Verbal negotiation of affection in romantic relationships

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Verbal negotiation of affection in romantic relationships

Chairperson: Alan Sillars

This study examined how expressions of affection are verbally negotiated within the context of romantic relationships. Affection has long been recognized as a fundamental human need with broad significance for relationships. Moreover, affection research defines a wide variety of behaviors as communicative of affection. Given this breadth in conceptions of affection, this research assumes that both the concept and expression of affection are highly variable from person to person. Due to this variance, affection exchange requires adapting to the partner. Additionally, understanding of what counts as affection for one partner is challenging due to this breadth.

This study examined participant identified expressions of affection for congruency between partners, number of affectionate behaviors reported, and type of affection behavior(s) identified. Four hypotheses and four research questions served as the basis for this study. The hypotheses examined the relationships between verbal communication about affectionate expressions, modification of affectionate expressions, understanding of partner preferences for affectionate expressions, and relationship satisfaction. This study’s research questions inquired about degree of understanding between romantic partners, and the relationships of verbal communication, understanding, and modification levels to intimacy, passion, and commitment.

The results of this study indicate a high level of variance between partner’s accounts of recent affection expressions. Furthermore, these accounts contain multiple affection behaviors per episode as well as multiple types of affection behaviors. Moderate correlations were found between verbal communication and relationship satisfaction, verbal communication and modification, and verbal communication and intimacy, passion, and commitment. Understanding levels between dyads were moderate. Sex differences were also noted regarding preferences for affectionate expressions as well as among these correlations.
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CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Rationale

Affectionate communication is a fundamental human need; it is an essential component to human health, well-being, and basic human development. Furthermore, the exchange of affection is necessary for the maintenance of intimate relationships, because of this, these relationships often serve as primary sources of affection exchange. Despite the importance of affection to both interpersonal relationships and basic human development, relatively little emphasis has been placed upon its study, especially within the domain of communication (Pendell, 2002).

This research examines affection in intimate relationships. More specifically, the connections between understanding of partner preferences for affection, affectionate behavior modification, and relationship quality are examined. Even though the connection between intersubjective understanding and relationship quality is intuitive, past research has produced mixed results regarding this relationship (e.g. Ickes & Simpson, 1997; Allen & Thompson, 1984). This study evaluates understanding through more traditional assessments (i.e. comparison of direct perspective and metaperspectives on a predetermined list of behaviors) as well as through less traditional means (by comparing dyad members direct and metaperspectives on spontaneously identified acts of affection). Dyads’ spontaneously identified acts of affection were also compared with an existing taxonomy of affection behaviors and assessed for the number of affection behaviors reported. Furthermore, this study investigates these connections by measuring relational quality through the lens of overall relational satisfaction as well as through a measure of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Finally, this study examines the connection between affection expression modification and relational quality. These
varied measurements of affection expressions, understanding, and relational quality should provide a clearer, more precise picture of each of their various roles in intimate relationships.

This research is grounded in a number of assertions regarding the nature of affection in human relationships. Affection has long been recognized as a fundamental human need with broad significance for relationships. Scholars who study affection delineate multiple components and definitions of affection. Affection research also defines a wide variety of behaviors and expressions as communicative of affection (see below). Given this breadth in conceptions of affection, this research assumes that both the concept and expression of affection are highly variable from person to person. Due to this variance, affection exchange requires adapting to the partner. Additionally, understanding of what counts as affection for the partner is necessary for satisfying affection exchange. A review of literature supporting this argument follows.

Review of Literature

Affection is a human need

Affection is a fundamental human need with broad significance for relationships. According to Knapp and Vangelisti (1996), the concept of affection is related to Maslow's belongingness and love need. Rotter, Chance, & Phares (1972), referred to the components of "love and affection" as a primary human need. Additionally, a lack of affection may lead to dysfunctional relationships and poor human development. The necessity of affection to human development is not contested.

In addition to being a necessary ingredient for human development, affection has been found to produce a number of physical, mental, and psychological benefits (Floyd &
Morman, 1997, 1998; Schwartz & Russek, 1998). For example, affection has been found to impact child well-being (Castiglia, 1999), adult health (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998; Rubin & Martin, 1998), mental well-being (Oliver, Raferty, Reeb, & Delaney, 1993), parenting (Floyd & Morman, 1998; Parrott & Bengston, 1999; Rubin & Martin, 1998), academic performance (Steward & Lupfer, 1987), and elder happiness (Mathias-Riegel, 1999). Therefore, affection is essential to relationships and a key component to our emotional, mental, and physical health (Pendell, 2002).

In addition to its developmental benefits, affection has been found to mitigate a variety of negative human experiences. For example, affection has been found to alleviate loneliness (Downs & Javidi, 1990) as well as depression (Oliver et al., 1993; Vega, Canas, Bayon, Franco, Salvado, Graell, et al., 1996). Affection has long been considered one of the most vital of human needs (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972), and both the expression and receipt of affection hold broad significance for relationships.

**Affection Exchange Theory.** Affection Exchange Theory (AET; Floyd, 2001a, b, 2002; Floyd & Morman, 2001, 2003) takes an evolutionary perspective on expressions of affection in romantic relationships. AET posits that affection is a resource that (when given or received) enhances an organism’s chances of survival and procreation. AET rests on three postulates.

Postulate one posits that affectionate communication increases human survival as it helps establish, develop, and maintain partnerships. Additionally, it suggests that a partnership benefits each pair member as it makes accessible resources such as love. Postulate two states that affectionate communication has short-term reproductive benefits as it signals to potential partners that one would be a fit parent. Postulate three takes a
long-term approach; it suggests that long-term fertility (e.g. beyond first generation) benefits from communicating affection to the first generation, as the benefits associated with affection make the first generation better mates and increase the likelihood that they will reproduce and pass their genes on. In sum, AET posits that affection is a resource that produces survival and procreational benefits to organisms that both give and receive it.

*Expressions of affection are highly variable*

Affection occurs predominantly, although not exclusively, in closer, more intimate relationships (Andersen, 1999). The courtship, dating, and marriage processes serve as primary sources of affection. Thus, the expression of affection plays an especially significant role within the realm of romantic relationships.

Despite its importance in intimate relationships, the exchange of affection can be difficult as expressions of affection are highly variable. Research suggests that a wide range of behaviors can be construed as affection. These behaviors can be divided into three categories: non-verbal, verbal, and combinations of both non-verbal and verbal expressions of affection (Pendell, 2002).

Non-verbal expressions of affection are perhaps the first that come to mind when considering affectionate expressions. Affectionate touching is the most frequently cited affectionate behavior (Pendell, 2002) and has been labeled as tie signs in other research (Afifi & Johnson, 1999). In addition to touching (Prager, 1999; Salt, 1991), other non-verbal signs of affection include kissing (Afifi & Johnson, 1999; Twardosz, Botkin, Cunningham, Weddle, Sollie, & Shreve 1987, Landau, 1989), holding hands (Afifi & Johnson, 1999; Twardosz et al., 1987), hugging (Landau, 1989; Noller & Fitzpatrick,
1993), snuggling (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983), physical closeness (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), and caresses or rubs (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983; Twardosz et al., 1987). Non-verbal expressions of affection are not limited to physical contact; a variety of non-verbal behaviors that do not involve direct contact are also deemed affectionate. Some of these behaviors are smiling (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983; Twardosz et al., 1987), head nodding (Palmer & Simmons, 1995), forward lean (Palmer & Simmons, 1995), eye contact (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), extended, focused eye-contact (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983), and positive facial expressions (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

In addition to physical behaviors, affection can be communicated verbally through a variety of expressions. Research has shown that affection is verbally communicated through self-disclosure (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), compliments (Twardosz et al., 1987; Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983), direct expressions of affection (Twardosz et al., 1987; Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), and teasing or banter (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Other factors play into verbal expressions of affection including laughing (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983), and both increased rates of talk and moderate amounts of talk (Palmer & Simmons, 1995).

Finally, combinations of non-verbal and verbal behaviors often communicate affection. Examples of these behaviors include sex (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), cooking for someone or eating their cooking (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996), sharing activities (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), providing encouragement (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), doing favors for the partner (Twardosz & Nordquist, 1983), and generally caring for the
partner (Twardosz et al. 1987). Clearly, a variety of behaviors serve to communicate affection.

As indicated in the above research, there are numerous ways affection can be expressed in romantic relationships; moreover, the term affection carries with it various connotations. Scholars argue that affection entails, is related to, or is synonymous with warmth (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996), liking (Sprecher, 1987), intimacy (Andersen, 1999), and caring (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988). Additional literature suggests that the term affection implies, is related to, or is expressed as need (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998), intimacy (Andersen, 1999), feeling (Schultz, 1992), rituals (Bruess & Pearson, 1997), and social support (Burleson, 1994b). In sum, it is clear that there are multiple ways that affection can be expressed in relationships, as well as numerous components to affection.

Given the varying behaviors that communicate affection as well as the multiple components that comprise affection, it is not surprising that there is some variation in the way affection is defined. Floyd and Morman (1998) comment that, while some research has examined affection within human relationships, there is little consistency in the way it is studied or defined. Affection has been defined by Rubin and Martin (1998) as the need to either attain or maintain support and connection to another. Floyd and Morman (1998) define affection as an internal psychological state of positive and frequently intimate regard. Schultz (1958) defines affection as establishing and maintaining satisfactory relations with others. Finally, Pendell (2002) defines affection as “the need for positive regard from another and the feeling of positive regard for another, communicated through affectionate behaviors, found in relationships ranging from acquaintance to intimate” (p. 79).
While multiple definitions of affection exist, there are some unifying concepts present in the various definitions. One theme present in many definitions of affection is that affection involves a feeling of positive regard. A second theme present in multiple definitions of affection is that affection can be communicated to others through affectionate behaviors. Twardosz and Nordquist (1983) argue that if a feeling of affection exists, yet no affectionate behaviors are used, then communication of affection has not occurred. This research adopts Pendell’s (2002) definition of affection as well as reflects Twardosz and Nordquists’ (1983) focus on the necessity of behavior to communicate affection.

