researchers have examined the outcomes of PIs from a continued psychological viewpoint, the previously discussed research neglects the communication
component of PIs. A relationship that maintains high levels of satisfaction, is able to successfully ward off external threats, and can reduce uncertainty, might result from both relational partners' perceptions of PIs. How PIs of individuals are shared in a relationship may be better evaluated and understood if research begins to examine the impact of the communication of PIs. Previously discussed relational outcomes associated with PIs, including satisfaction, protection from threat, and uncertainty reduction, should be considered outcomes of a communicative mechanism or event in close relationships, though no evidence yet exists for this reasoning.

The lack of clarity regarding the communicative aspects of PIs is evident in Murray and Holmes' (1997) investigations of PIs in romantic relationships. They hypothesized and found support for the idea that individuals with PIs project and reflect their PIs onto their partners. These individuals assume that their relational partners have PIs and that their partners will assume that they have PIs as well. Murray and Holmes (1997) argued that "this sense of confidence should be infectious" (p. 589). What is unclear in Murray and Holmes research is how PIs are infectious. PIs may become infectious through communication. When talk is structured around PIs, relational partners can develop the combined relational illusion described by Murray and Holmes (1997). For example, Ann believes and communicates to Nathan "I think I make a great relational partner, I think you make a great relational partner, together we make great relational partners. We really have a lot of control in our relationship and I know we will be together forever." Nathan believes that Ann thinks he holds the same illusion, thereby increasing the overall satisfaction from the communication of the PIs.
It is important to consider when partners communicate these PIs, making the transition from non-communicative PIs to those that are communicative. This examination is necessary to further validate pre-existing support for relational outcomes of PIs. PIs may be communicated in relationships during turning points, critical events that may determine the success or failure of a relationship. A turning point is an event or occurrence associated with change in a relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986) and generally occurs with positive or negative evaluations of commitment. What occurs during these turning points may have implications for the future of the relationship. Thus if PIs are communicated at this critical time, they may have a powerful impact on the relationship. The following will discuss turning points in relationships and examine characteristics of turning points in romantic relationships.

**Turning Points**

Turning points are instrumental in the relational development literature, as a turning point event provides insight by which researchers can view when talk of the relationship occurs. Researchers have been examining different turning points in relationships in response to Bolton’s (1961) desire to understand subjective inferences relational partners make. Since then, research has examined a variety of topics involved in relationship turning points, including the attributed causes of turning-point change, the patterning of turning points, the communicative remembering of turning points, and types of events that constitute turning points (Baxter, 2001; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988). Turning points in romantic relationships offer evidence for a
transitional approach to development, indicating that relationships progress toward greater or lesser levels of commitment.

Baxter and Bullis (1986) identify fourteen major turning point events involving relationship talk that occur in developing romantic relationships. Each of the events vary in the degree to which they are associated with relational commitment and relational talk. For the purposes of this proposal, these events can be grouped into five major categories consisting of supra-types, single events, and smaller sub-type events.

The first major category of turning points in romantic relationships are those having to do with time. Get-to-Know Time, a supra-type of turning points, is comprised of First Meeting (the first time partners meet each other), Activity Time (time partners spend together after initial meeting) and First Date (the first time one partner acknowledged the occurrence of a date). Another supra-type in this category is Quality Time. It is composed of the time partners spend together enjoying each others’ presence and two additional specific turning points, Meeting the Family (for the first time as a couple) and Getting Away Time (taking time away from the regular routine to do something unexpected).

The second major category of turning points in romantic relationships are those that are uncontrollable and external to the relationship. External Competition, a supra-type describing forces outside the relationship, is composed of three turning point events; New Rival (third party is attracted to one of the partners), Competing Demands (nonromantic competition of partner, e.g., work, school, and sports), and Old Rival (reemergence of an ex-partner). Physical Separation is another supra-type in this major second category. This type of separation refers to vacations, trips, or breaks that
physically removes one partner from another. This category also include the Reunion, a supra-type that occurs after Physical Separation. For example, a turning point reunion may occur when children return home for Christmas after their first semester away at a university.

The third major category of turning points in romantic relationships involves explicit, direct talk (or metacommunication) about the relationship. Relational Talk involves metadiscussion, or talk about the talk of the current status of the relationship. When Relational Talk occurs as a turning point, this may give individuals the chance to communicate their PIs. Passion, a single event supra-type is comprised of four specific events. This turning point has been criticized as being vague (Steigert & Stamp, 1994) as well as unlimited as it can range from First Sex, First Kiss, the first time a partner says “I love you” to Whirlwind Phenomenon (love-at-first sight). Exclusivity, consisting of Joint Exclusivity Decision (co-decision that parties are an exclusive couple) and Dropping All Rivals (reserving exclusivity only for relational partner), and Serious Commitment involving Living Together and Marital Plans (optimistic planning of marriage). Commitment Tension (Bullis, Clark, & Sline, 1993) is a turning point in this category that reflects partners being different at levels of commitment and as a result, tension runs high in the relationship. Disengagement (referring to any de-escalation in a relationship that can lead to dissolution) and Making Up (partners repair their broken relationship post break-up) are also supra-types that involve direct talk.

The fourth category of turning points in romantic relationships consists of turning points that involve attitudinal changes of the individual towards the relationship. Positive Psychic Change (positive change of attitude) and Negative Psychic Changes (negative
changes of attitude) are single event supra-types which describe valenced perceptions of the relationship. Bullis, Clark, and Sline (1993) suggested Negative and Positive Evaluation in addition to positive and negative psychic changes, which fittingly seem relevant to the PIs that are communicated in relationships. These occur when individuals observe their partner’s behaviors and draw conclusions regarding the suitability or desirability of the partner. For example, if a young woman notices her partner always helping elderly ladies cross the street, it may come to her mind that he would work wonderfully with her grandma. These evaluations are reminiscent of PIs. The fact that the individual is drawing conclusions of a potential lifelong partner is exemplary of unrealistic optimism.

Finally, the fifth category of turning points in romantic relationships is offerings. Sacrifice, a supra-type is made up of Crisis Help (one partner receives help from other partner in times of personal problems) and Favor or Gifts (sacrifice made in these ways) both comprise this final category.

Other researchers have developed categories that describe turning points in romantic relationships as processes. Surra (1987) suggests four primary categories that illustrate events as communicative to a further degree. The first is the intrapersonal/normative category whereby individuals cognitively evaluate the relationship according the normative expectations of relating. This is similar to psychological PIs, whereby individuals may conclude that they have met the perfect partner or that they have never been so happy in a relationship before (though this is not yet communicated to their partner). The second category is dyadic events, or events the couple experience together. These reflect some of Baxter and Bullis’ (1987) turning point
events such as the First Date. The third category revolves around the interactions of the couple's social networks, such as meeting an ex-partner or facing the evaluation of family members. The final category is circumstantial, that is, turning points that are more or less beyond control of the couples such as physical separation due to job relocation or other similar events. Circumstantial events may be another turning point that individuals may experience PIs in order to maintain their sense of unified relationship and continued satisfaction.

Baxter and Bullis (1986) note that the presence or absence of some specific relational events during development may differentiate between more and less satisfied partners, regardless of the total proportion of negative and/or positive events. In other words, partners overall satisfaction may be determined to the extent by which turning points they experience regardless of how many occur.

One turning point in romantic relationships that the communication of PIs is apparent is a couple’s first big fight (FBF), a major conflict that occurs in romantic relationships. In the following, I will define and describe the components of the FBF and make clear differences between those couples who survive and those who do not survive, most likely due to the communication of PIs, and briefly discuss the relation of conflict, the FBF, and PIs.

First Big Fight

One significant turning point or critical event in the development of close relationships is the FBF (Seigert & Stamp, 1994). The experience of an FBF has been shown to be crucial to both the development and the dissolution of romantic relationships. The FBF is a memorable event due to either its intensity threatening the
survival of the relationship) or timing (after mutual decision to become a couple has been made).

