COMMUNICATION AND IDEALIZATION IN
LONG-DISTANCE DATING RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in the
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by

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* * * * *

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The goal of this study is to determine if individuals in long-distance premarital relationships are more idealized regarding their partner than individuals in short-distance relationships (i.e., couples not geographically separated), and to see if differences in their interaction patterns might help to explain the results. First, a rationale for examining premarital relationships will be presented, followed by a rationale for examining premarital long-distance relationships. After reviewing the literature on idealization, several hypotheses will be offered regarding communication and idealization in long-distance relationships. Finally, the results of a study designed to determine if long-distance individuals are more idealized than are short-distance individuals will be presented and discussed.
A Rationale for Studying Premarital Relationships

Much stands to be learned from the study of communication in the context of the premarital dating relationship. Stephen (1987) maintains that the study of premarital relationships is valuable for three reasons. First, it can provide insight into intimate communication that is generalizable to other contexts, such as marriage, friendship, and kin relationships. Second, the knowledge gained from the study of premarital relationships can help the university professor understand the world his or her students live in, since many of them are involved in such relationships. Third, it can provide a sound, research-and-theory based approach for premarital counseling.

A related concern for studying premarital relationships is that since the premarital relationship forms the basis of the later marriage of the two partners, events that occur and attitudes that are formed during the premarital phase of a relationship may have serious implications for later marital satisfaction and stability (Dean, 1962; Hall & Taylor, 1976; Pinoe, 1963; Schulman, 1974; Winch, 1952). Perhaps the insight gained from research into premarital relationships may result in the prevention of marriages which are likely to be problematic and/or short-lived.
A Rationale for Studying Premarital Long-distance Relationships

Within the context of premarital relationships exists the almost completely ignored sub-context of premarital long-distance relationships (LDRs). Although researchers have examined the characteristics of short-distance relationships (SDRs) (see Knox & Wilson, 1981, and Lloyd, Cate, & Henton, 1984 for complete reviews), only one study exists on communication within premarital LDRs (Stephen, 1987).

Stephen (1987) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of premarital long-distance relationships from a symbolic interactionist perspective. In his study, subjects, all of whom were university students, completed the "Relationship World Index -- Version 2", in which they rank-ordered sixty statements regarding their relationship in terms of how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Stephen found, among other things, that long-distance couples did not differ from couples that were not geographically separated in their amount of commitment to the relationship or in their amount of relationship satisfaction. He also found no difference in the amount of time the couples reported talking to each other each day. Though this
finding may represent what actually happens in premarital long-distance dating relationships, his methodology demands further scrutiny. He only asked couples a question about frequency of talk at "time four" (which he does not define). Since he found that 41% of all the couples had broken up by the end of the study, it is reasonable to assume that many of the couples had broken up by "time four", and the only couples left to respond to questions at that time were those with at least some sense of longevity. Hence, one may assume that these long-distance couples survived because they talked as frequently as other couples.

Premarital long-distance dating relationships merit further attention for several reasons. First, it seems that the premarital long-distance dating relationship is not an uncommon type of relationship. Informal surveys in large introductory communication classes seem to bear this out. Stafford and Reske (1987), in a study of the effect of relationships on friendship networks, found that 37% of the dating relationships in their sample were long-distance ones. In an unpublished study, Reske (1986) found that 19% of the romantic relationships in which undergraduates were presently involved were long-distance
relationships. Second, there is reason to believe that the long-distance relationship is very different from the short-distance relationship. Though very little research exists regarding premarital LDRs, researchers of long-distance marital relationships have suggested that differences may exist between long-distance marriages and short-distance ones (Gerstel & Gross, 1984). Though Gerstel, et al. (1984) did not directly compare long-distance marriages to short-distance ones, they did find that individuals in long-distance marriages complain that their communication is more awkward and restricted, and that they missed the small talk and daily interaction that their geographic separation deprived them of. This work suggests that perhaps differences exist between long-distance and short-distance premarital relationships as well. However, due to the lack of empirical research on premarital LDRs, if differences do exist between LDRs and SDRs, we do not know about them.

A third and more important reason for studying premarital LDRs is that the communication of long-distance relationships differs both qualitatively and quantitatively from the communication of other relationships. Qualitative differences include the fact that the mode of
most communication changes from face-to-face communication to telephone and written communication. This is significant in the light of recent research which maintains that the telephone can be restrictive on a couple's communication (Singer, 1987). Although telephone conversations can include a paralinguistic element, both of these lack the visual elements of nonverbal communication, which plays an important role in relationships (see Gottman, 1979, for a complete review). Quantitative differences center around the probable reduced frequency of communication in long-distance relationships as a result of the physical distance between the partners.

If one probable effect of geographic separation is restricted communication, one might suspect that this would be detrimental to the relationship. In fact, long-distance relationships pose a difficult question for current interpersonal theory. In the only study on the communication of long-distance premarital couples, Stephen (1987) noted that in light of current interpersonal theory, the reduced frequency of communication in LDRs makes one wonder how such relationships can even exist. If the communication of premarital long-distance dating relationships is substantially different both
qualitatively and quantitatively from communication in other relationships, then perhaps current knowledge of interpersonal communication in romantic relationships is not applicable to this new context. Without research into LDRs, this question remains unanswered.