*Affection exchange and adaptation*

As noted above, a variety of behaviors and combinations of behaviors communicate affection between romantic partners; within relationships, the communication of affection can be problematic, as individuals vary in their preferences, needs, and desires for affection. Because each person is influenced differently by individual elements, they each have differing needs and feelings pertaining to affection and they use different behaviors to communicate affection (Pendell, 2002). This multitude of expressions of affection increases the likelihood of affection misinterpretation.

Due to the potential for misunderstanding, some congruency, or at least understanding of differences, must be present in the relationship regarding affection expression. Relational partners must have corresponding rules for the satisfying exchange of affection (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996). Both relational partners must understand what behavior “counts” as affectionate in order for affection to be communicated. If an
affectionate behavior is expressed by one party that is not understood as affectionate by the receiving party, a misunderstanding occurs and affection is not (necessarily) communicated. “Only if differences in affectionate behaviors are identified and a mutually agreeable system of affection exchange negotiated, can individuals accurately interpret their relational partner’s communication of affection” (Pendell, 2002, p. 87).

Pendell (2002) argues for the need for “enmeshment” in romantic relationships regarding expressions of affection. For “enmeshment” to occur, both partners’ behaviors must be viewed as affectionate. Thus, for affectionate communication to be most effectively conveyed, both partners’ must understand that a behavior communicates affection. Notably, the behaviors do not have to be identical, just mutually understood to be affectionate.

In their research examining expressions of affection, Gulledge, Gulledge, and Stahman, (2003) examined seven physical affection (PA) behaviors: backrubs/ massages, caressing/ stroking, cuddling/ holding, holding hands, hugging, kissing on the lips, and kissing on the face. From this research, Gulledge et al. (2003) commented on the necessity of communication about affection behaviors in romantic relationships. Specifically, they suggest that one romantic partner assesses what the other finds most demonstrative of love. They wrote, “we suggest that couples be cognizant of these differences in attitudes regarding PA (in their own relationships), and adjust their behavior accordingly” (Gulledge et al. 2003, pg. 239). This research underscores the necessity for communication about expressions of affection between romantic partners and leads to hypothesis one:
H1: Individuals who verbally communicate about affectionate expression will modify their affectionate expressions according to their partners’ preference.

Understanding in affection exchanges

Understanding is defined as the congruence between an individual’s metaperspective (an estimation of his/her partner’s perspective) and the other person’s direct perspective (his/her actual perspective) (Laing, Phillipsen, & Lee, 1966). In intimate relationships, congruence of a perception is affected by multiple factors (e.g. emotionality, interdependence, and complexity of communication) (Sillars, 1998). Further, Sillars and Scott (1983) note that the tendency for intimate partners to assimilate meaning and overestimate the similarity between their own and their partner’s attitudes is one of best-supported findings in interpersonal perception literature. Other research indicates that intimate partners may be poor judges of each other’s perceptions (Sillars & Scott, 1983; Sillars, 1998). Thus, congruency of perspectives in intimate relationships is a difficult process— one aided by communication.

The importance of interpersonal perception is undisputed in the literature on intimate relationships literature (Sillars & Scott, 1983). Indeed, some scholars have labeled the negotiation of shared perceptual reality as the central construct for organizing intimate relationships (e.g. Berger & Kellner, 1964). Further, research indicates a strong relationship between congruence of perception and relationship adjustment. Thus, congruence of perception is a key component to relationships.

It is evident from affection research that romantic couples must communicate about affection in their relationship in order to mitigate the likelihood of misunderstanding. Research also suggests that communication about affection may not
only minimize the likelihood of misunderstanding but will also allow couples to receive the maximum benefits of affection. Notably, interpersonal perception research indicates that there are other mitigating factors involved in this process as well (e.g. different communicative goals, ambiguity of the perceptual referent) (Sillars, 1998). Even so, communication about affection should help facilitate understanding about the perceptions relational partners hold of affection; this in turn leads to an understanding of expressions of affection in romantic relationships. Research question one examines perceived understanding in romantic relationships:

RQ1: To what extent do individuals show understanding of partner preference for affectionate expressions?

**Affection exchanges and relationship satisfaction**

As indicated above, the expression and receipt of affection yields multiple benefits for relational partners. One such benefit is a high degree of relational satisfaction (Gulledge et al., 2003). Generally, relational satisfaction incorporates an individual’s position in the relationship, the degree to which their needs are met by their partner, and the level of contentment individuals have with their relationships (Hendrick, 1988). Additionally, relationship satisfaction is a benefit of affection because it is associated with positive emotions such as love and commitment. As affection is a well-documented human need (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996; Rotter et al., 1972), it clearly has implications for relational satisfaction. Thus, hypotheses two, three and four are offered:

H2: Understanding of partner’s affectionate expressions is positively associated with the relationship satisfaction of both individuals.
H3: The extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partner’s preference is positively associated with their degree of relational satisfaction.

H4: The extent to which couples verbally communicate about affectionate expressions is associated with their degree of relational satisfaction.

Affection exchanges and intimacy, passion, and commitment

A significant portion of relationship research measures relationship quality based on reports of relational satisfaction (e.g. Dainton, 2000; Punyanunt- Carter, 2004). However, relationship quality is a multi-dimensional concept that extends beyond global reports of overall relational satisfaction. Sternberg (1986, 1987, and 1988) offered a Triangular Theory of Love, this theory posits that every love relationship is characterized by the three components of intimacy, passion, and commitment. This research incorporates these components, in addition to a measure of relational satisfaction, to get a more encompassing estimate of relational quality. Thus, in order to get a broader, multi-dimensional assessment of relational quality and relational benefits, the following research questions are asked:

RQ2: Is the extent to which couples verbally communicate about affectionate expressions associated with their degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment?

RQ3: Is understanding of partner’s affectionate expressions positively associated with degrees of intimacy, passion, and commitment of both individuals?

RQ4: Is the extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partners’ preference positively associated with their own degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment?
Various approaches to studying affectionate communication

Within the studies that have examined affection, there is minimal uniformity in how affectionate communication is operationally defined and studied (Floyd & Morman, 1998). This inconsistency makes cross-study analysis difficult. Floyd and Morman (1998) define three approaches communication scholars have generally used when measuring the communication of affection.

One approach has been to examine affectionate behaviors retrospectively. This approach studies affection without providing a specific definition for the analyzed behaviors. For example, Noller (1978), video-taped parents and children interacting with one another. The participants then identified and recorded the behaviors that they regarded as affectionate. No specific criteria were offered for judging affectionate behavior.

A second approach entails a quantitative analysis of specific affectionate behaviors. Examples of this approach include coding for a predetermined list of nonverbal behaviors such as kissing and hugging (Acker, Acker, & Pearson, 1973). This approach has the advantage of specificity in behaviors analyzed, although the approach can be restrictive in that it limits affectionate communication to a fixed list of behaviors.

A third approach also relies on participants’ reports of affection. Specifically, this approach asks participants to recall both verbal and nonverbal behaviors (e.g. Twardosz et al., 1987). This approach has the advantage of breadth in conceptualizing affection, yet it can be problematic in that it relies on participant recall.

This research adapts a combination of the second and third approaches in its examination of the way couples communicate about affection. Couples were asked to
report various ways they have communicated affection to their partner, as well as various ways their partner has communicated affection to them. Following this report, participants were given a list of specific affection behaviors. Individuals were asked to report both their preferences as well as their partners' preferences for specific affection behaviors. This research addresses the potential limitation of participant recall to this approach by studying current relationships and by incorporating several open-ended questions in the initial stages of the survey to help aid in participant recall.
CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Participants

A total of 130 dyads were recruited from undergraduate courses from a western United States university. Students were offered extra credit for their participation. Participants were primarily students at the university and their romantic partners, although students were given the option to recruit a couple for credit if they were not currently engaged in a relationship. In order to receive credit for survey participation, both the student and a romantic partner had to come to an outside location and complete the survey in separate rooms. Those students who were not currently involved in a relationship (or were in a new relationship- less than one month for the purposes of this study) had the option to recruit a couple to fill out the survey on their behalf. Both members of the couple were required to be present to complete the survey.

Male participants averaged 23.12 years ($SD = 7.96$) and ranged in age from 18 to 66 years of age. Female participants averaged 22.07 years old ($SD = 7.15$) and ranged in age from 18 to 56 years of age. As this survey involved individuals in heterosexual relationships, half the participants were male ($n = 65$) and half were female ($n = 65$). Average length of participant's relationship was a little over two years ($M = 26.62, SD = 55.35$ months). The duration of relationships ranged from 1 month to 300 months (25 years). However, 55% of the participants reported having been in their relationship for less than a year ($n = 71$). Moreover, 76% of the sample reported being in their current relationship for two years or less ($n = 99$). Thus, while participant’s ranged in relationship duration, the majority had been in their relationship less than two years.
Procedure

The survey was designed to gauge communication about expressions of affection in romantic relationships as well as measure individual perceptions of the relationship. To this end, participants were asked to report about multiple aspects of affection in their romantic relationship. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on their assessment of their current romantic relationship.