Increased uncertainty of the relationship is one possible component impacting the development of the relationship and instigates the FBF. This uncertainty results from an individual's or partners' commitment to the relationship. Partners build up a limited knowledge base about their partner and relationship and when that is challenged, talk about the relationship results. Jealousy is a second possible component affecting the onset of an FBF. A perceived third party or potential for alternative, as well as a lack of explicit expectations in the relationship and unclear relational boundaries all may contribute to the FBF. Violations of relational expectations are a third component of possible relational conflicts. When confusion or disorientation occurs due to a disruptance of the status quo, the likelihood of an FBF increases, as well as the potential for eventual dissolution. A final component of a pending FBF is that of personality and/or background differences (Seigert & Stamp, 1994). Fundamental differences based on previous individual experiences and the ways in which conflict was handled also influenced the likelihood of an FBF.

Several outcomes result post FBF, yet perhaps one of the most salient to PIs are the differences that result between couples who do not survive the FBF (non-survivors) and those who do (survivors). Seigert and Stamp (1994) determined non-survivors to have had (a) irreconcilable differences and (b) the belief that those differences would manifest themselves in the future. Non-survivors were likely to attribute the dissolution of the relationship to individual differences — a lack of communication or desire to confront relational problems by the partner. Non-survivors reported an inability, great
difficulty, or even reluctance to communicate with their partner about the events that led up to the FBF, and tend to blame the destruction of the relationship on individual differences. The following excerpt illustrates the past experience of a non-survivor.

... You know how people say, 'Oh, it doesn't really matter, he'll change,' or 'We'll work it out.' Well it doesn't always work that way. I don't think you can work at a relationship if you don't talk about your problems. I finally realized that you just can't keep it inside and hope that it's gonna go away. It's not going to. You have to talk about it. And I also learned that some people don't communicate in that fashion. [Non-survivor] (Seigert & Stamp, 1994, p. 352)

Survivors, on the other hand, do not experience this reluctance, and describe more cooperative and confrontational approach to the issues affecting the relationship negatively. Survivors reported a willingness to confront their problems together, talk about them with each other, and work together to resolve the problematic situations in order to pursue the relationships (Seigert & Stamp, 1994). This collaboration of efforts to maintain the relationship may be due to PIs. When partners have high degrees of idealized positive views of self ("I know I can get through this"), grandiose perceptions of control ("Everything will be okay") and unrealistic optimism ("Our love and relationship will continue to grow") as individuals with PIs, the individuals should have renewed commitment to the relationship and be willing to maintain it to experience greater satisfaction. When the PIs are communicated between partners ("You are the one for me, Let's work it out, We were meant to be together"), the relationship should have a greater possibility of surviving in comparison to relationships where communicated PIs are absent. Survivors who recognize a need to willingly approach problems through
communication and address them with PIs will ultimately believe that differences can be managed successfully during their FBF.

In first big fights, specific types of conflict, perceived understanding is a crucial determinant of successful conflicts. Partners who are perceived as ideal tend to behave similarly in conflict, which results in a greater perceived understanding. The same partners also engage in more positive and fewer negative behaviors during causal conversation and problem solving. Similarly, couples matching these descriptions are also more likely to produce high levels of mutuality and understanding when intimates attempt to deal with their differences in comparison to their distressed counterparts. Conflict has been shown to be positive and stimulating, in that partners can consider, explain, and define their relationship and its possibilities more clearly (Harvey, Weber, Yarkin, & Stewart, 1982). What is being explained or communicated may be due, in an indirect way, to the influence of PIs whereby the couple may recognize how idealistically they view their partner ("He is the one for me"), perceive to be in control of the events of the relationship, and plans for future.

It may be the case that when individuals have similar degrees of PIs they may be more likely to survive the first big fight, or fights of similar nature. With a high degree of shared PIs or relational PIs, the couple may be more cohesive and threats to the relationship as a result of big fights may be terminated. The less similar a couples' degree of shared PIs or relational PIs may be, the less likely they would be to survive their first big fight of fights of similar nature. With less similarity, the couple may feel as if their partner is not "the one" for them, have little need for control of the relationship, nor may they perceive their relationship to be a fulfilling one with promises of a future,
instrumental so that both partners maintain PIs. PIs among relational partners may play a major role in a couple’s “success” during times of distress, such as the first big fight or fights similar in nature (Cahn, 1990).

As the FBF is highly influential in initial stages of relational development, subsequent fights of similar nature should also be associated with similar outcomes. Big fights, major conflicts couples experience, can be further characterized by their potential to threaten the current relationship and are comprised of doubts or disappointments. Expectations and ideals that are diminished at the extent of big fights can have serious consequences that may propel the relationship to deteriorate. Thus, these big fights hold equal status to the FBF.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Based on the previous discussion, PIs, composed of idealized positive views of self, grandiose perceptions of control, and unrealistic optimism have been associated with several relational outcomes. Though PIs researchers have identified a link between PIs of the individual and relational satisfaction, protection from threat, and uncertainty reduction, how an individual’s PIs are enacted on the relationship has not been examined. More specifically, the communication of PIs in romantic relationships is unexplored.

Relational turning points, specifically the first big fight and subsequent big fights are important places to examine the communication of PIs. It was suggested that individuals with PIs may perceive each other as more similar and thereby may perceive each other as more attractive. Simply, when individuals are perceived as having similar PIs, they should be more attracted to one another and engage in a relationship that involves similar PIs. When individuals without PIs desire to be perceived as similar and
attractive to individuals with PIs, contagion of PIs may occur. That is, individuals with PIs may have great influence over those who wish to be perceived as similar to individuals with PIs. To that extent, PIs between individuals should be related. Thus, the following research questions and hypothesis were posed:

RQ1: What is the association between relational partners’ PIs?

RQ2: To what extent do individuals communicate their PIs during big fights?

RQ3: What is the association between the degree of PIs and the degree of communication of PIs during big fights?

Hyp: Increases in the communication of PIs during big fights will be related to increases in communication satisfaction during big fights.
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Procedure

Participants were recruited from ongoing Speech classes and informed about a study that examined dating relationships and the communication that occurs when relational partners experienced a big fight or one similar to that nature. In order to participate, students must have been in a current dating relationship and experienced big fights, identified as heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions, within the same relationship. If the students were not currently in a relationship that fit those requirements but knew a couple that did, they could have that couple complete the surveys. Once the couple was determined to have included a participating student or not, partners were assigned as either Partner A or Partner B. Partner A was almost always the participating student member while Partner B was almost always the non-student member.

Students were given two surveys, one for themselves, and one for their partners (or two surveys for a couple they knew fit the requirements). Each survey packet contained a participation agreement form, which was completed before filling out the survey, and an attached envelope on which participants provided the following information: name, class, instructor, and partner designation (i.e., Partner A or Partner B). Participants completed the survey alone, so as not to jeopardize or influence their partner’s answers, and had their partners do the same.

Participants were asked to recollect the first time they experienced a big fight that threatened their current relationship, recall discussing certain feelings, doubts,
disappointments, expectations, ideals, and/or assessments they communicated about their relationship, and provide relational status and demographic information such as current status of dating relationship (i.e., casually dating or exclusively dating) and length of current dating relationship (in months), age, sex, sex of partner, class standing (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, or other), occupation, and ethnicity (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Hawaiian, Caucasian, mixed, or other). In addition, participants completed measures of PIs, communication of PIs, communication satisfaction, and relational satisfaction. The relational satisfaction measure was included because this provided an overall report of the satisfaction in the relationship, distinct from satisfaction associated with specific types of events (i.e., communication satisfaction).

The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete (see Appendix A for recruitment speech). Upon completion of the survey, each partner put their survey into the attached envelope and sealed the envelope to ensure that their answers were kept confidential from their partner. Participating students received research credit or extra credit for their participation or recruitment help.