The study of communication in relationships is important for obvious reasons. As communication scholars, we assume that communication is the "lifeblood of relationships" (Bienvenu, 1970; Knapp, 1984). The literature has long placed a high value on self-disclosure (see Parks, 1981, for a complete review). Increasing self-disclosure seemed to be the key to competence in interpersonal communication (e.g. Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1975). This approach was closely paralleled in the popular literature of the late 60s and 70s, in which injunctions to "be open," "be totally honest," and to "tell it like it is" abound (Kidd, 1975). Self-disclosure has also been a topic of interest in the study of premarital dating relationships. For example, Hill, Peplau, and Rubin (1981), in a study of differing perceptions in dating couples, found that couples with low self-disclosure were more likely to disagree on a number of issues, including the likelihood of ever marrying each other, how close their relationship was, whether or not both of them were in
love, and who was more involved in the relationship. More importantly, relationship dissolution was positively correlated with disagreement on intimacy issues such as those listed above. In other words, couples with low self-disclosure were more likely to dissolve their relationship.

Studies such as this one seem to point towards the benefits of increasing one's self-disclosure. However, several authors have expressed qualms with the excessive devotion paid to self-disclosure in the literature (e.g., Bochner, 1981; Parks, 1981). One major problem with the self-disclosure construct is in the rationale behind it—the idea that increased self-disclosure will increase understanding, which will in turn increase satisfaction. This rationale assumes two causal links: (1) increased self-disclosure will increase understanding; and (2) increased understanding will increase satisfaction. As Garland (1981) points out, no empirical evidence exists to support such assumptions. In fact, in a review of marital communication skills training programs, Reske (1987) pointed out that the field had gone for over two decades with this implicit rationale without one study even mentioning these assumptions, let alone trying to find empirical support for them. Interestingly enough, one of the qualms that people have with self-disclosure is that it can
serve to only bring to light all of a couple's disagreements and leave them disillusioned. This is precisely what some premarital researchers (e.g. Schulman, 1974) recommend—only they want it to take place before marriage, not after.

Other critiques of the self-disclosure construct have been more direct (see Bochner, 1984, 1981; and Parks, 1981, for more complete reviews). Most researchers, however, would still agree that a certain amount of self-disclosure is essential for the healthy functioning of relationships (e.g. Knapp, 1984). Berger and Kellner (1964), writing from a symbolic interactionist perspective, see face to face interaction as vital to the creation and maintenance of a "shared reality" between two members of a dyad, and the creation of a joint world view. Berger and Calabrese (1975) maintain that frequent verbal communication is necessary for "uncertainty reduction", which they see as the goal of relationships. Certainly, relationships must have a certain amount of communication to exist, let alone thrive. This presents some problems for the premarital long-distance couple. As mentioned above, differences between communication in premarital LDRs and SDRs include restricted modes of communication and the possible reduced frequency
of communication in LDRs. What is of interest here is the effect that these changes in communication may have on the relationship. The concern of this study is not simply increasing communication for communication's sake. A specific result of the reduced frequency of communication in couples is that they may have problems with perceptual accuracy.

Understanding the construct of idealization can be facilitated by first considering the construct of perceptual accuracy. Perceptual accuracy may be defined simply as being able to see one's partner accurately. It is commonly known that couples often do not have accurate images of each other (Hill et al., 1981). Hill et al. (1981), for example, found that both men and women in romantic relationships tend to attribute greater involvement to the partner, greater power to the self, and greater disclosure to the self. Schulman (1974) asked subjects to respond to a questionnaire of relationship issues giving their own views and their predictions of their partner's views. The results were compared to provide an estimate of their perceptual accuracy. She argues that three types of perceptual accuracy are possible in a relationship: (1) couples may see themselves accurately; (2) couples may see themselves
inaccurately with a negative skew (pessimists); and (3) couples may see themselves inaccurately with a positive skew (optimists). The definition of idealization subscribed to in this paper is the third type of perceptual inaccuracy mentioned above: perceptual inaccuracy with a positive skew.

One of the primary concerns of this study is determining whether or not premarital long-distance couples are affected by idealization, and the role that communication plays in this effect. Before launching into a major work on idealization in premarital relationships, one issue that needs to be addressed is whether or not there is anything inherently wrong with being idealized. The problem is not that idealized couples are not happy; they may actually report higher levels of satisfaction than non-idealized couples (Schulman, 1974). It is important to note at this point that the aim of most research into premarital relationships is quite different from the aim of most marital research. Marital researchers have implicitly made "marital quality" their primary area of concern (Norton, 1983; Spanier, 1976). Though considerable disagreement exists over what the term "marital quality" actually means (e.g. Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Norton, 1983), studies of marital adjustment have
traditionally conceptualized the goals of marital quality in terms of satisfaction (how "happy" the couple is) and stability (how long they stay that way). Though satisfaction and stability have also been of interest to premarital researchers (e.g. Hill, Rubin, and Peplau, 1976; Lloyd, Cate, & Henson, 1984; Ridley, Jorgensen, Morgan, and Avery 1982), the concern of those who research idealization is not the satisfaction and stability of idealized couples at present; rather, it is their future satisfaction and stability (e.g. Ball, 1981).

This, then, is the major underlying concern of research into premarital idealization: that premarital idealization may result in later marital dissatisfaction and possible dissolution. The contention is that in the crucible of married life, idealized couples will no longer be able to avoid communication in areas of disagreement. As reality sets in and romantic images subside, disenchantment and disillusionment may set in, resulting in a sudden drop in satisfaction (Bochner, 1984). So although ending premarital idealization may carry with it the cost of premarital dissatisfaction, or even dissolution, avoiding later marital dissatisfaction is seen as worth that risk (Schulman, 1974). It has often been said, "The best divorce is one you get before you get married" (Hill
et al., 1976).