Upon entering the room where the survey was administered, participants were informed about the nature of the study and given a copy of the survey (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C). Couples were then seated in separate rooms to ensure privacy while filling out their survey. Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the survey. Most participants took approximately 20 minutes. Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked to place their completed survey and signed consent forms in two separate piles. The participants were asked not to identify themselves on the survey; however, they were given the opportunity to print their name on a separate page for the purpose of receiving extra course credit. Participants were then thanked for their participation and given the opportunity to read a short survey debriefing statement. The debriefing statement, like the cover letter, explained how survey results will be used and further clarified the purpose of the survey (see Appendix D for a sample of the debriefing statement). In addition to study information, participants were also provided with contact information for local services (e.g. Counseling and Psychological Services at the University) in case of any experienced discomfort.
Instruments

When designing this study, both open-ended questions as well as previously constructed instruments were determined to be appropriate and were included in the questionnaire. The first section in the survey focuses on general demographic information including participant age, sex, race/ethnicity, and year in school. The second section of the survey asks similar demographic questions about the participants' romantic partner. The third portion of the survey asks participants to report on their affectionate expressions, their communication about expressions of affection, and the degree to which they modify their behavior based on partner preference. In this section, participants also answered two open-ended questions designed to check the veracity of participant accounts regarding their relationship. In order to elicit recent examples of affection expressions (both given and received), participants also responded to two open-ended questions. These questions were 1) “What has your partner said or done (if anything) that lets you know they care about you? Describe the most recent situation in which this occurred. Please be as specific as possible.” The second question was, 2) “What have you said or done (if anything) to let your partner know you care about them? Describe the most recent situation in which this occurred. Please be as specific as possible.” Each of the recalled responses was independently categorized by two coders for congruency between dyads, unitized for separate expressions of affection reported, and coded for the type of affection reported. These open-ended responses were placed into specific categories and four broad categories to allow for comparison to the ACI items. Finally, participants filled out a modified version of the Affectionate Communication Index (ACI) for both themselves and their partner. The fourth portion of the survey gauges
relationship satisfaction and the benefits of affectionate expressions by having participants using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and a modified version of the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (STLS).

To test for amount of congruency between couples’ spontaneously identified acts of affection, participants’ self-reports of their most recent expression of affection were coupled with their partner’s report of most recent received affection and vise versa. This resulted in a total of 255 paired responses; however, three pairs were eliminated due to lack of response (n= 252). As the coding process began, the first coder read over the entire sample of conversations and constructed preliminary congruency categories for the affectionate expressions reported. Then, each pair of responses was assigned a category. As this process proceeded, categories were added, altered, and refined. Each pair of responses was then placed into a final category (Appendix D). Next, the second coder also assigned the data to these pre-established categories. Kappa inter-rater reliability for the coding was .78.

In addition to amount of congruency, the open-ended responses were also unitized for separate affection behaviors reported within each couple’s paired responses. As a reliability check, two coders examined sample data and identified the number and individual expressions of affection. Coders reported very close agreement on 15% (n= 38) of the responses, the two responses that coders initially did not agree on were discussed and the participants reached an agreement on them as well. Thus, one coder conducted the remaining unitizing of affectionate expressions for the paired responses.

Following unitizing, the open-ended responses were coded for the types of affection reported. In order to produce a typology of reported expressions of affection,
preliminary categories for affectionate expressions were constructed, by the author from inspection of the responses. Then, each individual expression of affection was assigned a category. As this process proceeded, categories were dropped, added, altered, and refined. Each pair of responses was then placed into a final category. Once the author had established categories and coded the data, a second coder independently placed the data in the categories (Appendix F). Cohen's kappa reliability for type of affection behavior coding was .82.

The ACI (Floyd & Morman, 1998)

To measure preferences for affection, participants filled out a modified version of the Affectionate Communication Index (Floyd & Morman, 1998). Participants filled out this measure twice, one time for their preferences for affectionate expressions and one time for their prediction of their partner's preferences. The ACI is a 19-item Likert-type scale that gauges affectionate communication in relationships. The original scale ranges from ("partner always engages in this affectionate behavior") to 7 ("partner never engages in this type of affectionate behavior"). For the current project these anchors were changed to 1 equals "I do not prefer this affectionate behavior" and 7 equals "I prefer this type of affectionate behavior." When filling the scale out for their partners' preference, anchors were adjusted so that 1 equals "my partner does not prefer this type of affectionate behavior" and 7 equals "my partner prefers this type of affectionate behavior."

These reports were used to calculate understanding. Understanding was derived from the ACI items based on within dyad correlations between direct perspectives and meta-perspectives. Specifically, on a couple-by-couple basis, the nineteen items
indicating the participant’s meta-perspective (the participant’s prediction of their partner’s preference for each affectionate expression) was correlated with the nineteen items reflecting the partner’s direct perspective. Chronbach’s alpha for male self-assessment was .88; reliability of males’ assessment of partner preference was .87. Chronbach’s alpha for female self-assessment was .80; reliability of females’ assessment of partner preference was .87.

In addition to degree of understanding, participant responses to the ACI items were also used to gauge similarity of preferences, and perception of similarity within dyads. Similarity was derived from the ACI items based on within dyad correlations between direct perspectives and direct perspectives. Specifically, on a couple-by-couple basis, the nineteen items indicating the participant’s direct perspective were correlated with the nineteen items reflecting his/her partner’s direct perspective. A similar procedure was conducted to compute perceived agreement. Specifically, on an individual basis, participant’s self-reports were correlated with their prediction of their partners’ preference, yielding each participant’s perceived similarity for the nineteen different items. Lastly, average male self-reports and average female self-reports of preferences for the nineteen different expressions of affection of affection listed by the ACI were compared to compute average sex differences between partners.

The RAS (Hendrick, 1988)

To determine relational satisfaction, participants filled out The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). The RAS is a seven-item generic gauge of relationship satisfaction. The scale was developed to measure a single construct--
individual’s perception and feelings about their existing relationship (Vaughn, Matyastik, & Margeret, 1999).

The RAS was originally developed as a five-item measure to relationship satisfaction within a marriage; however, it has been adapted to measure many different types of relationships, including “intimate relationships like dating, cohabitating, and engaged couples” (Hendrick, 1988, p. 4). Chronbach’s alpha was .74, for males and .73 for females, with reliability of .80 for dyads.

*The STLS (Sternberg, 1988)*

To further measure relational quality, participants filled out a modified version of the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1988). Data from this measure was used to test for an association between the giving and receipt of affection and the relational benefits of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

The original STLS is a three-scale, thirty-six item measurement of intimacy, passion, and commitment in a love relationship. Initial tests of the overall scale revealed a strong correlation with a satisfaction measure ($r$'s > .75); however, tests also indicated strong item overlap (Sternberg, 1988; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989). Due to the correlation with satisfaction, participants were asked to fill out a modified version of the scale.

In an effort to address the problem of item overlap in the original STLS, Acker and Davis (1992) constructed a revised, shorter version of the STLS. Items were included only when they were (1) highly loaded on the intended scale in the original Sternberg (1988) scale, (2) highly loaded on the Acker and Davis (1992) intended scale, and (3) when both loadings had a magnitude greater than or equal to .50 (Acker & Davis, 1992).
The application of these criteria produced a five-item intimacy scale, a seven-item commitment scale, and a seven-item passion scale. Chronbach’s alphas for intimacy, passion, and commitment scales were .78, .85, and .88 for males, .78, .83, and .89 for females, and .83, .86, and .90 for dyads.

In addition to the above previously constructed measures, participants were also asked to report on their amount of verbal communication about affection expressions with their partner, provide recent examples of expressions of affection (both given and received), and report the degree to which they modify their expressions of affection in their relationship based upon their partners’ preference. To gauge amount of verbal communication about affectionate expressions, participants responded to five Likert-type items. The first two were on a five point scale, where 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree. These items were “My partner and I talk with each other about how we express affection to one another” and “If I dislike how my partner expresses affection to me, I will let him/her know.” The next two questions were also on a five point scale, where 1 equals never and 5 equals very frequently. The first question was, “How frequently do you and your partner communicate about the ways you express caring to each other?” The second question was, “My partner and I discuss our relationship.” The final question, “I tell my partner if I am feeling uncared for,” was also answered on a five-point scale, anchored with 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree. Chronbach’s alpha for this measure of verbal communication about affectionate expressions was .76 for male participants and .78 for female participants. Reliability of averaged scores for the dyads was .78.
Modification measure

To gauge the degree to which dyads modify their expressions of affection to their partners’ preference, each participant responded to two Likert-type items on a five point scale where 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree. These items included: 1) “My partner has changed the way he/she expresses caring to me based upon my preference” and 2) “I changed the way I express caring to my partner based on his/her preference.” Chronbach’s alpha for this measure was .77 for both males and females.

Veracity check

Once data collection was complete, participant surveys were paired up in order to check relationship authenticity. Specifically, answers on two survey questions were compared to ensure that they matched. These questions included: 1) “Where were you and your partner when you had your first kiss?” and 2) “Where did you and your partner go on your first date?” Any survey sets with inconsistent answers were removed from the data set. Thus, while 160 couples responded to the survey, the data from 30 couples was excluded as suspect, leaving a final sample set of 130 couples.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

In order to more accurately gauge participant’s conceptualization of affection in their relationship, the questionnaire included two open-ended questions. Answers were coded for degree of congruence, for number of behaviors reported, and types of behavior. Additionally, open-ended responses were compared to an existing typology and analyzed for sex differences.

**Congruency**

Results from the congruency coding revealed a trend toward dissimilarity between couples regarding each dyad member’s identified expressions of affection. Specifically, 54.9% (n=140) of couples responses reflected complete variation (CV) -- accounts of the most recent expression of affection that referenced different events, behaviors, and/or expressions of affection. An additional 11.3% (n=29) of couples reported partial variation (PV) -- accounts of the most recent expression of affection that referenced a varying or undetermined event, relatively similar behaviors and/or expressions of affection. Finally, 17.6% (n=45) reported partial congruency (PC) -- accounts of the most recent expression of affection that referenced the same event, deviation in behavior and/or expression of affection or number of reported expressions and 14.9% (n=38) reported complete congruency (CC) -- accounts of the most recent expression of affection that referenced the same event, behavior, and/or expression of affection.