Participants

Seventy-one dating couples participated in the “Communication in Romantic Relationships” research project. However, because several surveys contained extensive missing data, the total number of couples actually included in the study was 67 (67 females and 67 males). Once surveys were completed and returned, participants were given a couple number (1-67) and were distinguished by one of two recruitment types. Forty-four couples had at least one member who was a participating student (66%) and the remaining 23 couples involved non-participating students (i.e., collected through
networking to friends and family members) (34%). The age of the participants ranged from 16-48 years ($M=22.63$, $SD=4.86$). Eleven freshmen (8%), 21 sophomores (16%), 40 juniors (30%), 32 seniors (24%), 22 graduates (16%), and 17 others (13%) participated. Couples reported that they had been dating from less than one month (3 weeks) to 12 years ($SD=27.82$ months) with an average dating period of 2.13 years. Of the participants, 9 were casual daters (7%), 108 were exclusive daters (81%), and 14 other daters were involved in different circumstances (e.g. “cohabitating”) (10%). Reported ethnicities included 38 mixed (28%), 36 Japanese (27%), 24 Caucasian (18%), 14 Filipino (10%), 7 Chinese (5%), 7 Korean (5%), 5 other ethnicities (4%), 1 Hawaiian (1%), and 2 missing (4%).

Measures

*Positive Illusions*

The degree to which individuals experience PIs in their relationship were measured using Murray and Holmes’ (1997) “Interpersonal Qualities Scale” (IQS), “Measuring Optimism in Romantic Relationships,” and “Measuring Perceptions of Efficacy or Control in Romantic Relationships.” These sub-scales were designed to assess an individual’s idealized views of self, optimism, and perceived control in comparison to the typical or average individual.

In their original form, Murray and Holmes’ scales measured the three components of PIs in both marital and pre-marital dating couples. However, given the purpose that this study was to examine PIs in pre-marital dating relationships, the sub-scales were adapted to consist only of items applying to dating relationships. Also, in order to obtain more accurate measurements of PIs, the scales were adapted into separate measures for
the individual (i.e., self) and the individual’s partner (i.e., partner) to eliminate the subscales’ tendency to blend the two.

**Overall positive illusion measures.** To obtain overall PIs scores, the three components of PIs (i.e., idealized views of self, control, and optimism) were combined to create overall measures of PIs. They were calculated by averaging and equally weighting each of the three components together. Two general versions of the scale were used, one measured positive illusion beliefs (i.e., beliefs) and the other, through further adaptation, measured the communication of positive illusion beliefs (i.e., communication). Thus, four overall measures of PIs were developed and used: self beliefs (i.e., Partner A’s self reports of beliefs, Partner B’s self reports of beliefs), partner beliefs (i.e., Partner A’s perception of Partner B’s beliefs, Partner B’s perception of Partner A’s beliefs), self communication (i.e., Partner A’s self reports of communication of PIs, Partner B’s self reports of communication of PIs), and partner communication beliefs (i.e., Partner A’s perception of Partner B’s communication of PIs, Partner B’s perception of Partner A’s communication of PIs).

**Idealized positive views of self.** Four versions of Murray and Holmes’ (1996a) Interpersonal Qualities Scale (IQS) were used to assess the individual’s beliefs and communication of their personal qualities and their partner’s personal qualities. Participants completed 10 items, reduced from the scale’s original 21 items. Items measured the extent to which various descriptions characterize participants (e.g., “I am kind”) and their partner (e.g., “My partner is kind”) in comparison to the typical or average person using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*highly uncharacteristic*) to 5 (*highly characteristic*). Higher scores reflected more favorable perceptions. Three
statements pertaining to patience, dominance, and laziness were removed from final scales to increase overall reliability. The resulting 7-item measure obtained adequate reliabilities: idealized self beliefs ($\alpha=.70$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.64$ for Partner B); idealized partner beliefs ($\alpha=.77$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.74$ for Partner B); idealized self communication ($\alpha=.78$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.83$ for Partner B); and idealized partner communication beliefs ($\alpha=.83$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.82$ for Partner B) (see Appendix B).

Perceptions of control. Four versions of Murray and Homes' (1997) "Measuring Perceptions of Efficacy or Control in Romantic Relationships" scale were used to assess the individual’s and their partner’s perception and communication of the degree of joint control they possess over positive and negative events within their relationships. Participants completed all of the scale’s original 10 items. Items measured how likely participants believed themselves (e.g., “I can resolve any problem in our relationship”) and their partner (e.g., “My partner and I can resolve any problem in our relationship”) could control various events in comparison to the typical or average person using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (highly unlikely) to 5 (highly likely) for perceptions of control and 1 (never) to 5 (always) for communication of control. Higher scores reflected beliefs of more control. The statements “I am always able to make my partner feel better no matter how upset I might be about confronting various pressures confronting our relationship” and “My partner is always able to make me feel better no matter how upset they might be about confronting various pressures confronting our relationship” were removed from the final scales to increase overall reliability. The resulting 9-item measure obtained adequate reliabilities: control self beliefs ($\alpha=.79$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.75$ for Partner B); control partner beliefs ($\alpha=.78$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.74$ for Partner B); control self
communication (α=.82 for Partner A, α=.82 for Partner B); and control partner communication (α=.81 for Partner A, α=.78 for Partner B) (see Appendix C).

Optimism. Four versions of Murray and Holmes’ (1997) “Measuring Optimism in Romantic Relationships” scale were used to assess the individual’s and their partner’s perceptions and communication of the likelihood of positive and negative events occurring in their own relationship in comparison to the typical or average relationship. Participants completed 10 items, reduced from the scale’s original 11 items. The eleventh item “My partner and I becoming happier and even more satisfied with our relationship than we are today” was removed because satisfaction was assessed in a separate measure. Optimism items measured the extent to which participants believe they (e.g., “The love I share with my partner will continue to grow”) and their partner (e.g., “The love my partner shares with me will continue to grow”) experienced various events in the future in comparison to the typical or average person using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (highly unlikely) to 5 (highly likely) for perceptions of optimism and 1 (never) to 5 (always) for communication of optimism. Higher scores reflected more optimistic beliefs of the future. The statements “I will become closer to my partner when external forces conspire to tear our relationship apart” and “My partner will become closer to me when external forces conspire to tear our relationship apart” were removed from the final scales to increase overall reliability. The resulting 9-item measure obtained adequate reliabilities: optimistic self beliefs (α=.80 for Partner A, α=.78 for Partner B); optimistic partner beliefs (α=.76 for Partner A, α=.83 for Partner B); optimistic self communication (α=.77 for Partner A, α=.81 for Partner B); and optimistic partner communication (α=.76 for Partner A, α=.85 for Partner B) (see Appendix D).
Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction. Hecht’s (1978b) Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory scale was used to assess an individual’s overall communication satisfaction after recalled big fights. Participants completed 10 items, reduced from the scale’s original 19 items. Items measured the extent to which participants were satisfied with the communication during their big fights (e.g., “I was very satisfied with the conversation”) using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflected more communication satisfaction: The measure obtained adequate reliabilities: $\alpha=.83$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.83$ for Partner B (see Appendix E).

Overall relational satisfaction. Norton’s Quality Marriage Index (1983) scale is a global evaluative assessment of happiness in marital relationships. The 6 item scale was revised to include only 5 items, and the term “marriage” was replaced with “relationship.” Items measured participants’ assessments of their relational quality (e.g., “We have a good relationship”), using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflected more relational satisfaction. The measure obtained adequate reliabilities: $\alpha=.93$ for Partner A, $\alpha=.91$ for Partner B (see Appendix F).
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

All statistical analyses were computed using SPSS. All results are reported as two-tailed tests.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked about how individual’s PIs related to their partner’s PIs. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients were computed and correlational analyses showed that there was a strong relationship between the two. One way to explore this research question was to examine how individual PIs were correlated at a relationship level. This research question was explored using four correlations. Specifically, the findings indicated that Partner A’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s self reports of PIs, $r(64)=.38, p<.001$. The results also showed that Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B’s PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s PIs $r(63)=.52, p<.001$. Similarly, Partner A’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B’s PIs, $r(62)=.69, p<.001$. Finally, Partner B’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s PIs, $r(65)=.62, p<.001$. This suggests that on a relationship level, increases in reports of the PIs of one partner were associated with increases in the reports of PIs of the other partner.