Several scholars have maintained that reduced communication can result in perceptual inaccuracies. One such study—though limited to a study of SDR couples—is Schulman’s (1974) work on idealization in engaged couples. Understanding idealization as one type of perceptual inaccuracy, Schulman explains that couples manage to create and maintain such inaccurate images through "blocked communication." In her schema, couples identify and isolate areas of potential conflict and avoid communication in those areas so as to maintain perceived agreement. Knowledge of one's other that is unavailable because of blocked communication is simply created in the person's mind based on their preconceived, idealistic image of their other or their image of what relationships should be.

It seems plausible, therefore, that when communication is blocked, imputations to the other will not be accurate; thus idealized perception would be the "predetermined response" for the engaged person, since it is made available by the romantic attitudes of our society. (Schulman, 1974, p. 140)

This is consistent with a Gestalt approach to psychology (Perls, 1969). The blocking of communication, while serving the function of avoiding conflict (at least temporarily), leaves certain "gaps" in one's
knowledge of their other. In order to maintain a complete, holistic concept of one's other, the gaps will be filled in. The source of information used to complete the picture of one's other is the romantic, idealized notions the person has in his or her mind. In other words, what one doesn't know, one makes up. [It is interesting to note that Schulman's implicit assumption is that one cannot have a healthy relationship without an accurate view of one's other--an assumption that recently has been questioned by marital communication scholars (see for example Schumm, 1983). Bochner (1981, 1984) contends that perceptual inaccuracy may even be functional, although his concern is with married relationships.] Although some scholars are inclined to disagree (e.g. Bochner, 1984), most researchers would agree with the proposition that reduced or restricted communication can result in perceptual inaccuracies (e.g., Murstein & Beck, 1972; Satir, 1964; Taylor, 1967). Taylor (1967) specifically claims that discrepant perceptions are the result of "faulty communication." If restricted communication can result in perceptual inaccuracy, improving the communication of premarital couples should force them to achieve one of two goals. Couples will either (a) address and resolve areas in which they differ, or
(b) terminate the relationship. Either may be preferable to a relationship in which partners hold unrealistic images of each other, because the disillusionment that can result from such unrealistic images may cause later marital dissatisfaction and/or dissolution (Ball, 1981). Achieving either of the above goals may be problematic for the long-distance couple, whose communication is hindered by their geographical separation. Indeed, if it is true that reduced communication can result in perceptual inaccuracy, it follows that LDRs would naturally have less accurate images of their partners. This is true not only because they will, like any other premarital dating relationship, tend to block communication in areas of potential conflict (Schulman 1974), but because a certain amount of communication is blocked simply by the physical constraints of being a long-distance couple (Gerstel et al., 1984). Hence, we would expect LDR couples to hold to more idealized images of each other.

The construct of idealization may possess explanatory power that is useful in understanding long-distance relationships. One of the more interesting findings of Stephen's (1987) study is the fact that long-distance couples were less likely to break up than were SDR
couples, which conforms to the expectation mentioned above that LDR couples will be more stable (at least in the short run). This presents problems for Stephen, who tries to explain it within the confines of his perspective:

Most theories of interpersonal communication suggest that relationships should deteriorate as interaction is restricted. Yet, the long-distance relationships did not deteriorate... (Stephen, 1987, p. 206)

The high drop-out rate of his study (41%) notwithstanding, it would seem that the reason Stephen cannot adequately explain the lack of deterioration in the long-distance couples is that he does not take into account the effects of idealization. This is interesting, since his results seem to suggest that idealization is taking place; he found that the long-distance couples reported conversing as much as short-distance couples; estimated, on the average, that their relationships had a higher probability of lasting into the future; and, as a group, actually did maintain their relationships longer than did the group of short-distance couples.

Stephen's perplexity is understandable. Existing interpersonal communication theory does suggest that the long-distance relationships would deteriorate. It is quite possible, however, that idealization is an
intervening variable that accounts for this troublesome finding. If, as other work on long-distance relationships (Gerstel et al., 1984) would suggest, the communication in LDRs is more restricted than the communication of other couples, this would allow them to maintain more idealized views of each other. We would expect to see them report higher satisfaction with their communication and to maintain their relationships longer, at least over the period of time examined by Stephen's study. Perhaps the construct of idealization explains the results of previous work on long-distance relationships better than does existing interpersonal communication theory.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON IDEALIZATION

Idealization has been a long-standing concern of premarital researchers. Waller (1937, 1938) felt that idealization of one’s partner was an important element of courtship behavior, and that idealization was facilitated by both partners displaying their best features. Idealization has been noted as an area that may contribute to relationship dissatisfaction (e.g., Goode, 1959; Kephart, 1966). As mentioned above, however, the concern of most idealization researchers has not been the present satisfaction of the couple; rather, it is the potential for later marital dissatisfaction that is the issue. Specifically, these researchers have been concerned that individuals with unrealistic notions of their partners will project these images on their partners instead of seeing them as they really are, and that these images will be shattered after marriage, resulting in marital dissatisfaction (Dean, 1962; Hall et al., 1976; Pineo, 1963; Schulman, 1974; Winch, 1952). Premarital
counselors in particular have been concerned about the unrealistic expectations regarding marriage that dating couples may hold (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1980; Goode, 1959; Kephart, 1966; Walster & Walster, 1978). Ball (1981), for example, identifies several major "irrational beliefs" that premarital couples have, and suggests the use of Rational-Emotive Therapy to overcome them.