**Number of reported affection behaviors**

In addition to amount of congruency, the open-ended responses were also examined for the number of behaviors reported within each couple’s paired responses. Participants varied significantly in the number of affectionate expressions they reported
when both expressing and receiving affection. Specifically, the number of reported expressions of affection ranged from two (i.e. In an argument I felt I was very responsive and supportive to her situation. partner: He told me that he loved me during a very difficult time in my life.) to fourteen (i.e. Being there to work, painting her house, spending time outdoors, walking, talking, showing her I care about our relationship by prioritizing it over going out and getting obliterated, praising her to figure out what she likes physically, long caresses and heartfelt kisses. partner: Cuddled this afternoon on a beanbag. He hugged me several times throughout the day. He checked in to say hi. Called me “sweetheart” when I got out of bed this morning, also called me “silly” affectionately. We discuss the future openly). The total number of reported expressions of affection was 1421 for the 252 dyads. The average number of expressions of affection for self and partner combined was 4.80 (SD= 2.24). As these statistics indicate, participants varied in their number of reported acts of communication and tended to report multiple acts of affection in their answers.

In their description of recent affection exchanges, females tended to report more behaviors than males. Female descriptions of their partner’s most recent expression of affection included an average of 3.37 (SD = 1.77), this was followed by female’s self-reports (M = 2.73, SD =1.72). Male’s descriptions of partner’s most recent expression of affection was next (M =2.51, SD = 1.32), followed by male’s self reports (M = 2.33, SD = 1.36).

*Types of affection behaviors*

Individual expressions of affection were placed in one of fourteen different categories. The categories include: 1) verbal declarations of love, 2) kissing, 3) physical
touch, 4) verbal expressions of caring, 5) acts of service, 6) reflection on / projection of
relationship, 7) compliments, 8) time, 9) cooking, 10) humor, 11) sacrifice, 12) symbolic
expressions of affection, 13) written expressions of affection, and 14) other. The most
common means of expressing affection reported in the open-ended responses were
physical touch, verbal expressions of affection, kissing, and acts of service. The least
common was reflection and/or projection of the relationship. A brief explanation of each
category follows.

Verbal declarations of love were primarily discussed in overt terms such as “I
have told my partner that I love her and that I’ll be there for her whenever she needs me.”
or “I told her I missed her and that I loved her.” Comments expressing liking or more
implicit declarations of love were also included in this category. Originally, expressions
of caring were included in this category; however, due to their prevalence in the data,
they emerged as a separate category. In summary, 16.49% of the 1125 different
expressions of affection reported by participants were overt, verbal declarations of love
or liking.

The category of kissing reflected roughly 11.91% of reported expressions of
affection. Expressions that included any form of kissing were included in this category,
such as “I kiss him on the lips and touch his hands often,” “On the car ride over here I
thanked him for being there last night and kissed him on the cheek,” or “I hugged him
and kissed him on the mouth and neck.” Due to the frequent references to kissing in the
data, it was separated from other forms of physical touch.

Physical touch was the most frequent means of expressing affection and
encompassed a wide variety of behaviors. Specifically, physical touch involved hugs,
holding hands, cuddling, sitting on partner’s lap, and intimate acts (to name a few).

Examples of reports of physical touch as a means of expressing affection include: “We spent a lot of time cuddling, hugging, and holding hands with each other” and “He is very touchy and we are constantly holding hands.” The category of physical touch accounted for 20.57% of expressions of affection amongst couples involved in this survey.

As mentioned above, due to extensive reference throughout the data, verbal expressions of caring was distinguished from overt declarations of love. Specifically, 11.10% of expressions of affection involved verbal expressions of caring. While most often these expressions of caring were linked to health or well-being concerns, they were also reflected in such behaviors as “checking-in” with the partner throughout the day, verbal encouragement, and inquiry about partner’s day or a significant event.

Acts of service represent the third most common form of expressing affection. Participants reported the use of acts of service in 12.88% of expressions of affection between partners. The most common acts of service were favors (i.e. “I agreed to stop what I was doing to take this survey”); more specifically, help with schoolwork (i.e. “simple things like helping with homework or favors”), and acts based on learned history (i.e. “came home and brought her a cheeseburger and parfait because I knew she was hungry and that’s what she likes to eat”).

Reflection on, or projection of, the relationship represented a small, yet significant portion of identified expressions of affection. Most often (although not exclusively) participants reported these reflections in conjunction with a physical expression. Responses that reflect this category include: “We spent the night together intimately and talked about our relationship and the last 2 and a half years” and “We were discussing our
relationship and how we first met and I told her how glad I was that I did meet her . . .”

Additionally, when participants reported reflecting about previous time in their relationship it often included favorable comparisons to previous relationships they had been involved in. When participants reported conjecturing about their future, it often involved desire for marriage or children with their partner. As one participant stated, “Yesterday I told him that he is going to be such a wonderful husband and daddy someday and that I can’t wait to spend the rest of our lives together.” A total of 1.87% of affectionate expressions fell into this category.

Compliments were used to express affection in about 5.55% of the responses. Not surprisingly, the majority of compliments concerned physical appearance, “He tells me how beautiful I am every single day.” Even so, many also included positive references to their partners’ work or appreciating their partner as a friend. Examples of this include, “I told him I was proud of him for how hard he has worked to get through school and how much I loved him for working so hard” and “I told my fiancée one night that he was my best friend I would be lost without him . . .”

The mere act of spending time with one’s partner constituted roughly 5.55% of reported expressions of affection. This was primarily mentioned in two ways, one in terms of a date (“I also asked him on a date after we take the survey” and “Took her out to dinner and paid.”) and second, as simply spending down time with one’s partner (“I guess I am around my girlfriend most of my free time” and “We were just relaxing on my bed and talking while listening to music”).

Cooking for one’s partner was the most recent means of expressing affection for 2.28% of recalled expressions of affection. Responses such as, “So I took care of her and
did cooking and stuff,” “cooked his lunch and brought him coffee” and “I cooked him dinner for the two of us . . .” all evidence this expression of affection.

Humor was used to express affection in about 2.12% of identified expressions of affection. Teasing, jokes, sarcasm, and nicknames were all included in this category. As one participant described, “When we reunited this morning I was met with a kiss, sarcasm, and teasing.” Occasionally, humor was seen as a way of connecting with their partner, and thus a means of expressing affection, “I also like to tease her and “push her buttons.” No one else does this to her so that is my way of connecting with her because only I do it to her.”

Although originally categorized as an act of service, sacrifice eventually emerged as its own category. An expression was coded as sacrifice when it was referenced unfavorably to another option, yet conducted nevertheless. For example, “after, we just sat and relaxed, watching movies even though he wanted to go out with his friends.” And “I knew she was feeling down so I told my friends I was going to catch up with them another time.” Roughly 2.28% of expressions of affection reflected a form of sacrifice.

Symbolic expressions of affection were also evidenced in 2.28% of descriptions of affectionate communication. These were primarily discussed in conjunction with a celebratory event (i.e. “She made me a bracelet for my birthday, it is pretty awesome”). However, they were also reported merely as a means of expressing affection in a more ordinary context, “Today he brought me flowers that he picked out for me.”

A total of 2.12% of expressions of affection were written. As the following examples illustrate, the vast majority of these written expressions were in the form of text messages. “He constantly text messages and e-mail sincerely,” “He makes a point to call
me every night or text me to say he loves me and goodnight,” “Well when I got up and went lifting this morning she gave me a kiss then sent me a text saying I love you when I was lifting (I got it afterwards),” and “I sent him a text while I was trying on clothes at the mall that said I love you while he was outside the dressing room.” While participants did report other methods of written expressions of affection, text messages were the primary means of expressing affection in written form.

The final category, “other,” comprised 4.00% of the survey responses. Obviously, these involved answers that did not appear to “fit” any specific category. Examples of these responses include staring at one’s partner, dreaming of one’s partner, or expressing eagerness to see one’s partner.

Comparison to the ACI

In order to compare the qualitative descriptions of recent affectionate communication to the nineteen expressions of affection listed in the ACI (Floyd & Mormon, 1998), both were placed into four broad categories. These categories included verbal, physical, contextual, and other expressions of affection. Qualitative and ACI responses were compared in order to check participants open-ended responses to the affectionate communication measure used in this study, as well as provide a more complete picture of how this study’s participants conceptualize affection.

As reported above, participants tended to report multiple expressions of affection. When this was the case during coding, the most recent expression of affection was identified. When more than one behavior was reported and the most recent was unclear, the first behavior was selected. This coding procedure was carried out for each of the open-ended responses (4 per dyad).
Verbal expressions of affection included any expressions of love or like that were verbally stated, 26% (n=137) of the behaviors fell in this category. Physical expressions of affection included any physical gestures used to convey affection, these constituted 37% (n=194) of the identified expressions of affection. A response was coded as a contextual expression of affection when it was read as affectionate only when the circumstances around it were considered, 18% (n=95) of the expressions of affection fell into this category. The final category, other, contained all expressions participants identified as affectionate yet did not fit in the prior three categories, this was true for 18% (n=93) of the behaviors.

The ACI (Floyd & Morman, 1998) was used to test individual understanding of partner preferences for nineteen different expressions of affection as well as to elicit individual preferences for various expressions of affection. When compared with individuals’ spontaneously identified expressions of affection, the ACI mirrored the most common types of affection expression (physical and verbal). However, many of the expressions for the open-ended responses were contextual (see Appendix G for percentages); this expression is not included in accounts of affection behavior (e.g. ACI).

**Sex differences for ACI items**

Self-reports from the ACI items were also utilized to compute sex differences regarding preferences for affectionate expressions. Specifically, male self-reports and female self-reports on preferences for the nineteen different expressions of affection listed by the ACI were used to compute average sex differences. The results of the paired sample t-tests indicated a significant difference between sexes for thirteen of the nineteen
different expressions of affection (Appendix H). More specifically, females expressed
greater preferences on all of the items that differed.