A second way to examine this research question was to correlate PIs at an individual level. Specifically, Partner A’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s PIs, $r(64)=.56, p<.001$. The analysis also indicated that Partner B’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner
A's perceptions of Partner B's PIs, \( r(63) = .44, p < .001 \). These results suggest that the more individuals reported that they had PIs, the more these individuals were perceived as having PIs by their partners.

Research Question 2

Research question two examined the extent to which individuals communicate PIs during big fights. The statistical frequencies and descriptive findings revealed that individuals believe they communicate their positive illusions to a moderate degree (Partner A: \( n=67, M=3.19, SD=.45 \), with scores ranging from 2.05 to 4.10; Partner B: \( n=67, M=3.12, SD=.50 \), with scores ranging from 1.27 to 4.24). The results also indicated that people perceive their partners as communicating PIs to a moderate degree (Partner A’s perception of Partner B’s communication of PIs: \( n=67, M=3.31, SD=.55 \), with scores ranging from 1.15 to 4.44; Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s communication of PIs; \( n=66, M=3.18, SD=.49 \), with scores ranging from 1.79 to 4.16).

Research Question 3

Research question three asked about the extent to which PIs were related to the communication of PIs during big fights. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients were used to explore this research question in four ways. One way to examine this research question was to explore how self reports of PIs correlated with self reports of communication of PIs. Specifically, the results indicated that Partner A’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner A’s self reports of communication of PIs \( r(64) = .57, p < .001 \). Further, Partner B’s self reports were significantly correlated with Partner B’s self reports of communication of PIs \( r(65) = .57, \).
This suggests that the more people reported having PIs, the more they reported communicating their PIs during big fights.

A second way to investigate this research question was to correlate self reports of PIs with perceptions of partner’s communication of PIs. Two correlations were used to explore this relationship. Specifically, the results indicated that Partner A’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s communication of PIs $r(64) = .35, p < .001$. Partner B’s self reports of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B’s communication of PIs $r(65) = .32, p = .01$. This indicates that the more people reported PIs, the more partners were perceived to communicate PIs during big fights.

A third way to explore this research question was to correlate perceptions of partner’s PIs with self reports of communication of PIs. Specifically, the results indicated that Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B’s PIs were significantly correlated to Partner B’s communication of PIs $r(63) = .35, p < .001$. However, in contrast to the previous correlation, Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s PIs were not significantly correlated with Partner A’s communication of PIs $r(65) = .08, p = .16$. Thus, the results are mixed, so it is unclear if increases in perceptions of partner’s PIs are associated with increases in the communication of PIs.

Finally, a fourth way to examine this research question was to correlate perceptions of partner’s PIs with perceptions of partner’s communication of PIs. Specifically, the results indicated that Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B’s PIs were significantly correlated with Partner A’s perception of Partner B’s communication of PIs $r(62) = .59, p < .001$. Furthermore, Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s PIs were
significantly correlated with Partner B’s perceptions of Partner A’s communication of PIs $r(65)=.65, p<.001$. This suggests that the more people thought their partners had PIs, the more they thought their partners communicated their PIs.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that increases in the communication of PIs would be related to increases in communication satisfaction during big fights. Pearson Product Moment Correlational analyses were computed between the communication of PIs and communication satisfaction while controlling for overall relational satisfaction as a covariate. Again, relational satisfaction was used as a covariate to partial out any potential relationship that may have influenced the final communication satisfaction results. Indeed, relational satisfaction was significantly correlated with communication satisfaction for Partner A $r(64)=.45, p<.001$ and Partner B $r(65)=.47, p<.001$. This suggests that increases in overall relational satisfaction is significantly associated with increases in communication satisfaction.

One way to explore this hypothesis was to examine how self reports of communication of PIs were correlated with self reports of communication satisfaction. Specifically, Partner A’s self reports of communication of PIs were positively correlated with Partner A’s self reports of communication satisfaction $r(56)=.24, p=.06$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. Furthermore, Partner B’s self reports of communication of PIs were positively correlated with Partner B’s self reports of communication satisfaction $r(56)=.21, p=.11$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. In the specific case of Partner A’s, near significant increases in PIs were associated with increases in communication satisfaction, though this was not the case for Partner B’s.
A second way to investigate this hypothesis was to examine how perceptions of partner's communication of PIs were correlated with self reports of communication satisfaction. Specifically, Partner B's perceptions of Partner A's communication were positively correlated with Partner A's communication satisfaction $r(56)=.08, p=.10$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. The results also showed that Partner A's perceptions of Partner B's communication of PIs were not significantly correlated with Partner B's self reports of communication satisfaction $r(56)=-.05, p=.73$ while controlling for relational satisfaction.

A third way to look at this hypothesis was to examine how self reports of communication of PIs correlated with partner's self reports of communication satisfaction. Specifically, Partner A's self reports of communication of PIs were positively correlated with Partner B's communication satisfaction $r(56)=-.08, p=.56$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. Additionally, Partner B's self reports of communication of PIs were not significantly correlated with Partner A's communication satisfaction $r(56)=-.05, p=.70$ while controlling for relational satisfaction.

Finally, a fourth way to investigate this hypothesis was to explore how perceptions of partner's communication of PIs were correlated with self reports of communication satisfaction. Specifically, I found that Partner A’s perceptions of Partner B's communication of PIs were positively correlated with Partner A’s communication satisfaction $r(56)=.18, p=.18$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. However, the results also showed that Partner B’s perceptions of partner A’s communication of PIs were significantly correlated with Partner B’s communication $r(56)=.41, p<.001$ while controlling for relational satisfaction. Overall, this hypothesis had very limited support.
Only in the specific case of Partner B were increases in perceptions of partner's communication of PIIs associated with increases in communication satisfaction.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine PIs during big fights in romantic dating relationships. More specifically, this study investigated PIs from a communicative perspective. Given the exploratory nature of this research, several research questions and one hypothesis were posed to examine the association between PIs, the communication of PIs, and communication satisfaction during big fights in romantic relationships.

It was found that partners’ PIs were strongly correlated with each other. Specifically, the results showed that increases in individuals’ PIs were correlated with increases in their partner’s PIs. These findings were consistent when self reported and when PIs were assessed through perceptions of partners. One possible explanation for the association between partners’ PIs could be the Similarity Attraction hypothesis. According to Byrne’s attraction paradigm (1997), when individuals perceive themselves to be similar to others, they are likely to be attracted to them. This explanation suggests that individuals with high degrees of PIs might have chosen to date people with similar PIs, and thus, their PIs are correlated. For example, Ann and Nathan share similar PIs. Tyler is an individual with a lesser degree of PIs from Ann’s and Nathan’s. According to the Similarity Attraction hypothesis, Ann would be likely to choose Nathan as a relational partner because she is attracted to the similarity they share in their degree of PIs. Ann might be attracted to the fact that Nathan is competent, capable, passionate, and has a positive outlook on life. Ann would recognize these characteristics of Nathan’s PIs and be attracted to him because they would match her own. It might be that individuals with a lesser degree of PIs would not be selected as potential partners because little similarity
between their PIs and their degree of PIs would exist. Ann would not select Tyler because little similarity exists between their PIs and their degree of PIs. These results suggest that individuals with high degrees of PIs are likely to seek out other individuals who share similar PIs and PIs to a similar degree.