A study which asked men to rate their level of satisfaction when they married, and then compared those who divorced with those who remained married found that the divorcees actually reported that they were more satisfied at the time they married (Pineo, 1963). In a study involving mental patients, Coe, Curry, and Kessler (1969) found that though both control and maladjusted families had a similar amount of disagreement in reality (about 30-40%), control families admitted to 28% disagreement, while psychiatric patients admitted to only 4% disagreement. The two studies mentioned above, though correlational, suggest that empirical support exists for the fear amongst premarital researchers and counselors that negative consequences may exist for having an overly idealized view of one's other.
One implicit assumption of some research on idealization is that idealization occurs primarily in the early stages of a relationship. Intuitively, this makes sense, as realization of differences and inaccurate perceptions should inevitably occur as a relationship progresses. Though some of the research on idealization has specifically addressed this issue, some disagreement exists as to when idealization takes place. Kirkpatrick and Hobart (1954) found that a lack of realism existed in all stages of courtship and early marriage. Hall and Taylor (1976) maintain that idealization does not end in the early stages of relationship development. Indeed, their work specifically concerns idealization within a marital context. Other work on idealization within marriage (Blood & Wolf, 1960; Burgess & Wallin, 1968) would also seem to suggest that idealization continues, or at least can continue, on into marriage. Some support also exists for the idea that idealization is primarily confined to the earlier stages of relationships. Pollis (1969) found this to be true, and one can infer the same result from the work of Centers (1975). Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) found that fewer negative attributes were mentioned by subjects in shorter relationships; they concluded that idealization is most prominent in early stages of relationships. If
idealization is confined to the earlier stages of relationships because it dissipates only through the increased contact that occurs over the course of time, then one can assume that long-distance couples, because they do not have as much contact over the course of time, are in danger of remaining idealized longer.

Sex differences have also been a major concern of researchers on idealization, although little agreement exists here either. Some of the findings on idealization support the idea that women are more idealized than men (Kanin, Davidson, & Scheck, 1970; Kemper and Balogh, 1980; Schulman, 1974), while other research has found that men are more idealized than women (Dion & Dion, 1973; Hong, 1986). Research on premarital dissolution (Hill et al., 1976) has found that men tend to fall in love more readily than women, while women tend to fall out of love more readily than men, suggesting that it is men who are more romanticized than women. [It is important to note that the construct of romantic love is slightly different than that of idealization. However, the subtle differences between these two notions is not the concern of this paper.]
The appearance of seemingly conflicting results on idealization in the literature can be more readily understood when one considers the way such results have been obtained. Though an intuitive notion of idealization may exist, it is clear that considerable disagreement exists regarding exactly how to measure this phenomenon. Hall and Taylor (1976), for example, measured idealization by comparing ratings of one's spouse with ratings of one's self, a friend, and the spouse's self-rating, the idea being that idealization occurs when someone says, "I think you're better than me, and I think you're better than you think you are" (p. 753). Pollis (1969) adopts a similar approach, comparing partners' ratings of each other with their friends' ratings of them. Aside from the fact that marriages and friendships are very different types of relationships, the problem with using friends' perceptions as a "standard" by which to judge partners' perceptions is that it assumes that friends' perceptions are accurate while spouses' perceptions are not accurate. Assuming that spouses' perceptions are not accurate is assuming the presence of the very phenomenon under consideration, a critical mistake in any type of research.
Other research on idealization has measured the phenomenon more simply. Kerckhoff and Davis (1962), for example, measured idealization as a simple count of the number of negative attributes used to describe one's partner. Burgess and Wallin (1968), in a slight twist on that theme, measured idealization as the number of changes desired in a partner. It is obvious that idealization will be correlated with the number of negative attributes found in a partner and the number of changes desired in a partner, but it is not clear that these actually measure idealization. One may actually have a partner with few faults that need remedying, and be seeing them quite accurately.

A similar measure of idealization involves giving the couple a scale designed to measure how positively they view the relationship. For example, Dion et al. (1973) developed a 9-item scale to measure idealization, which was also used in a later study by Hong (1986). Olson and his colleagues (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1985) have also developed a 5-item scale which purports to directly measure idealization. The problem with measuring idealization in this way is that the basis of comparison is merely the common sense notion that no relationship is perfect. The contention of this research is that if a
couple scores "too high" on such a scale, they must be idealized. It is almost as if they assume that no couple could possibly be that satisfied in reality; such perceptions, therefore, must be the result of idealization.

A far superior way to measure idealization is through the construct of perceptual accuracy. A considerable number of studies have examined "coorientation", or the congruence of perceptions between partners (see Bochner, 1984 for a complete review). Hill et al. (1981) found that both men and women tend to attribute greater involvement to the partner and greater power to themselves. [Unlike the research on idealization, sex differences are not a prominent theme in the literature regarding perceptual accuracy; Hill (1981), for example, in the study described here, found no appreciable differences between men and women.] Yelsma (1984) found that satisfied individuals tended to see themselves as more effective communicators than their spouses.

Several recurring themes are present. Researchers have, for example, been concerned with how perceptual differences have been correlated with communication and satisfaction. Yelsma (1984), for example, found that happy couples had more congruent happiness scores and more congruent views of their communication. Taylor (1967)
maintained that discrepant perceptions may be indicative of faulty communication, which in turn led to poor marital adjustment. Satir (1964) also suggested that a strong association exists between accurate perceptions and effective communication and, like Taylor (1967), suggests that discrepancy between partners' views will produce dissatisfaction. Bochner (1984) draws several conclusions from the literature on perceptual accuracy. He maintains that studies of perceptual accuracy have found, among other things, that actual similarity is generally higher than perceived similarity, and that metalevels of perception are more important to satisfaction (i.e., are better predictors of satisfaction) than are direct perceptions of satisfaction.