Hypothesis One predicted that individuals who verbally communicate about
affectionate expressions would modify their affectionate expressions according to their
partners’ preference. To test this hypothesis, a Pearson correlation was calculated twice.
First, the relationship between verbal communication and modification was calculated for
males; results from this test indicated a moderate correlation ($r = .33, p < .01$, one-tailed).
The coefficient of determination was ($r^2 = .10$). Second, the relationship between verbal
communication and modification for females was tested; results from this test also
indicated a significant correlation ($r = .25, p < .01$, one-tailed). The coefficient of
determination for females was ($r^2 = .06$). Thus, there were small to moderate statistically
significant correlations for both males and females in support of Hypothesis One.

Research Question One asked to what extent individuals show understanding of
partner preference for affectionate expressions. Understanding scores for males ranged
from -.16 to .86 ($M = .45, SD = .27$). Understanding scores for females ranged from -.31 to
.88 ($M = .41, SD = .28$). As these scores were based on correlations, the average scores
suggest a moderate association between direct and meta-perspectives; however, the range
in scores indicates considerable variation in the amount of understanding couples have
about their affectionate expressions.

In addition to understanding, similarity and perceived similarity scores were also
calculated. Similarity scores ranged from -.32 to .90 ($M = .40, SD = .28$). Perceived
similarity scores for females ranged from -.53 to 1.0 ($M = .62, SD = .27$). Perceived
similarity scores for males ranged from -.21 to 1.0 ($M = .64, SD = .27$). Thus, both males
and females tended to overestimate their similarity to their partner with some perceiving complete similarity with their partner.

Hypothesis Two states that understanding of a partner’s affectionate expressions is positively associated with the relationship satisfaction of both individuals. To test this hypothesis, understanding scores for both males and females were correlated with both partners’ relational satisfaction scores. Results indicated no significant correlations between understanding and satisfaction for either males or females. Hypothesis Two was not supported.

Hypothesis Three predicted that the extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partner’s preference is positively associated with their degree of relational satisfaction. To test the relationship between modification and relational satisfaction, a Pearson correlation was calculated twice, once correlating male modification with male relational satisfaction and a second time correlating female modification with female relational satisfaction. Neither correlation was found to be statistically significant ($r=.06$, n.s., one-tailed, for males and $r=.13$, n.s., one-tailed, for females); therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

To test Hypothesis Four, a Pearson correlation was calculated between couples’ level of verbal communication about affectionate expressions and couples’ relationship satisfaction levels. The results show a low, but significant correlation between verbal communication and satisfaction ($r=.24$, $p<.05$, one-tailed). The coefficient of determination for this correlation was ($r^2=.05$). This hypothesis was supported with a low, yet statistically significant correlation.
Research Question Two asks if the extent to which couples verbally communicate about affectionate expressions is associated with their degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy, passion, and commitment were assessed as one measure due to the degree of correlation between each sub-scale. Results indicated a moderate correlation ($r = .54$, $p < .01$, two-tailed) between couples verbal communication about affectionate expressions, and ratings of intimacy, passion, and commitment. This coefficient of determination for this correlation was ($r^2 = .29$).

Research Question Three asks if understanding of the partner's affectionate expressions is positively associated with the intimacy, passion, and commitment of both individuals. The results indicated that male understanding of female preferences of expressions of affection did not significantly correlate with either male reported levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment ($r = .09$, n.s., two-tailed) or female reported levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment ($r = .04$, n.s., two-tailed). Interestingly, there was a significant, negative correlation ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$, two-tailed) between female understanding of male preferences of affectionate expressions and male reports of intimacy, passion, and commitment. There were no statistically significant correlations between female understanding of male preferences of affectionate expressions and female reported levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Research Question Four asks if the extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partners' preference is positively associated with individuals' own degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Results for males indicated a slight, almost negligible relationship ($r = .19$, $p < .05$, two-tailed) between male modification of their affectionate expressions and their own ratings of intimacy, passion.
and commitment. No significant correlations were found between modification and 
ratings of intimacy, passion, and commitment for females. These results indicate 
modification of affectionate expressions according to partner preferences is slightly 
related to intimacy, passion, and commitment levels for males, with no significant 
relationship found for females.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Affectionate communication in interpersonal relationships remains an important area of study for interpersonal scholars. While results from this study were at times counterintuitive, they do indicate several important findings about the nature of affection as well as the relationship between affection, understanding, modification, and relationship satisfaction. A brief summary of the study results follows.

Participant qualitative accounts of recently communicated expressions of affection show that relationship partners’ vary in the expressions they interpret as affectionate. Moreover, not only are the actual affection behaviors highly variable, but they are often discussed in terms of multiple individual behaviors. Female participants tended to report a higher number of affectionate behaviors (both given and received) than male participants. Both male and female participants also tended to discuss affection in terms of a sequence as opposed to a single specific behavior. When the qualitative responses were compared to the ACI items, the comparison indicated that context tends to play a role in participants interpretation of a behavior as affectionate. Notably, there were no items to measure contextually dependent expressions of affection on the ACI measure used in this study. Lastly, female and male participants also varied in their preferences for various expressions of affection; females expressed greater preferences on all of the thirteen items that differed.

Results for verbal communication about affectionate expressions indicated a low to moderate correlation to relational satisfaction for couples as well as a low to moderate correlation to modification of affectionate expression according to partner’s preference.
for both male and female participants. Furthermore, a moderate correlation was found between verbal communication and intimacy, passion, and commitment for couples.

Study results regarding understanding were less intuitive. While both male and female participants reported moderate levels of understanding of their partner’s preferences for affectionate expressions, understanding did not correlate with couples’ relationship satisfaction scores. Furthermore, male understanding did not correlate with either male or female reported levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Female understanding scores negatively correlated with male intimacy, passion, and commitment, while failing to significantly correlate with females’ own intimacy, passion, and commitment ratings.

Study results for the modification of expression of affection according to partner preference do not support the benefits of this behavior. Specifically, no significant correlation was found between the extent to which individuals report modifying their expressions of affection to their partner’s preference and their own ratings of relational satisfaction. Furthermore, modification was not strongly related to the relational elements of intimacy, passion, and commitment for either male or female participants.

Self-identified expressions of affection

In order understand participant’s conceptualization of affection in their relationship, participants responded to two open-ended questions which asked them to report on the last time they expressed affection to their partner, as well as the last time they felt their partner expressed affection to them. Each participant’s response were then paired with his or her partner’s responses and results were compared for the degree of congruency between their answers, the number of individual expressions of affection
reported within each answer, and they type of affectionate behavior identified. The self-identified means of expressing affection were then compared to an existing measure of affectionate communication.

A little over half the participants’ responses reflected complete variation in the affection expressions they reported expressing most recently, versus the expressions their partners reported receiving (as well as the reverse). Moreover, an additional eleven percent reported partial variation with their partners’ reports (e.g. a different event yet similar behavior). The remaining responses combine to reflect either a partial congruency (same event, different behaviors) or complete congruency (different events, different behaviors) for about a third of the paired responses.

These results support a point made by Pendell (2002); specifically, she argues the need for “enmeshment” in romantic relationships regarding expressions of affection. For “enmeshment” to occur, both partners’ behaviors must be viewed as affectionate. Notably, the behaviors do not have to be identical, just mutually understood to be affectionate. The roughly two-thirds of couples who reported complete variation or partial variation in their recollections of the last time they expressed or received affection may reflect the process of enmeshment. Although dyads are not necessarily congruent on which behaviors are personally salient as expressions of affection, they may have a mutual understanding about which behaviors are meant to express affection.

In addition to the degree of congruency, the open-ended results were also examined for the number of individual acts discussed in each dyad’s responses. Participants reported roughly five individual expressions of affection per dyad. Thus, while the survey questions asked participants to report about one specific episode, their
recollection of that episode involved multiple expressions of affection. While both males and females reported multiple behaviors per affection episode, females tended to report a higher number of behaviors both in their description of affection they had received, as well as affection they had given. Males tended to report fewer behaviors in general with their self-accounts of expressed affection containing the fewest number of behaviors. The numbers of behaviors reported per affection episode indicate the need to view affection as more of a sequence than an individual behavior; this is particularly true for females. This tendency may suggest that females have a more elaborate and complex memory of affection episodes.

In addition to the number of expressions of affection reported, these expressions varied across the typology of affectionate expressions. Specifically, fourteen different categories of affectionate expressions were extrapolated from participant’s accounts of recent affectionate communication: 1) verbal declarations of love, 2) kissing, 3) physical touch, 4) verbal expressions of caring, 5) acts of service, 6) reflection on / projection of relationship, 7) compliments, 8) time, 9) cooking, 10) humor, 11) sacrifice, 12) symbolic expressions of affection, 13) written expressions of affection, and 14) other. Moreover, many of the responses included multiple behaviors which fell into multiple categories. This degree of variance in both number of individual expressions and type of individual expressions that were exhibited throughout the qualitative responses indicate a need to expand the conception of affection from a single expression to a series of multiple, different behaviors. This also suggests that many different behaviors can serve as signs of affection. Additionally, existing measures of affection may fail to take into account the
complex way in which affectionate communication is conceptualized for this study’s participants.

Comparison to the ACI

Participant responses to the ACI items were compared with their open-ended responses when both were coded into the categories of physical, verbal, contextual, and other expressions of affection. When compared with individuals’ spontaneously identified expressions of affection, the ACI mirrored the most common types of affection expression (physical and verbal); however, it did not include measures for contextually dependent expressions of affection. Participant’s accounts of affection indicate that context plays a significant role in their interpretation of various expressions of affection.

As the typology of affectionate expressions discussed above illustrates, affection for these participants involved a wide array of expressions, many of which may be contextually dependent. Thus, this study indicates that the behaviors identified in the ACI may not be diverse enough to assess the range of behaviors that constitute affection for this study’s participants.