The findings of this investigation might also allow for the explanation that PIs allow for PIs based relationships to develop. If individuals are, in fact, similar and attracted to other individuals with high degrees PIs, PIs may be the reason why the two individuals will engage in a relationship together. This is much different than two individuals initiating a relationship and then developing PIs, though this is highly possible as well. The first scenario would support the findings of this research that peoples’ PIs are correlated to one another. Because PIs occur before the relationship begins, when relational communication occurs, PIs should come to the forefront. If the individuals form a relationship and then begin to form PIs, they may not do so at the same rate or to a similar degree, though the correlations of this study are not able to partial this possibility out. When big fights occur, the partner who has a greater degree of PIs will be more likely to communicate them. When the other partner cannot match, per se, the degree of PIs, it could be possible that the relationship will not survive the big fight. When individuals share PIs to a similar extent, the communication of those PIs will also be done to a similar extent, allowing for equal representation during the big fight.

Another possible explanation for why partners’ PIs are correlated could be that individuals with high degrees of PIs tend to infect their partners with PIs. The concept of social and emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994) might explain that partners’ PIs are correlated. The social and emotional contagion literature suggests that
individuals have the power to infect others who are more vulnerable and susceptible to being influenced. In this case, individuals with PIs would be able to influence individuals with lesser degrees of PIs. When this happens, one partner’s PIs may act as a contagious “virus” that is caught by the other partner. Thus, PIs act as a one-way “infection”, whereby one individual’s PIs are caught by another. Eventually, when the other partner is infected with the PIs, their PIs will become more similar. This may explain why partners’ PIs are so strongly correlated.

The results also showed that PIs were communicated and PIs were correlated with the communication of PIs. It was found that individuals communicate their PIs to a moderate extent. Furthermore, increases in individuals’ PIs were strongly associated to increases of their own and their partner’s communication of PIs.

Possible reasons why individuals communicate their PIs are twofold. First, individuals might think about or believe PIs on a psychological level which eventually are communicated. Because these PIs become a regular process of thought, individuals should be likely to maintain the PIs through talk. Since the PIs previously exist within the individual, it would give good reason for individuals to manifest them through communication. Second, it might be that through talk, individuals might communicate in such a way that they eventually come to believe what they have communicated as PIs. When individuals frequently communicate to their partner idealized statements such as “You are great for me,” or “I think we should get married”, a psychological recognition of these statements as PIs may occur.

Finally, the results showed very limited support that the communication of PIs was correlated with communication satisfaction. The extent to which people
communicated their PIs was not significantly associated to their own and their partners' communication satisfaction. Only in one situation was there a significant association between the communication of PIs and communication satisfaction. This could be for several reasons. First, participants were asked to recollect their big fights. Because the data collected were retrospective in nature, participants may have been influenced by their overall relational satisfaction when reporting on communication satisfaction. When partialled out, the analyses showed that communication satisfaction was no longer correlated the communication of PIs. Moreover, if participants were recollecting big fights that were in the distant past, their perceptions of their communication satisfaction might have been similar to their perceptions of how satisfied they were with the relationship in general. The results showed that overall relational satisfaction was strongly correlated with communication satisfaction which would support this. Second, for the specific case where the hypothesis was supported, the findings may have been due to error statistically expected by chance given the number of correlations tested. Therefore, it is not possible to know if this finding was by chance alone or if it was truly representative of this case during big fights in dating relationships. Third, it could be the case that PIs are not correlated with communication satisfaction because the communication satisfaction is correlated to other factors. In other words, the communication of PIs may not be what influenced communication satisfaction. For instance, an individual's emotions prior to the big fight may have more of an overall effect on communication satisfaction than the communication of PIs. Overall, it may also be the case that the results are correct and no real relationship exists between the communication of PIs and communication satisfaction.
In general, these findings suggest that partners’ PIs are strongly associated. Additionally, the results show that individuals communicate their PIs to a moderate degree and increases in PIs are associated to increases in the communication of PIs. However, the results did not support the prediction that the communication of PIs would be significantly correlated with communication satisfaction.

Implications
Early research has examined PIs and the role of PIs in interpersonal relationships. However, none has yet investigated the extent to which PIs are associated to the communication of PIs. This current research has shown that PIs are, in fact, communicated during big fights in romantic dating relationships. The findings of this study have several implications.

Positive illusions
The findings of this study contribute to existing PIs literature and research. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996a) found that an individual’s PIs can be (a) projected and (b) reflected onto their relational partner. If both partners engage in these projected PIs, it would reinforce the findings that partners’ PIs are strongly correlated. In the projected PIs, an individual will see their partner in a more positive light due to the influence of the PIs. The shared projection of PIs will influence both partners to cast PIs towards their partner in a relationship. The same authors suggest that individuals with PIs in a relationship will also tend to reflect their partner’s PIs. The reflected PIs may be another verification of the findings that partner’s PIs are strongly correlated. Individuals tend to believe their partner’s projection of PIs onto themselves. Thus, not only are PIs being projected, but they are also being reflected. The results of this study lend support to
Murray, Holmes, and Griffin’s projected and reflected PIs. Because partner’s PIs are strongly associated, individuals with PIs are projecting and reflecting onto their partner’s PIs to be able to maintain similar levels of PIs.

PIs and conflict

The findings of this study also contribute to existing conflict literature and research. The role of being understood by one’s partner is a key factor in successful conflicts (Cahn, 1990). Cahn suggests that “ideal partners” engage in particular types of communication during conflict that results in greater perceived understanding between relational partners. PIs might be one type of communication that occurs to increase perceived understanding between partners during big fights. The results of this study that show partner’s PIs to be strongly correlated to each other may be one implication for perceived communication between partners. The fact that increases in one partner’s PIs led to increases in the second partner’s PIs shows that both partners needed to have mutual understanding of each other in order to mirror each others progression of PIs. If PIs of partners were not strongly correlated, that could suggest that individuals with dissimilar PIs in relationships may experience less mutual understanding. Also, individuals with dissimilar PIs would probably not be seen as “ideal” partners. Ultimately, this could hinder the development of PIs and the communication of PIs in the relationship.

This study found that partner’s PIs and the communication of PIs were strongly associated. These findings support Gottman (1994) and Schapp’s (1984) research which suggests that reciprocation during conflict in interpersonal relationships reflects symmetrical exchanges. Implications can be made that when partner’s PIs are similar,
they will also probably be communicated to symmetrical degrees. For example, if Ann
tells Nathan in conflict, “I really think that you are the one for me,” Nathan should reply
symmetrically such as “I have no doubt that you are the one I want to marry.” PIs
communicated during conflict should be reciprocated by partner sharing similar degrees
of PIs.

The results of this study may further validate Gottman’s research in marriage
conflict, recognizing that the association between PIs and the communication of PIs in
dating relationships is relevant to previous conflict literature. Gottman (1994) suggests
that five positive communicative exchanges are recommended for every one negative
communicative exchange for a stable relationship to exist. PIs may be one way relational
partners can engage in one of the five positive communicative exchanges. When
individuals with high levels of PIs communicate their PIs, they will be communicating
positive moves in progression to the five suggested for relational stability. For example,
when couples have PIs that involve intimacy, such as emphasizing their compatibility or
plans for a future, they are positively reinforcing their relationship.

This research may also contribute to the similar conflict investigation of Seigert
and Stamp’s first big fights (1994). Their research suggests that couples who survive their
first big fights describe more cooperative and confrontational approach to the issues
affecting the relationship negatively and are willing to confront their problems, talk about
them, and work through them together in order to pursue the relationship (Seigert &
Stamp, 1994). The communication of PIs might distinguish couples that survive big
fights from those who do not. When PIs are communicated, both partners will realize that
what they believe has now been translated into relationship talk. Once the PIs are out in
the open, so to speak, partners might know that it is the PIs that helped them to develop and maintain the relationship until this threshold. Communicating PIs would give partners reason to survive, as the three components would reinforce that their relationship is above others, is controllable, and has a future. If PIs were not communicated, couples might not have this saving grace and end up in dissolution.

Finally, it is also possible that the quality of the big fights individuals in dating relationships might determine the communication of PIs. Individuals in relationships with different degrees of PIs may experience different degrees of quality of big fights. These big fights that are more salient and raise issues associated with individuals PIs may make them more likely to communicate their PIs. PIs might only be communicated when they are relevant to the big fights. If an individual has a high degree of PIs but the big fight is not associated to their PIs, the PIs would probably not be communicated to their partner. While these implications may contribute to the understanding of the communicative role of PIs, I will now discuss several ways this research was limited in its findings.