Several studies of idealization have conceptualized it in terms of perceptual accuracy, and measured it by examining differences in perceptions. One of these is the Schulman (1974) study described in some detail above. Another such study was done by Sternberg and Barnes (1985), who had subjects fill out Rubin's (1970) Love Scale four ways: (1) how they feel about their other, (2) how they believe their other feels about them, (3) how they would wish to feel about an ideal
other, and (4) how they would wish an ideal other to feel about them. Their goal was to see how these four feelings, and discrepancies between all possible combinations of these four feelings, predicted relationship quality. They found that both the way an individual felt about the relationship and the way they perceived their other to feel about the relationship were predictive of relationship quality. Perceived differences in love predicted relationship satisfaction better than did actual differences. Feelings regarding the ideal other affected satisfaction, but not as much as feelings towards actual others. The best predictor of satisfaction overall was the discrepancy between how the individual felt the ideal other would feel towards them and how they felt their other actually felt toward them.

None of the studies regarding idealization in relationships to date has examined the differences in idealization that may exist between couples in long-distance relationships and those who are not geographically separated. It is this "gap" which the present study hopes to fill.
CHAPTER III

HYPOTHESES

In light of the above research, this study hypothesizes that individuals in long-distance relationships will be more idealized than their short-distance counterparts because their communication is more restricted. In order to examine this hypothesis, three major variables will be explored: (1) a "direct" measure of idealization; (2) satisfaction with the relationship; and (3) satisfaction with the communication.

The rationale for studying the first of the above variables is obvious; if the overall hypothesis of this study is that long-distance individuals are more idealized than are short-distance individuals, it follows that they should score higher on a direct measure of idealization. An equally sound rationale exists for examining the second and third variables. Studies have shown that perceptions of satisfaction and perceptions of communication are correlated with each other (e.g., Bienvenu, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1976). Therefore, if an individual is idealized in terms
of satisfaction, it stands to reason that he/she may be idealized in terms of communication as well. Previous research has examined the idealization of the relationship, but has not considered the idealization of the communication in a relationship. This study hopes to fill this gap in the literature.

Since it is the contention of this paper that direct measures of idealization are inadequate, this study will examine the last two variables in several ways, involving the subjects' direct perceptions of themselves, their direct perceptions of their partner, and comparisons of the two in order to determine perceptual accuracy. [A more detailed discussion of the procedure can be found in the Methods chapter of this paper.] An examination of the perceptual accuracy of the two groups (SDRs and LDRs) should allow a better judgement regarding idealization than a direct measure of idealization would.

Specifically, this study will seek to examine five broad research questions, dealing with (1) idealization (directly measured), (2) satisfaction with the relationship and the communication, (3) perceptual accuracy, (4) interaction patterns, and (5) correlations among these variables. Several specific hypotheses are proposed within each question.
Research Question #1: Do long-distance individuals differ from short-distance individuals in terms of their scores on a direct measure of idealization?

The "direct" measure of idealization used in this study will be Olson's Idealization Subscale (Olson, et al., 1985; see Appendix E). Though using a direct measure of idealization is subject to criticism (as described in some detail earlier in this paper), Olson et al.'s (1985) scale is an accepted measure of idealization in a relationship. Since the overall hypothesis of this study is that long-distance individuals are more idealized than are short-distance individuals, it follows that they should score higher on a direct measure of idealization; hence, H1 is as follows:

H1: Long-distance individuals will score higher on direct measures of idealization than will short-distance individuals.

Research Question #2: Does the satisfaction of individuals in long-distance relationships differ from that of individuals in short-distance relationships?

Two aspects of satisfaction are of interest here: satisfaction with the relationship, and satisfaction with the communication. Individuals will be asked to give not only their perception of their satisfaction in these two
areas, but also their perception of their partners' satisfaction. If the basic premise of this study—that long-distance individuals are more idealized than are short-distance individuals—is correct, three specific results are to be expected:

**H2a:** Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will show greater amounts of satisfaction with the relationship and with their communication than will short-distance individuals. It follows that if long-distance couples are more idealized, they will show more satisfaction with the relationship, since idealization has been shown in the past to be positively correlated with satisfaction (Schulman, 1974). **H2b** follows from the same logic:

**H2b:** Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will perceive their partner to be more satisfied than short-distance individuals perceive their partner to be.

**H2c:** Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will be more likely to perceive their partner's satisfaction to be similar to their own than will individuals involved in short-distance relationships. This can be expected because the "blocked" communication in the long-distance relationship has not allowed them to see the areas in which they disagree
(Schulman, 1974). Differences in actual similarity will also be examined as part of this hypothesis.

**Research Question #3: Do long-distance couples differ from couples that are not geographically separated in terms of perceptual accuracy?**

In other words, is one of the groups more likely than the other to see their partner’s satisfaction with the communication and with the relationship more accurately? Specifically, this study hypothesizes the following:

**H3: Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will hold less accurate images of their partner than individuals in short-distance relationships.** Specifically, it is thought that individuals in LDRs will be more likely to overestimate their partner’s satisfaction with the relationship and with the communication in the relationship. In other words, the long-distance individuals will be more likely to be inaccurate with a positive skew in their perceptions of their other. If this is true, we can say that long-distance individuals are more idealized than their short-distance counterparts.
Research Question #4: Do the interaction patterns of long-distance couples differ from those of couples that are not geographically separated?