In addition to indicating the wide range of behaviors participants reported as affectionate, self-reports from the ACI items also showed that male and female participants differed significantly in their preferences for thirteen different expressions of affection. These combined results fall in line with extant literature on affection that supports the argument that preferences for expressions of affection are many and varied.

Verbal communication and modification

Hypothesis One predicted that those individuals who verbally communicate about affectionate expressions would modify their behavior according to their partner’s
preference. Study results found a statistically significant correlation between those individuals who communicate about affectionate expressions and individuals who report modifying their affectionate expressions according to their partner’s preference; this correlation was observed for both male and female participants.

This hypothesis was based on a principle of AET, that there are benefits for both the sender and the receiver to expressing affection. From this, modifying one’s own means of expressing affection to partner preference is beneficial to both the sender and recipient as it increases affection benefits. This study’s findings in support of Hypothesis One maintain this principle.

Explanation for this correlation can once more be found in interpersonal perception literature. As discussed above, Sillars and Scott (1983) note that the tendency for intimate partners to assimilate meaning and overestimate the similarity between their own and their partner’s attitudes is one of the best-supported findings in interpersonal perception literature. This observation was also supported by this study’s data (i.e. perceived similarity scores were greater than actual similarity scores). Thus, intimate partners may overestimate the similarity between their own and their relational partners’ affection preferences, and therefore be less inclined to modify their expressions of affection to their partner. Furthermore, interpersonal perception research indicates that intimate partners may be poor judges of each other’s perceptions (Sillars & Scott, 1983; Sillars, 1998). This tendency of poor perception judgment coupled with the predisposition of partners to overestimate their similarity to the relational partners likely contributes to less communication about expressions of affection, and thus less
modification of expressions of affection, as individuals already perceive their affection preferences to be similar.

As mentioned above, a significant correlation between communication about affectionate expressions and modification of affectionate expressions was found, although the magnitude of this relationship was low. This correlation falls right in line with Gulledge et al. (2003), whose study on physical affection led to the suggestion that romantic partners assess what the other finds most demonstrative of love and adjust their expressions of affection accordingly. However, it is worth noting that the size of the correlation suggests that actual accordance does not strongly predict modification.

Understanding

A guiding objective of this research was to add the important element of understanding to the satisfying exchange of affection. A first step in exploring the role of understanding lies in examining the extent to which couples show understanding of partner preference for affectionate expressions, as posed by research question one.

Participants reported moderate degrees of understanding; both males and females were able to predict with reasonable accuracy their partner’s preferences for various expressions of affection. It is notable that, while average understanding scores were moderate, the range in understanding scores suggests a high degree of variability in participant understanding levels. Overall, study participants’ understanding levels exceeded those levels found in previous research that has examined understanding in intimate relationships (e.g. Sillars, Koerner, & Fitzpatrick, 2005). These higher understanding scores may result from the nature of communication in the types of relationships considered. Knapp (1978) observed that communication may be more
efficient in intimate relationships due to acquired understandings and specialized codes that have developed over the duration of the relationship. Furthermore, understanding may increase as relationship length increases (albeit to a certain degree), as individuals are less likely to rely on cultural and social stereotypes and more on individualized perceptions (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

**Understanding and relational satisfaction**

An examination of the literature on the connection between understanding and relationship satisfaction reveals mixed results. Sillars et al. (2005) note a general positive association in interpersonal research between understanding and relationships satisfaction among romantic couples. However, the inverse has also been found. For example, in their research on married couples, Allen and Thompson (1984) found a negative association between understanding and satisfaction.

Hypothesis Two states that understanding of partner’s affectionate expressions is positively associated with the relationship satisfaction of both individuals. Research done to test this hypothesis found no evidence of an association between understanding and relationship satisfaction (notably, there was a small, negative correlation found between female understanding and male satisfaction).

Some explanation for this null relationship lies within the complex nature of understanding. Sillars and Scott (1983) note that even in intimate, personal relationships where a wealth of prior existence and shared knowledge exists, understanding still remains a formidable issue. Moreover, it is certainly possible that while individuals may understand one another’s expressions of affection, they may still hold vastly different preferences on those expressions of affection. Thus, understanding, in of itself, may not
be enough to influence satisfaction. Partners may need to alter their expressions of affection in order to positively affect both self and partner's assessment of relational satisfaction. Drawing from their research on intimate partners, Knapp and Vangelisti (1996) support this notion; they conclude that relational partners must have corresponding rules for the satisfying exchange of affection. Thus, mere understanding of affectionate expressions, though a first step, may not be enough.

As noted above, there was a small, negative correlation found between female understanding and male satisfaction. This may be due to the importance placed on affection within the relationship. For example, greater understanding between partners has been shown to increase dissatisfaction when there are irreconcilable differences (Rubin & Brown, 1975) or when benevolent misconceptions had previously existed (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966) (see Sillars & Scott, 1983).

**Modification and relational satisfaction**

Hypothesis Three predicted that the extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partners' preference is positively associated with their degree of satisfaction. Results from Hypothesis Three showed no significant correlation between individuals who reported modifying their own affectionate expressions based on their partner's preference and their degree of relational satisfaction. These results were consistent for both male and female participants. This lack of evidence for a relationship between individual modification and individual satisfaction may underscore the important role of both members of the dyad to relational satisfaction. It is important to express affection in ways that are pertinent to both the individual communicating affection as well as the recipient.
Furthermore, the null relationship between modification and relational satisfaction may partially be attributed to the role of emotional involvement in these relationships. Average relationship duration for the study’s participants was over two years; this indicates a presumably significant level of emotional involvement. Emotional involvement may bias the interpretation of messages either to assimilation or contrast (e.g. Hovland, Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). As data from this study reflects a trend toward assimilation, participants may not have perceived a need to modify their expressions, thus reducing the impact of reported modification on evaluations of relational satisfaction.

*Verbal communication and relational satisfaction*

Hypothesis Four predicted that the amount couples verbally communicate about expressions of affection in their relationship would correspond with their relational satisfaction levels. As noted above, findings from this study reveal a low, yet significant correlation between verbal communication about affectionate expressions and relational satisfaction for couples.

A possible explanation for this low correlation lies in the nature of affection negotiation in romantic relationships. Verbally communicating with one’s partner about how affection is expressed within a relationship may involve delicate and possibly face-threatening communication. Thus, while this research focused on ways affection is negotiated verbally, it is reasonable to assume that much of the negotiation process regarding affectionate expressions happens at a non-verbal level. While a significant correlation does exist between verbal communication about affectionate expressions and relational satisfaction for couples involved in this research, it is also likely that much of
the communication about affectionate expressions occurs at a non-verbal level between partners, accounting for the low correlation between verbal communication and relational satisfaction.

Additionally, interpersonal perception research suggests that intimate partners tend to assimilate meaning and overestimate similarity levels between their own and their partner’s attitudes. Due to this erroneous perception, intimate partners may be less likely to communicate about affectionate expressions in general or less likely to seek clarification about that communication due to their inflated similarity perceptions (see Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This trend in the literature was supported by this study’s data, specifically; perceived similarity scores were significantly than the actual similarity scores for dyad members. Moreover, acquiring information about a person can be misleading as this increases confidence in one’s understanding of the other (Lester, 1978), which may extend to areas where understanding does not truly exist (Shapiro & Swenson, 1969). Results pertaining to Hypothesis Four supports the latter point- that there is a relationship (albeit a low correlation) between increased amounts of verbal communication about affectionate expressions and relationship satisfaction ratings for couples.

Verbal communication and intimacy, passion, and commitment

When examining the benefits of affection to relationships, a significant portion of research has relied solely upon overall measures of relationship satisfaction to measure relationship quality (e.g. Dainton, 2000; Punyanunt-Carter, 2004). This is problematic as relationship quality is a multi-dimensional concept that extends beyond global reports of overall relational satisfaction. Thus, this research incorporates Sternberg’s (1986, 1987,
& 1988) relational components of intimacy, passion, and commitment (in addition to a measure of relational satisfaction) to get a more encompassing estimation of relational quality. To this end, Research Question Two asks if the extent to which couples verbally communicate about affectionate expressions is associated with their degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

While verbal communication about affection and overall relational satisfaction had a low correlation, when relational satisfaction was expanded to include the elements of intimacy, passion, and commitment study results indicated a stronger correlation between communication and relationship quality. Specifically, a moderate correlation between verbal communication and intimacy, passion, and commitment was found. That is, couples who reported high degrees of verbal communication about affectionate expressions also reported corresponding levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment in their relationship.

These findings fall right in line with a central argument of AET (Floyd, 2002). Specifically, the results support the argument that there are benefits to expressing affection in addition to the well-established benefits of receiving affection. These findings begin to suggest that mere communication about affection is a characteristic of couples with higher intimacy, passion, and commitment. Additionally, these findings make logical sense. As discussed above, it is reasonable to assume some of the negotiation of affection occurs at a nonverbal level, thus when couples begin to move beyond nonverbal negotiation to more explicit verbal negotiation, this more overt communication likely influences intimacy, passion, and commitment in that relationship.
The relationship between understanding of partner preferences for affectionate expression and couples' levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment, as outlined in Research Question Three, is complex. Inquiry into this association for males' understanding of female preferences revealed no significant correlation with either male or female reports of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Similar to the investigation between understanding and relational satisfaction, this result is counterintuitive. The relationship is further complicated when female understanding of partner affectionate expressions was correlated with intimacy, passion, and commitment. Interestingly, a statistically significant, negative correlation was found between female understanding and male reports of intimacy, passion, and commitment. No significant relationship was found to female ratings of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

These findings shed further light on the nature of understanding in romantic relationships. Study participants reported moderate levels of understanding in their relationships. However, these understanding scores did not correlate with elevated satisfaction score for couples, nor did they correlate with higher intimacy, passion, and commitment scores for couples. While ostensibly puzzling, these findings can be explained through interpersonal perception literature. Sillars (1998) notes several features of interpersonal encounters that help explain this finding: 1) familiarity may increase knowledge of a partner, however it corrodes objectivity; and 2) communication in intimate relationships is replete with multiple goals and levels of meaning. Thus, while couples may understand one another's preferences of affection, due to their personal involvement in the situation or a competing goal, individuals may still choose to express
affection in a way inconsistent with their partner’s preference, or even in a manner contrary to their partner’s preference. As this lack in objectivity as well as multiple goals is characteristic of intimate communication encounters, it follows that understanding of affection preferences will not necessarily translate into increased levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

The negative correlation between female understanding and male intimacy, passion, and commitment scores, while counterintuitive, is not completely at odds with extant literature on understanding and relationship quality (operationalized for this research question as intimacy, passion, and commitment). To help explain the negative correlation between understanding and intimacy, passion, and commitment, it is helpful to examine previous research on intimate couples. In their research on married couples, Sillars, Pike, Jones, and Murphy (1984) found a negative relationship between understanding and satisfaction; they specifically noted that less satisfied couples exhibited more understanding (about which issues were significant marital conflicts). They suggested that conflicts may force the discussion or clarity on issues that couples had assumed similarity about or lost objectivity on. Thus, the negative relationship between female understanding and male levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment may indicate where higher levels of understanding existed about the issue because of expressed conflict concerning expressions of affection. Thus, this research supports the concept that understanding does not equal communicative competence (Spitzberg, 1994).