Limitations

Despite the favorable findings, some limitations are evident in this research. One major area of concern that may have limited the findings were the original measures for PIs and the communication of PIs. The initial PIs scales by Murray and Holmes (1996a) were obscure and problematic in their wording. At the decision of the researcher, the scales were edited and then only certain statements were selected to be used in the final survey. These adaptations were made to make the scales consistent and easier for the participants to respond to. Additionally, each of the idealized views of self, control, and
optimism scales had to be adapted to scales for (a) individuals and (b) perceptions of their partners in order to obtain reports on both participating members of the relationship.

The scales also had to be distinguished as (a) PIs measures and (b) communication of PIs measures. This was done with distinct rewording of instructions for each of the measures. With these eight different scales on the survey, sets of instructions were given for participants to contextualize what the scales were measuring (i.e., self reports of PIs, perceptions of partners’ PIs, self reports of communication of PIs, perceptions of partners communication PIs). Because the instructions were very similar to each other with few words changing, participants may have overlooked these and responded to the scales without reading the necessary instructions. If participants did overlook or disregard distinctions between instructions, this may have provided an alternative explanation for the strong correlations between PIs and the communication of PIs. Future research should take extra care to highlight the changes in instructions.

As with much research collected by surveys, it is difficult to measure the exact behavior of the participants. Because PIs, communication of PIs, communication satisfaction, overall relational satisfaction, and big fights were all recollected events of the past, the data collected is limited as it is only reflective of actual events. Simply, the data collected are perceptions of the participants. Future research could be conducted in a lab setting to avoid perceptual data collection and instead focus on the participants actual behavior.

Due to extensive missing data on several surveys, the total participating number of couples was reduced. This missing data could be different from the data remaining in the study. Those surveys containing missing data could have affected the correlations
between partner’s PIs and the communication of PIs during big fights. It is possible that the surveys containing the missing data could have been due to negative perceptions of the participant or their partner. Thus, participants did not complete that portion of the survey that reflected their negative perceptions. Also, individuals may have experienced big fights but did not have PIs or did not communicate positive illusions to report on. Finally, the survey was limited to romantic dating couples who had experienced a big fight. If couples did not experience a big fight as characterized on the survey, participants may not have reported information instrumental to the purposes of the study.

Also of concern, differences in perceptions of “big fights” within the relationship may have occurred when individuals and their partners were asked to recollect big fights in their relationship. Partners may have different perceptions of what a big fight is. For example, what Ann may have perceived as a big fight, Nathan may see as nothing more than a minor disagreement. Though a definition of a big fight was provided in the survey, individual’s experiences and perceptions of big fights may vary. In future studies, data could be collected in a lab with the couple present so that consensus on a big fight they are reporting on could be recorded instead of providing descriptions on a survey. Couples could also tape record big fights they had and then have the partners agree upon which one was most crucial to their relationship and then report on that one. Individual’s perceptions of their partner may also have been inaccurate because they are different from self reports and cannot be validated as such. In the future, participants should only participate if they have experienced a big fight within one week or less to enable responses that are recent and salient.
It is also important to consider that a lapse in time may have occurred between the
time of the couple's big fight and their reports. Thus, if the couple had not experienced a
big fight recently, reports of past big fights might have been inaccurate or blurry and
removed recounts of what actually took place. Also, the survey failed to have participants
report how long ago their big fight(s) occurred. These issues could be avoided in the
future by giving participants a tape recorder to tape one or some of their big fights they
will report on and having them log the date of the big fight(s).

The amount of time the couple had been dating, or length of relationship, may
have influenced self reports and perceptions of partners PIs and communication of PIs.
For example, Ann's PIs and her perceptions of Nathan might have been less accurate if
they were dating for only one month as opposed to three years. Couples who were in
relatively new relationships may have been limited in their degree of PIs and their degree
of their communication of PIs. Thus, in the future, researchers should categorize couples
by relationship length so comparisons may be made between new relationships (0-6
months), relatively new relationships (6 months to 2 years) and long term relationships (2
years or more).

Finally, it is worth noting that participants completed the surveys in unmonitored
environments, such as their home. Surveys were issued in the university's classrooms.
The instructions made clear that participants were to complete the surveys separate from
their partners, though there was no way to control for this. For future research,
participants could complete surveys in a room controlled by a monitor to make sure the
couple does not converse. These limitations should be accommodated in future research,
of which I will suggest some future directions.
Directions for Future Research

This research has contributed new understandings of PIs and their communicative role during big fights in dating relationships. Future investigations could further explore many facets of this research. First, clear distinctions need to be made between an individual’s PIs and relational PIs. This research examined individual’s PIs that were communicated within a relationship. These PIs are different from relational PIs. Relational PIs should be distinctly defined as PIs both partner form and share, and are unique to the relationship. To clarify, individuals’ PIs are beliefs such as “I am a peach, and I think this relationship will lead to marriage, I know this relationship is the best one for me.” Relational PIs, on the other hand, are beliefs such as “We are peachy, our relationship will lead to marriage, and we know this relationship is the best one for us.” Well-defined relational PIs must be apparent, supported with a communicative analysis, as well as the process PIs undergo from individual PIs to relational PIs.

Because this research only examined how individuals in relationships communicated their own PIs, future research might investigate the extent to which relational PIs are communicated. Possibly, relational PIs might be communicated to a greater extent. This might be because when individuals have different degrees of PIs in a relationship, as in the case of this research, depending on the quality and extent of the PIs, they may only be communicated to certain degrees in different contexts. For example, Ann may have a moderate degree of PIs that she communicates moderately during big fights. Nathan may have a high degree of PIs that are communicated to a moderate degree during big fights but during times of relational intensification, such as intimate moments, his PIs might be communicated at a much more intense degree.
However, if relational PIs are examined, it is more likely that individuals will communicate relational PIs because they will be the same for both partners despite the severity of the big fight.

Future research might also make effort to more clearly differentiate between PIs and reality. In order to be more accurate in identifying PIs, literature should strive to acknowledge legitimate differences between PIs that are more illusory and PIs that are more grounded in reality. These differences may play a major role in the communication of PIs. For example, an individual might be less likely to communicate PIs that are highly illusory during big fights for fear that their partner may not share similar PIs. An individual might be more likely to communicate PIs closely grounded to reality as they might be more reflective of actual circumstances and behavior experienced in the relationship.

On the other hand, future research might want to discuss metacommunication about PIs. Distinctly, it would be interesting to investigate if PIs are reinforced through talk. It might be speculated that the more illusory an individual’s PIs are, the more likely they would be reinforced through talk. The more reality-based an individual’s PIs are, the less likely they would be reinforced through talk.

The communication of PIs can also be examined at various stages and turning points in interpersonal relationships. Most PIs research that involves interpersonal communication is limited to relationship initiation, as PIs may be most pervasive there. However, PIs research could also look at various stages of relationship development (e.g., experimentation, intensification, integration, and bonding), dissolution (e.g., differentiation, circumscribing, stagnation, avoidance, and termination), and turning
points in relationships. A couple’s first big fight is only one turning point where PIs are communicated in retrospect of the vast amount of turning points found in interpersonal relationships at different developmental and dissolution stages. The communication of PIs could be addressed in turning points involving time. In developing relationships, initial turning points in relationships may be ripe for PIs to be communicated (e.g., get-to-know time, first meeting, first date, or meeting the family). The communication of PIs could also be examined in turning points that involve shifts in attitude (i.e., positive psychic change or negative psychic change). Depending on individuals’ attitudes in a relationship, PIs should be communicated to varying degrees. Communicating PIs may be instrumental in therapy related situations. Relationships that have reached the termination phase may be saved by the couple’s communication of PIs. The PIs may act as a protective force against dissolution, and, possibly, prolong or reject total termination. It would be interesting to see what happens to PIs over the trajectory of a relationship. A longitudinal study that would measure individual’s PIs before entering a relationship might help to show the likelihood of individuals forming relationships based on similarity. This investigation would provide insights as to how PIs are communicated through the lifetime of the relationship and grades of variations of communication of PIs at different stages in the relationship.