Several aspects of the couples' interaction are of interest here. First, this study will attempt to get a picture of how the couples interact by asking them to describe what percentage of their interaction is face-to-face, over the phone, and through letters. Second, the amount of time that the couples spend in "focused" interaction (together and engaged in the same activity) as opposed to "unfocused" interaction (together while engaged in specific tasks) will be ascertained. It is hoped that these measures will provide a way adequately to describe the differences in interaction which exist between LDR and SDR couples. The specific hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H4: The communication of individuals involved in long-distance relationships will be more restricted than will the communication of individuals in short-distance individuals. This will be evidenced through a smaller amount of focused interaction and face-to-face interaction in the LDR (and, conversely, a greater percentage of interaction taking place over the phone and through letters).
Research Question #5: What elements of communication are correlated with direct perceptions and perceptual inaccuracy?

Several specific results are expected:

**H5a:** The more an individual's communication is restricted, the more satisfied he/she will report being with his/her relationship and with his/her communication.

**H5b:** The more an individual describes his/her communication as being "restricted," the more inaccurate their perceptions of that other will be. This hypothesis is based on the view of many researchers in the past that restricted communication is what causes inaccurate perceptions to occur (Murstein et al., 1972; Satir, 1964; Schulman, 1974; Taylor, 1967). If their view is correct, we should expect some correlation between the accuracy of their perceptions and their interaction patterns.
CHAPTER IV

METHOD

Participants

Subjects for the study were drawn from a large undergraduate-level introductory communication course at The Ohio State University. The students received extra credit for participating in the study. The students were asked to recruit their significant other for the study as well, so the final group of subjects consisted of the communication students and their partners. None of the couples were married. There were 74 short distance individuals (37 couples) and 68 long distance individuals (34 couples) in the sample. The average age of subjects was 21.04. Individuals in long-distance relationships lived, on average, 421.64 miles from their partner.
Procedure

In order to participate in the study the SDR students and their significant others came to a communication laboratory to fill out an extensive questionnaire (see below) as did the LDR students. The partners of the LDR students were mailed the questionnaire with instructions to mail the completed questionnaire directly to the investigator without collaborating with his/her partner.

Instruments

Individuals completed one questionnaire booklet containing items pertaining to demographic information, some questions about interaction patterns developed specifically for this study, and several instruments (defined below).

Demographic Questions. Several demographic questions were asked first. These included items such as age, length of dating relationship, etc. and can be found in Appendix A.

Interaction Patterns. Individuals were asked their perceptions about their interactions with their partners. Individuals were asked what percentage of their interaction time was face-to-face, over the phone, or
through letters. To obtain a clearer picture of their interaction over the telephone, two additional items asked subjects to estimate the number of times they talked on the telephone each week, and the length of the average phone call. These two items were multiplied in order to obtain an estimate of the number of minutes spent on the telephone each week. Subjects were also asked to estimate the number of "blocks" of time they spent together in the last month both engaged in an activity together, and engaged in separate activities while together. These two questions were summed to obtain an estimate of the total number of blocks of time the couple spent together in the previous month. These questions can also be found in Appendix B.

**Olson's Idealistic Distortion Scale (OIS).** The Idealistic Distortion Scale is actually a subscale of Olson's (1985) ENRICH scale (Enriching and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness). The Idealistic Distortion subscale is a five-question scale which purports to measure how idealistic couples are. According to Olson, the scale has been well validated; he claims an internal consistency reliability score of .92 (n=1344) and a test-retest reliability of .92 (n=115, separated by 4 weeks). The range of possible scores on the test is 5-25, with higher
scores indicating more idealistic distortion. [See Appendix C.]

**Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LW).** The Locke-Wallace test is the most widely-used test of marital satisfaction in the marital/family literature, and has been successfully modified for use with premarital couples (Stephen, 1987). [See Appendix D.]

**Bienvenu’s Marital Communication Inventory (MCI).** Bienvenu’s scale is a 19-item scale concerning the perceived quality of marital communication. The scale includes such items as “Do you find it difficult to express your true feelings to your other?” and “Does your other have a tendency to express things which would be better left unsaid?” [For the purposes of this study, items were modified so as to be applicable to premarital relationships.] Bienvenu (1970) reports a split-half reliability of .93. The MCI has been used in 21 empirical articles and 43 dissertations since its publication in 1970, and is also widely used in both marital and premarital counseling (Schumm, Anderson, Race, Morris, Griffin, McCutchen, & Benigas, 1983). [See Appendix E.]

Participants were asked to complete the above scales (LW, MCI, and OIS) twice, giving (1) their perceptions and (2) their predictions of their partners’ perceptions.
Statistical analysis

The basic design for the study is a 2x2 manova with the various scores and combinations of scores on LW BMCI and OIS as the dependent variables with sex and geographic separation (LDR and SDR) as the independent variables. In addition, numerous t-tests were conducted on the demographic and interaction variables. Pearson-product moment correlations were also computed among several variables of interest. Each of these is explained fully in the results section.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Comparable Samples

Several analyses were undertaken in order to compare the LDR and SDR individuals on the variables of interest. However, before doing this it was necessary to ensure the two groups were comparable samples. Since previous research has suggested that age, length of relationship, and previous experience in relationships might be correlated with perceptual accuracy and satisfaction (e.g. Lloyd, 1984), the two groups were compared on these factors. No significant difference was found between the LDR and the SDR groups on any of these variables (see Table 1).