Modification and intimacy, passion, and commitment

The final research question of this study asks if the extent to which individuals modify their own affectionate expressions based on their partners’ preferences is
positively associated with their own degree of intimacy, passion, and commitment. This research question adopts the dyadic approach adopted by Floyd's (2002) AET, which argues for the benefits of expressing affection. This research question sought to discover whether the benefits of expressing affection are augmented when individuals express affection in ways that are preferred by their partner. Results indicated that partner modification of affectionate expressions was not strongly related to the relational benefits of intimacy, passion, and commitment for females. A slight non-significant correlation was found for males.

Possible explanations for this null finding are suggested by the nature of affection. In order to receive the benefits of affection, this research indicates that individuals need to express affection in a way that is understood as affectionate to them, not necessarily by their partner. Thus, when individuals modify their expressions of affection to their partner's preference, they may not be expressing affection in a way that is personally salient, thus accounting for the lack of correlation between modification and individuals own levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Moreover, the familiarity of partners with one another (average relationship length was over 2 years) may affect perceptions of modification. Weick (1971) points out that intimate partners generally assume their partners are constant, and thus perceive changed behavior as merged with previous behavior rather than acknowledging it as new behavior. It follows that changes in impressions will be even more conformist in intimate relationships as the impressions will be drawn from a wealth of prior experiences (Sillars & Scott, 1983). Thus, dyad members may be less likely to observe modification in their partners.
As previously mentioned, a distinguishing feature of AET is its dyadic approach to the benefits of affection. The null relationship between modification and intimacy, passion, and commitment, coupled with this dyadic perspective, suggest that there may be intrinsic benefits to the expression of affection for the individual who expresses it, regardless of whether it is interpreted as such by the receiver.

Limitations and Future Research Considerations

As is true for any study, there are limitations that should be kept in mind during the evaluation of this research. A first and perhaps most obvious limitation to this study lies in its method: self-report questionnaires. The discussion, negotiation, and expression of affection within romantic relationships are all complicated processes that may involve many behaviors participants are not consciously aware of. When asked, participants readily supplied recent examples of expressions of affection. This indicates awareness of affectionate expressions within their relationship; however, it does not allow access to unconscious expressions of affection. Future research should use a different methodological approach such as direct observation to include these unconscious elements in the examination of affection negotiation in romantic relationships. Additionally, as this study used self-report data, social desirability may be a factor; however, this pressure may have been mitigated partly due to the use of anonymous questionnaires. Finally, participation in this survey required both partners to come to an outside location and fill out a survey. Due to the significant amount of time participation may have required, the population in this study may represent more highly satisfied couples.
Despite the aforementioned limitations, there is much to be investigated regarding how expressions of affection are verbally negotiated in romantic relationships. A natural area of extension in this line of research is to examine how expressions of affection are negotiated nonverbally in romantic relationships. Given the sometimes face-threatening, and often delicate behaviors that are involved in negotiating expressions of affection it is very likely that a significant portion of the negotiation process occurs at the nonverbal level. Further investigation into these processes would provide personal relationship scholars with a more complete understanding of the negotiation process.

Conclusion

Every intimate relationship involves the expression of affection. However, expressions of affection, as well as preferences for affection, are as varied as the individuals involved in relationships. Even so, the necessity of affection, however expressed, remains a bedrock element to the study of interpersonal relationships. This study sought to further knowledge of how expressions of affection are verbally negotiated in romantic relationships, as well as the influence of understanding and affectionate communication modification on relational satisfaction, intimacy, passion, and commitment. Moreover, this study also considered understanding as a potential precursor to the benefits of expressing and receiving affection.

Results from this study will hopefully lend to a better understanding of romantic relationships and particularly the crucial role of affectionate expressions in romantic relationships. While this research produced mixed results in terms of the benefits to merely expressing affection, it produces support for the many and varied expressions of affection existent in human behavior. Affection continues to be a key aspect of
communication related to individual health. Its importance to human development is undisputed. The continued exploration of this essential ingredient to human well-being has implications for communication scholars, as well as applied value for all individuals involved in intimate relationships, romantic or otherwise.
References


APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT STATEMENT

Affection in Romantic Relationships
A Study Conducted by the University of Montana

We would like to invite you to participate in a study about affection in romantic relationships.

If you agree to participate, you and your partner will separately fill out and turn in a survey. For the purposes of this study, you must be currently involved in a romantic relationship that has lasted at least 1 month. Additionally, both you and your partner must be present to fill out this survey. The survey will ask you about expressions of affection in your current romantic relationship. Some of the questions will also ask you about your preferences on expressions of affection in your current romantic relationship. Other questions will ask you to report on your partners’ preferences on expressions of affection in your current romantic relationship. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Your answers to the questionnaire will be completely anonymous. The only way for anyone to know your responses will be for you to tell them. When your results and those of other participants are combined and entered into a computer, they will not contain any identifying information that could connect the data to you. The results of the study will be compiled for a graduate thesis and may be published but your name will not be connected to the results.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time or may decide to skip any parts of the survey that you do not wish to answer. If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact me at (406) 243-6604 or at andrea.richards@umontana.edu.

Date:

Place:

Time:

Sincerely,

Andrea A. Richards
Dept. of Communication Studies
University of Montana
APPENDIX B: AFFECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Affection in romantic relationships survey
Thank you for participating in this study. This survey consists of four sections. Please read the directions carefully and answer the questions as completely and truthfully as possible. **For the purposes of this study, you must be currently involved in a romantic relationship that has lasted at least 1 month. Additionally, both you and your partner must be present to fill out this survey**. If you are currently involved in more than one romantic relationship, please think about the partner you arrived with and answer the entire survey with that same partner in mind. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime without penalty.

I. Please describe yourself.

1. How old are you? ________ # of years

   Please circle your answer.

2. Sex:  
   1 Male  
   2 Female

3. Year in school:  
   1 Freshman  
   2 Sophomore  
   3 Junior  
   4 Senior  
   5 Graduate

4. Ethnicity:  
   1 Caucasian  
   2 African-American  
   3 Mexican/ Hispanic  
   4 Asian  
   5 Native American  
   6 Other

II. Please describe your partner.

5. How old is your partner? ________ # of years

   Please circle your answer.

6. Sex:  
   1 Male  
   2 Female

7. Year in school:  
   1 Freshman  
   2 Sophomore  
   3 Junior  
   4 Senior  
   5 Graduate

8. Ethnicity:  
   1 Caucasian  
   2 African-American  
   3 Mexican/ Hispanic  
   4 Asian  
   5 Native American  
   6 Other

III. Please describe the romantic relationship you are currently involved in.

   Please circle your answer.

9. How long have you been in your current relationship?
   ______________ # of months ______________ # of years
10. What is your most frequent method of communication with your partner?

1. Face to face  2. Telephone  3. E-mail  4. Text message  5. Written letters  6. Other ____________________________

11. Within the last 24 hours, has your partner expressed affection to you?
1. Yes  2. No

12. Within the last 24 hours, have you expressed affection to your partner?
1. Yes  2. No

Please write in your answer for the next two questions.

13. Where were you and your partner when you had your first kiss? __________

14. Where did you and your partner go on your first date? __________

Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement.

15. My partner and I talk with each other about how we express affection to one another.

1  2  3  4  5

16. My partner lets me know how he/she wants me to express affection to him/her.

1  2  3  4  5

17. If I dislike how my partner expresses affection to me, I will let him/her know.

1  2  3  4  5

Never  Very frequently

18. How frequently do you and your partner communicate about the ways you express caring to each other?

1  2  3  4  5

19. My partner and I discuss our relationship.

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly disagree  Strongly agree

20. I tell my partner if I am feeling uncared for.

1  2  3  4  5

21. My partner tells me if he/she is feeling uncared for.

1  2  3  4  5
Please answer the following questions about your current romantic relationship in the space provided. If you need additional space use the back of this page. Please be as specific as possible.