Third, the communication of PIs research can be extended to relationships other than romantic dating relationships. Romantic dating relationships were used for the purposes of this research because they are one type of relationship that is likely to communicate PIs. However, the communication of PIs may hold a prevalent role in relationships such as friendships, family relationships, work relationships, and marriage
relationships. Specifically, in family relationships, PIs may be communicated to a lesser degree than in friendship relationships because families are non-voluntary relationships. Individuals may feel less of a need to communicate PIs in families because these types of relationships may not experience the likelihood of dissolution as might friendships. Friendships, on the other hand, may experience higher degrees of communication of PIs, as this type of relationship is voluntary and individuals may have many PIs involved.

Conclusion

This communicative analysis of PIs in romantic dating relationships during big fights is useful in interpersonal relationship research. It is clear that PIs are communicated in these relationships during big fights. Some of the reasons why relational partners may be correlated in their PIs are similarity and contagion. While additional implications of PIs’ roles in interpersonal relationships and conflict have been made, it must be recognized that several limitations affecting the research do exist. Future research may take several directions, including making clear distinctions between relational and individual PIs, investigating different turning points and types of interpersonal relationships, and conducting longitudinal studies in order to expand the literature and knowledge of PIs and the communication of PIs from communicative perspectives. Overall, this research offers an informative glance at PIs and their relevance to interpersonal communication.
References


*Social Psychology Quarterly, 44, 24-30.*
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SPEECH

My name is Ann and I am a current graduate student in the Speech Department. I would like to inform you about an ongoing study I am conducting for my thesis project that examines communication in romantic relationships. In order to participate you must be in a current dating relationship. If you are not in a current dating relationship but know someone who is, you may also participate.

You and your partner will each need to complete a survey that will take approximately 20-30 minutes to finish. Your participation will be completely voluntary and you may decide to discontinue your participation at any time. The survey will ask you to evaluate yourself, your partner, and your relationship. You will need to think of a big fight that you may have recently experienced and report on what happened during that fight. Finally, you will need to provide some basic information about yourself and your relationship which will be kept in strict confidentiality.

In return for your participation, you will receive extra credit or a research participation grade in this class. If you would like to participate, please raise your hand so I may distribute the surveys to you and have you write your name on a sign-up sheet. Please write your name under the appropriate column: if you and your partner are participating, please sign under column 1. If you are not currently in a dating relationship but know a couple who is and would like to participate, please sign under column 2. Once you receive the survey, be sure to fill out the attached envelope before leaving. You will use this envelope to insert your agreement of participation form and completed survey.
APPENDIX A (Continued)

Your partner will do the same. Please return your completed survey in its sealed envelope to your instructor within one week’s time.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at 956-6354 (office) or e-mail me (information provided on envelope). Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX B

POSITIVE ILLUSIONS IDEALIZED VIEWS OF SELF AND PARTNER MEASURES

Idealized Self Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe possible characteristics of yourself. Please consider the degree to which the following characteristics of yourself you believe are: (1) much less characteristic, (2) less characteristic, (3) equally characteristic, (4) more characteristic, or (5) much more characteristic in comparison to the typical or average person and circle the corresponding number.

1. I am kind.
2. I am open.
3. I am patient. b
4. I am understanding.
5. I am tolerant.
6. I am lazy. a b
7. I am dominant. a b
8. I am moody. a
9. I am thoughtless. a
10. I am irrational. a

Idealized Partner Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe possible characteristics of your partner. Please consider the degree to which the following characteristics of your partner you believe are: (1) much less characteristic, (2) less characteristic, (3) equally characteristic, (4) more characteristic, or (5) much more characteristic in comparison to the typical or average person and circle the corresponding number.

1. My partner is kind.
2. My partner is open.
3. My partner is patient. b
4. My partner is understanding.
5. My partner is tolerant.
6. My partner is lazy. a b
7. My partner is dominant. a b
8. My partner is moody. a
9. My partner is thoughtless. a
10. My partner is irrational. a

a Indicates reverse coded items.  
b Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX B (Continued)

POSITIVE ILLUSIONS IDEALIZED VIEWS OF SELF AND PARTNER MEASURES

Idealized Self Communication

Instructions: The following items describe possible characteristics that you might have communicated during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which the following characterized your communication by circling the corresponding number: (1) highly characteristic, (2) uncharacteristic, (3) somewhat characteristic, (4) characteristic, or (5) highly characteristic.

During our big fights I communicated ________.
1. Kindness
2. Openness
3. Patience
4. Understanding
5. Tolerance
6. Laziness
7. Dominance
8. Moodiness
9. Thoughtlessness
10. Irrationality

Idealized Partner Communication

Instructions: The following items describe possible characteristics that your partner might have communicated during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which the following characterized your partner’s communication by circling the corresponding number: (1) highly characteristic, (2) uncharacteristic, (3) somewhat characteristic, (4) characteristic, or (5) highly characteristic.

During our big fights my partner communicated ________.
1. Kindness
2. Openness
3. Patience
4. Understanding
5. Tolerance
6. Laziness
7. Dominance
8. Moodiness

a Indicates reverse coded items.  b Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX B (Continued)

9. Thoughtlessness a
10. Irrationality a

a Indicates reverse coded items. b Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX C

POSITIVE ILLUSIONS CONTROL MEASURES

Control Self Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe events that occur in romantic relationships. Please consider the degree to which you believe the following statements are (1) much less likely, (2) less likely, (3) equally likely, (4) more likely, or (5) much more likely to occur in your relationship with your partner in comparison to the typical or average relationship and circle the corresponding number.

1. I can resolve any problem in my relationship.
2. I am in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in my relationship.
3. I can prevent undesirable events from occurring in my relationship.
4. I possess the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our relational differences.
5. I can create the ideal relationship.
6. I can successfully work through any incompatibilities in my relationship.
7. I am always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises with my partner when we discuss conflictual issues in my relationships.
8. I am always able to make my partner feel better no matter how upset I might be about various pressures confronting our relationship. b
9. I sometimes feel helpless when I am confronted by a serious problem that I am not sure how to solve in our relationship. a
10. I am always able to successfully influence my partner into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.

Control Partner Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe events that occur in romantic relationships. Please consider the degree to which you believe the following statements are (1) much less likely, (2) less likely, (3) equally likely, (4) more likely, or (5) much more likely to occur in your partner’s relationship with you in comparison to the typical or average relationship and circle the corresponding number.

1. My partner can resolve any problem in our relationship.
2. My partner is in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in our relationship.
3. My partner can prevent undesirable events from occurring in our relationship.
4. My partner possesses the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences.
5. My partner can create the ideal relationship we both desire.

a Indicates reverse coded items.  
b Indicates items removed from final scale.
6. My partner can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs.
7. My partner is always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises when we discuss conflictual issues in our relationship.
8. My partner is always able to make me feel better no matter how upset he/she might be about the various pressures confronting our relationship. \(^b\)
9. My partner sometimes feels helpless when he/she is confronted by a serious problem that he/she is not sure how to solve in our relationship. \(^a\)
10. My partner is always successful in influencing us into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.

Control Self Communication

*Instructions:* The following items describe messages that you might have communicated to your partner during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which you communicated the following statements to your partner by circling the corresponding number: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) sometimes, (4) almost always, or (5) always.