In addition, it was of interest to know if these three variables were significantly correlated with the major variables of interest in order to determine if these variables should be controlled for in subsequent analyses. No significant correlations were found between these three variables and the major variables (see Table 2). Since there were no
significant differences between the SDR and LDR groups on age, length of relationship, or previous relationship experience, and these variables were not correlated with the dependent variables of interest, they were not controlled for in subsequent analysis.

Scale Reliabilities

Scale reliabilities were computed for the three scales used in this study. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the Locke-Wallace MAT was 0.708; for Bienvenu's MCI, alpha = 0.704; and for Olson's Idealization Subscale, alpha = 0.704. Since each subject also completed the LW and MCI from their partner's perspective, reliability coefficients were computed for these as well; for LW, alpha = 0.679, and for MCI, alpha = 0.861.

Idealization (directly measured)

Research Question #1: Do long-distance individuals differ from short-distance individuals in terms of their scores on a direct measure of idealization?
H1: Long-distance individuals will score higher on direct measures of idealization than will short-distance individuals. For the entire sample, the subjects scored an average of 17 on Olson’s Idealization Subscale (possible range of scores is 5-25). In order to answer the above research question, a 2x2 manova was conducted with sex and geographic separation as the two independent variables and the score on the OIS as the dependent variable. No significant main effect for sex was found (F(1,138) = .16, ns, Wilk’s value = .99) nor was a significant interaction effect found (F(1,138) = .17, ns, Wilk’s value = .99). As predicted, a significant main effect was found for the variable of geographic separation (F(1,138) = 7.27, p < .0001, Wilk’s value = .86). A significant univariate effect was found for OIS (F(1,138) = 8.04, p < .005). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Satisfaction with the Relationship and with the Communication

Research Question #2: Does the satisfaction of individuals in long-distance relationships differ from that of individuals in short-distance relationships?
For the entire sample, the subjects scored an average of 113 for the LW scale (possible range of scores is 2-158), and an average of 39 for the BMCI (possible range of scores is 0-76).

H2a: Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will show greater amounts of satisfaction with the relationship and with their communication than will individuals in short-distance relationships. In order to answer this, a 2x2 manova was conducted with sex and geographic separation as the two independent variables and the scores on the two questionnaires as the dependent variables. No significant main effect for sex was found (F(1,138) = .16, ns, Wilk's value = .99) nor was a significant interaction effect found (F(1,138) = .17, ns Wilk's value = .99). As predicted, a significant main effect was found for the variable of geographic separation (F(1,138) = 7.27, p < .0001, Wilk's value = .86). A significant univariate effect was found for both variables, LW (F, (1,138) = 11.95, p < .001), and BMCI (F(1,138) = 21.40, p < .0001). Examination of the means revealed LDR individuals scored significantly higher on these two measures than did the SDR individuals (see Table 3). Thus, hypothesis 2a was supported.
Direct Perceptions of One’s Partner

H2b: Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will perceive their partner to be more satisfied than short-distance individuals perceive their partner to be. The question asked here concerns how individuals perceive their partner's scores on the two major scales. To answer this question, the same MANOVA design was utilized, except the dependent variables were the individuals' perceptions of their partners' responses to LW and BMCI. No significant main effect was found for sex (F(1,135) - 1.03, ns, Wilk's value = .98). Neither was there a significant interaction effect between sex and geographic separation (F(1,135) - .45, ns, Wilk's value = .98). Again, a significant main effect was found for geographic location (F(1,135) = 6.26, p. < .001, Wilk's value = .88). The univariate analysis revealed that LDR individuals reported higher scores for their partner on LW (F(1,135) = 14.94, p. < .0001) and on BMCI (F(1,135) = 13.77, p. < .0001). Thus, hypothesis 2b was supported.

H2c: Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will be more likely to perceive their partner's satisfaction to be similar to their own than will individuals involved in short-distance relationships.
Before examining perceived similarity, actual similarity was examined to form a basis of comparison. Pearson product moment correlations (see Table 4) reveal a significant correlation between individuals' own scores and their partners' scores. In other words, the scores of the two members of each couple on both of the measures tended to be correlated with each other. [This is consistent with early research on the marital adjustment scales, where correlations between husbands and wives have been found to range from .36 to .57 (Locke, 1951).]

Examining discrepancies between individuals' own scores and their partners' scores showed that the average subject received a 16 point difference from their partner on the LW scale (range of 0 to 71) and a 6 point difference on the BMCI scale (range of 0 to 21). T-tests were computed on the two partners' direct scores on each of these three variables. There were no significant differences in the partner's scores either of the measures. Means and standard deviations for these t-tests are reported in Table 5.

Before examining H2c for the two groups, it was of interest to know if people in general perceive their partners' satisfaction to be similar to their own satisfaction. Pearson product moment correlations (see Table
6) reveal a significant correlation between individual's own scores and their perceptions of their partner's scores. In other words, individuals' perceptions of their partner's satisfaction tend to be correlated with their perceptions of their own satisfaction.

In order to examine the congruence between an individual's own score and his/her perception of his/her partner's score more adequately (though the scores are correlated, the means may be different), the discrepancy between these scores was examined. The average subject perceived a 14 point difference to exist on the LW scale (range of 0 to 51) and a 5 point difference to exist on the BMCI (range of 0 to 23). T-tests were used to further examine perceived similarity. The tests revealed a significant difference between an individual's score and that individual's perception of his/her partner's score on each of these variables, and an examination of the means revealed that this was in a negative direction. In other words, the average individual perceived his/her partner's scores on these variables to be significantly lower than his/her own. Means and standard deviations for this analysis are reported in Table 7.