**Think about the last 24 hours or the most recent time you spent a significant amount of time with your partner when answering the next two questions.**

22. What has your **partner** said or done (if anything) that lets you know that they care about you? Describe the most recent situation in which this occurred. Please be as specific as possible.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23. What have **you** said or done (if anything) to let your partner know you care about them? Describe the most recent situation in which this occurred. Please be as specific as possible.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The following questions ask you to think about your preference and your partner’s preference for expressing affection. Preference refers to the degree you or your partner favor, desire, or like better one option over other reasonable options. Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. My partner has changed the way he/she expresses caring to me based on my preference.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. I changed the way I express caring to my partner based on his/her preference.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. The way I prefer to express affection and the way I express affection to my partner are different.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>27. I do things for my partner that I normally would not because I know it makes him/her feel loved.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</table>
Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement where 1 = I do not prefer this type of affectionate behavior through 7 = I prefer this type of affectionate behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>28. Holding hands</td>
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<td>29. Kissing on the lips</td>
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<td>30. Kissing on the cheeks</td>
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<td>31. Putting your arm around your partner's shoulder</td>
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<td>32. Sitting close to each other</td>
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<td>33. Hugging each other</td>
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<td>35. Giving massages to each other</td>
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<td>36. Winking at each other</td>
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<td>37. Saying how important your relationship is</td>
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<td>38. Saying &quot;you're my best friend&quot;</td>
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<td>39. Saying &quot;I love you&quot;</td>
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<td>41. Saying &quot;You're a good friend&quot;</td>
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<td>43. Giving each other compliments</td>
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<td>44. Praising each other's accomplishments</td>
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<td>46. Acknowledging each other's birthday</td>
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Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement where 1 = my partner does not prefer this affectionate behavior through 7 = my partner prefers this type of affectionate behavior.

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<th>Statement</th>
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<td>47. Holding hands</td>
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66
IV. What are your thoughts on your current romantic relationship?

*Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement.*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>How well does your partner meet your needs?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>How much do you love your partner?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten into this relationship?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>70.</td>
<td>To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>How many problems are there in your relationship?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Many</td>
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<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>How good is your relationship compared to most?</td>
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</table>

*Please mark the number that best describes your response to each statement.*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>I view my relationship with my partner as permanent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>My relationship with my partner is very romantic.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>I have a relationship of mutual understanding with my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>I am certain of my love for my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>I receive considerable emotional support from my partner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
78. I have decided that I love my partner.

79. I find myself thinking about my partner frequently during the day.

80. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.

81. My partner is able to count on me in times of need.

82. Just seeing my partner is exciting for me.

83. I find my partner very attractive physically.

84. I idealize my partner.

85. I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with my partner.

86. There is something almost 'magical' about my relationship with my partner.

87. I feel emotionally close to my partner.

88. I expect my love for my partner to last for the rest of my life.

89. I give considerable emotional support to my partner.

90. I can't imagine ending my relationship with my partner.

91. I adore my partner.

Thank you for your participation!
SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Affection in romantic relationships survey

PROJECT DIRECTOR(S):
Andrea Richards
Department of Communication Studies
University of Montana, Liberal Arts 339
406-243-6604
andrea.richards@umontana.edu

Alan Sillars, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor
Department of Communication Studies
University of Montana, Liberal Arts 301
406-243-4331
alan.sillars@mso.umt.edu

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study investigating expressions of affection in romantic relationships. If you agree to respond to this survey, you will be asked to think about your thoughts and experiences concerning expressions of affection in the romantic relationship you are currently involved in. You will also be asked to respond to questions regarding communication with your partner about expressions of affection in your relationship. Both you and your partner are both being asked to complete this questionnaire; your responses will be compared to provide a more accurate understanding of the relationship. You will be given 20-30 minutes to respond, but you may not need the entire time.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are normally entitled. Responding to some of the items might cause you to think about aspects of your relationship that may make you uncomfortable. Additionally, participation in this study may lead to uncomfortable discussions between you and your partner. Please do not continue if you feel you cannot do so. There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation will give personal relationship scholars an opportunity to better understand expressions of affection in romantic relationships. At the completion of the survey you will be given a debriefing sheet with contact information for local services if you have any concerns.

Your responses for this survey are confidential, please do not put your name or any identifying markings anywhere on the survey. Both you and your partner are being asked to complete this questionnaire and both your responses will be compared to provide a more accurate understanding of the relationship. Only the researcher and other approved research members will have access to the data files. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and your signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The results of this research will be compiled for my graduate thesis and may be submitted to be published, but your name will not be connected to the results.

Although we believe that the risk of taking part in this study is minimal, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms:

"In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University’s Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel. July 6, 1993)."

If you have any questions concerning this research or wish to find out the results of this study, please contact Andrea Richards at (406) 243-6604 or andrea.richards@umontana.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Office at the University of Montana at 406-243-6670.
I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Print Your Name Here: ____________________________________________

Sign Your Name Here: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

About this Study
Research has found that expressions of affection are a key ingredient to relationship satisfaction; however, preferences for expressions of affection may vary according to the individual. The questionnaire you just completed is designed to gauge how romantic partners verbally negotiate expressions of affection in their relationship. Your responses will future research in this area of study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us:

Andrea Richards
Communication Studies Graduate Student
(406) 243-6604
andrea.richards@umontana.edu

or

Alan Sillars, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor
(406) 243-4331

alan.sillars@mso.umt.edu

Thank you for your participation in this study.
It is normal to think a lot about your relationship and to feel powerful emotions about your relationship. However, if you experience discomfort about your relationship, please contact one of the following services.

Referrals

24-hour Crisis Services:
UM Student Assault Recovery Services 243-6559
Mental Health Center 728-6817
YWCA Crisis Line 542-1944
St. Patrick Hospital Emergency Room 329-5635

Counseling Services:
UM Counseling Services 243-4711
UM Clinical Psychology Center 243-4523
YWCA Sexual Assault Services 543-6691
### Congruency Categories and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC= complete congruency (same event, behavior, and/or expression of affection)</td>
<td>A: (partner) Last night after she went out for a couple of hours she called me and told me how much she misses me. B: (self) I called and said I missed him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC= partial congruency (same event, deviation in behavior and/or expression of affection or number of reported expressions)</td>
<td>A: (partner) Scratched my back this morning in bed. B: (self) This morning I woke him up with a good morning kiss and snuggle and told him how much I love him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV= partial variation (varying or undetermined event, relatively similar behaviors and/or expressions of affection)</td>
<td>A: (partner) She said she loved me right before we came here. B: (self) I called him at work just to let him know how much I loved him and how special he was to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV= complete variation (referenced different events, behaviors, and/or expressions of affection)</td>
<td>A: (partner) Told me he loves me and asked for a hug and kiss. B: (self) She was in a minor car wreck and needed to be taken to the hospital overnight. I stayed with her the entire time to make sure she was ok and cared for her the entire next week without hesitation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX F: TYPOLOGY OF AFFECTIONATE EXPRESSIONS

## Table 2

**Typology of Affectionate Expressions and Examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Verbal declarations of love                | 1: My partner tells me she loves me everyday.  
2: I tell him how much I care.                                                                    |
| 2. Kissing                                    | 1: I went to my partner during an unexpected time and gave her a very passionate kiss. It wasn’t just any kiss it was one that made her weak because of passion.  
2: Kissed her forehead and lips.                                                               |
| 3. Physical touch                             | 1: Holding hands on the way to the survey.  
2: Scratched my back this morning in bed.                                                        |
| 4. Verbal expressions of caring               | 1: My partner expresses concern about my health issues and wanting me around for a long time.  
2: I was concerned that she looked pale and tired. I asked her how she felt.                    |
| 5. Acts of service                            | 1: Simple things like helping with homework or favors.  
2: She did my laundry without being asked.                                                        |
| 6. Reflection on/projection of relationship    | 1: Just walking into this survey we were talking about when we first started dating when I still lived in the dorms.  
2: Just this morning he told me he can’t wait to marry me.                                      |
| 7. Compliments                                | 1: I told him he looked good in the shirt he was wearing.  
2: He tells me how beautiful I am every single day.                                               |
| 8. Time                                       | 1: I dedicated the whole day to him.  
2: (We) just spent some quality time together.                                                     |
| 9. Cooking                                    | 1: Tonight she cooked me dinner and it was waiting for me when I got home from work after a hectic day.  
2: I made cookies for him.                                                                      |
| 10. Humor                                     | 1: I tried to cheer him up when he felt grumpy (i.e. playfully tickled him and rubbed his face while joking with him that he was a ‘grumpy face’) and then he laughed.  
2: We also use a lot of sarcasm, humor, and teasing to show affection.                            |
| 11. Sacrifice                                 | 1: I hate it when he wants to eat McDonalds but he loves it. Today he almost passed the turn for McDonalds and I reminded him so he would be happy.  
2: He took me to Curry Health Center today and missed class so I felt better.                    |
| 12. Symbolic expressions of affection         | 1: He put my name on the same sandstone rock that his family did when they were young; it is on his family land. |
| 13. Written expressions of affection | 1: He wrote me a text message telling me, “He didn’t have a way to express how much he cares about me.”  
| | 2: I wrote him a little note that said I love you and put it into his folder so he’d find it when he went to class. |
| 14. Other | 1: First of all, I am going out with him, which says a lot.  
| | 2: She told me she had a dream about me. |
Table 3

Category of Open-Ended Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Open-ended responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical expressions of affection</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal expressions of affection</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual expressions of affection</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H: SEX DIFFERENCES OF AFFECTION PREFERENCES

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Preferences of Affectionate Expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding hands</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.62)</td>
<td>(1.36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissing on the lips</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissing on the cheeks</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>-3.8</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.43)</td>
<td>(1.36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting your arm around your partner's shoulder</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.42)</td>
<td>(1.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting close to each other</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugging each other</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.01)</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking into each other's eyes</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(6.36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving massages to each other</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.57)</td>
<td>(1.62)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winking at each other</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.99)</td>
<td>(2.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying how important your relationship is</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.81)</td>
<td>(1.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying “You’re my best friend.”</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.10)</td>
<td>(1.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying “I love you.”</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.96)</td>
<td>(1.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying “I like you.”</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.13)</td>
<td>(1.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying “You’re a good friend.”</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.05)</td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping each other with problems</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.96)</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving each other compliments</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.96)</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising each other’s accomplishments</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing private information</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.11)</td>
<td>(1.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging each other’s birthday</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>