During our big fights *I communicated* that:

1. I can resolve any problem in my relationship.
2. I am in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in my relationship.
3. I can prevent undesirable events from occurring in my relationship.
4. I possess the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our relational differences.
5. I can create the ideal relationship.
6. I can successfully work through any incompatibilities in my relationship.
7. I am always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises with my partner when we discuss conflictual issues in my relationship.
8. I am always able to make my partner feel better no matter how upset I might be about various pressures confronting our relationship. \(^b\)
9. I sometimes feel helpless when I am confronted by a serious problem that I am not sure how to solve in our relationship. \(^a\)
10. I am always able to successfully influence my partner into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.

\(^a\) Indicates reverse coded items. \(^b\) Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX C (Continued)

Control Partner Communication

Instructions: The following items describe messages that your partner might have communicated to you during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which your partner communicated the following statements to you by circling the corresponding number: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) sometimes, (4) almost always, or (5) always.

During our big fights my partner communicated that:
1. My partner can resolve any problem in our relationship.
2. My partner is in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in our relationship.
3. My partner can prevent undesirable events from occurring in our relationship.
4. My partner possesses the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences.
5. My partner can create the ideal relationship we both desire.
6. My partner can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs.
7. My partner is always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises when we discuss conflictual issues in our relationship.
8. My partner is always able to make me feel better no matter how upset he/she might be about the various pressures confronting our relationship. *b*
9. My partner sometimes feels helpless when he/she is confronted by a serious problem that he/she is not sure how to solve in our relationship. *a*
10. My partner is always successful in influencing us into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.

* Indicates reverse coded items.  
* Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX D

POSITIVE ILLUSIONS OPTIMISM MEASURES

Optimistic Self Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe events that occur in romantic relationships. Please consider the degree to which you believe the following statements are (1) much less likely, (2) less likely, (3) equally likely, (4) more likely, or (5) much more likely to occur in your relationship with your partner in comparison to the typical or average relationship and circle the corresponding number.

1. I will become closer to my partner even when external events or forces conspire to tear our relationship apart. 
2. The love I share with my partner will continue to grow. 
3. I will discover areas in which my partner's and my needs conflict in a serious way. 
4. I will be attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship. 
5. I will grow further apart from my partner as the negative aspects of our relationship begin to overwhelm us. 
6. I will never tire of my partner's company no matter how much time we spend together. 
7. My relationship with my partner will break up within the next 6 months. 
8. My relationship with my partner will lead to marriage. 
9. I will question my involvement with my partner as I discover my partner's faults. 
10. The passion I share with my partner will remain as intense as it is today.

Optimistic Partner Beliefs

Instructions: The following items describe events that occur in romantic relationships. Please consider the degree to which you believe the following statements are (1) much less likely, (2) less likely, (3) equally likely, (4) more likely, or (5) much more likely to occur in your partner's relationship with you in comparison to the typical or average relationship and circle the corresponding number.

1. My partner will become closer to me even when external events or forces conspire to tear our relationship apart. 
2. The love my partner shares with me will continue to grow. 
3. My partner will discover areas about me in which our needs conflict in a serious way. 
4. My partner will be attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship. 
5. My partner will grow further apart from me as the negative aspects of our relationship begin to overwhelm us. 

*a* Indicates reverse coded items. 
*b* Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX D (Continued)

6. My partner will never tire of my company no matter how much time we spend together.
7. My partner’s relationship with me will break up within the next 6 months. a
8. My partner’s relationship with me will lead to marriage.
9. My partner will question his/her involvement with me as he/she discovers my faults. a
10. The passion my partner shares with me will remain as intense as it is today.

Optimistic Self Communication

Instructions: The following items describe messages that you might have communicated to your partner during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which you communicated the following statements to your partner by circling the corresponding number: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) sometimes, (4) almost always, or (5) always.

During our big fights I communicated that:
1. I will become closer to my partner even when external events or forces conspire to tear our relationship apart. b
2. The love I share with my partner will continue to grow.
3. I will discover areas in which my partner’s and my needs conflict in a serious way. a
4. I will be attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship. a
5. I will grow further apart from my partner as the negative aspects of our relationship being to overwhelm us. a
6. I will never tire of my partner’s company no matter how much time we spend together.
7. My relationship with my partner will break up within the next 6 months. a
8. My relationship with my partner will lead to marriage.
9. I will question my involvement with my partner as I discover my partner’s faults. a
10. The passion I share with my partner will remain as intense as it is today.

Optimistic Partner Communication

Instructions: The following items describe messages that your partner might have communicated to you during your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions). Keeping your big fights in mind, indicate the extent to which your partner communicated the following statements to you by circling the corresponding number: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) sometimes, (4) almost always, or (5) always.

a Indicates reverse coded items.  

b Indicates items removed from final scale.
During our big fights my partner communicated that:
1. I will become closer to my partner even when external events or forces conspire to tear our relationship apart. b
2. The love I share with my partner will continue to grow.
3. I will discover areas in which my partner’s and my needs conflict in a serious way. a
4. I will be attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship. a
5. I will grow further apart from my partner as the negative aspects of our relationship being to overwhelm us. a
6. I will never tire of my partner’s company no matter how much time we spend together.
7. My relationship with my partner will break up within the next 6 months. a
8. My relationship with my partner will lead to marriage.
9. I will question my involvement with my partner as I discover my partner’s faults. a
10. The passion I share with my partner will remain as intense as it is today.

a Indicates reverse coded items.  b Indicates items removed from final scale.
APPENDIX E

COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Instructions: Recall discussions of your big fights (or heated arguments or confrontations characterized by negative emotions) and assess your degree of your overall satisfaction after the big fights had occurred. Please indicate how accurately the statements reflect the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree.

1. My partner let me know that I was communicating effectively.
2. Nothing was accomplished. *
3. I would like to have another conversation like this one.
4. My partner genuinely wanted to get to know me.
5. I was very dissatisfied with the conversation.
6. I had something else to do.
7. I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted my partner to view me.
8. My partner showed me that he/she understood what I said.
9. I was very satisfied with the conversation.
10. My partner expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say.

* Indicates reverse coded items.
APPENDIX F

OVERALL RELATIONAL SATISFACTION

Instructions: Please indicate your response by circling the number which best represents the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree.

1. My partner and I have a good relationship.
2. My relationship with my partner is very stable.
3. Our relationship is strong.
4. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.
5. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.
APPENDIX G

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN FORM

Communication in Romantic Relationships
Principal Investigator: Ann Krawciw
University of Hawaii, 2560 Campus Road, George Hall 322, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
Phone: 956-6354

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to examine the way beliefs of yourself, your partner, and your relationship are communicated during big fights. Your participation is greatly appreciated because findings from this research will increase our understanding of how certain beliefs are communicated in dating relationships.

Procedure
You are 1 of approximately 80 participants (40 couples) in this project. As a participant, you will complete a questionnaire about yourself, your partner, and your relationship. This questionnaire should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. The participating student will be offered extra credit or research credit for their participation in this research. No physical or mental risks are involved in this research project. Participation is strictly voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participating at any time without upsetting the researchers and the participating student’s name will still appear on the extra credit or research participation list for this research. If you do not meet the requirements for participation in this study or choose not to participate, please see your instructor about other extra credit or research participation opportunities. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact Ann Krawciw at 956-6354.

Confidentiality
All information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. The only way for anyone to know your responses is for you to tell them. All data collected will be coded so that the data will not contain any identifying information that could connect the data to you. The results of the research project may be published but only the combined data from all participants will be made public. The UH Committee on Human Studies has the authority to review research records.

Consent
I certify that I have read and understood the nature and requirements of this research project, that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning project procedures and other matters, and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in this project or activity at any time without prejudice.

I herewith give my consent to participate in this project with the understanding that I may ask questions at any time and that such consent does not waive any of my legal rights, nor does it release the principal investigator or the institution or any employee or agent thereof from liability for negligence. I also understand that this consent form will be filed in an area designated by the Department of Speech, with access restricted to the principal investigator or authorized representatives of the department.

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________
Participant’s Printed Name ________________________

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this research project contact: Committee on Human Studies, University of Hawaii, 2540 Maile Way, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822. Phone: (808) 956-5007.

c: Signed copy to subject