To examine differences in perceived similarity between the two groups, a 2x2 manova design was utilized, with sex and geographic
separation as the two independent variables and perceived similarity on the two scales as the dependent variables. No significant main effect was found for sex \(F(1,135) = .22, \text{ns, Wilk's value} = .97\). Neither was there a significant interaction effect between sex and geographic separation \(F(1,135) = .78, \text{ns, Wilk's value} = .99\). No significant main effect was found for geographic location \(F(1,135) = .85, \text{ns, Wilk's value} = .99\).

Thus, individuals were generally as satisfied as their other with the relationship and with the communication, yet they perceived their other to be less satisfied than they were. Furthermore, individuals in long-distance relationships were no more likely to perceive their partner to be similar to themselves than were individuals in short-distance relationships, thereby disconfirming H2c.

**Perceptual Accuracy**

**Research Question #3:** Do long-distance couples differ from couples that are not geographically separated in terms of perceptual accuracy?

The next issue concerns perceptual accuracy on the two scales, computed as the absolute value of the difference between an individual's
perception of their partner's score on a given measure, and their partner's actual score. Before differences between the two groups were examined, it was of interest to note if individuals in general accurately estimate their other's score on the two scales. First, a Pearson product moment correlation was conducted between a person's perception of his/her partner's score on each scale and his/her partner's actual score on that scale. Significant correlations were found for both scores (see Table 8).

A more direct examination of the difference between a person's perception of his/her partner's score on each scale and his/her partner's actual score on that scale revealed that the average subject perceived a 15 point difference on the LW scale (range of 0 to 73) and an average 7 point difference on BMCI (range of 0 to 24). A t-test examining the mean scores of a person's perception of his/her partner and the partner's actual score revealed significant differences on both variables. (Means, standard deviations, and t-values can be found in Table 9.) In other words, in both groups subjects perceived their partners to be less satisfied than their partners actually were.
H3: Individuals involved in long-distance relationships will hold less accurate images of their partner than individuals in short-distance relationships. The next manova examined the issue that was central to the entire investigation: whether or not the two groups (LDR and SDR) differed in terms of their perceptual accuracy. The same manova design was utilized. No significant main effect was found for sex (F(1,135) = .54, ns, Wilks value = .99) or for geographic location (F(1,135) = .34, ns, Wilk's value = .99). An interaction effect was not found either (F(1,135) = .71, ns, Wilk's value = .98). Thus, individuals involved in long distance relationships were no more likely to perceive their partner accurately or inaccurately than those involved in short distance relationships, thereby disconfirming H3. Since idealization has been defined in this paper as perceptual inaccuracy with a positive skew, and there were no significant differences between groups for perceptual accuracy, it was meaningless to see if the perceptual inaccuracy was in a positive or negative direction.

Interaction Patterns

Research Question #4: Do the interaction patterns of long-distance couples differ from those of couples that are not
geographically separated?

The next set of variables under consideration concerned measures of the individuals' perceptions of their interaction patterns. The specific hypothesis under this research question is as follows:

**H4: The communication of individuals involved in long-distance relationships will be more restricted than will the communication of individuals in short-distance individuals.**

Several t-tests were undertaken on the interaction variables (see Table 10). As would be expected, SDR individuals reported a significantly higher percentage of their interaction with their partners takes place face-to-face, while individuals in long-distance relationships reported that more of their interaction takes place over the phone and through letters. When examining the total number of minutes per week these individuals report spending talking on the phone, no significant difference was found, though the mean for short-distance individuals is higher. Individuals in SDRs also reported spending significantly more blocks of time together than did LDR individuals. The proportion of these blocks of time spent in focused versus unfocused interaction was also compared for the two groups. Though the difference on these two
variables was not significant, individuals in short-distance relationships reported a higher percentage of unfocused interaction time than did LDR individuals, and LDR individuals reported higher percentage of focused interaction time. Overall, these results support the view espoused in this study (H4) that communication is more restricted in long distance relationships.

Correlations

Research Question #5: What elements of communication are correlated with direct perceptions and perceptual inaccuracy?

Pearson product moment correlations were computed, comparing the major groups of variables (direct perceptions and perceptual accuracy) with reported satisfaction levels and the communication variables. [The correlation coefficients for each correlation, along with their significance levels, are reported in Table 11.]

H5a: The more an individual's communication is restricted, the more satisfied he/she will report being with his/her relationship and with his/her communication. The amount of interaction spent face-to-face was negatively correlated with idealization (OIS) and with satisfaction with
the communication (BMCI). A significant correlation was found between the amount of interaction that was through letters and all measures of satisfaction. No correlation was found between scores on any of the scales and the amount of communication that was spent either in focused or unfocused interaction. In addition, a negative correlation was found between the amount of interaction spent face-to-face and perceptions of one's partner's satisfaction. Overall, H4a was confirmed.

H5b: The more an individual describes his/her communication as being "restricted," the more inaccurate their perceptions of that other will be. Optimism/idealization (perceptual inaccuracy in a positive direction) regarding one's partner's relationship satisfaction (LW) was negatively correlated with the total amount of interaction spent on the telephone and the amount of time spent in focused interaction (the correlation for BMCI was not significant, but in the same direction). Overall, the more blocks of time (focused or unfocused) spent with one's partner, the more optimistic one is about his/her partner's satisfaction. However, the more time spent in focused interaction, the less optimistic one is about one's partner's satisfaction (all scales).
DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to determine if individuals in long-distance relationships were more idealized regarding their partner than individuals in short-distance relationships, and to see if differences in their interaction patterns might help to explain the results. Several hypotheses were confirmed, while others produced results that were quite surprising. The results of this study can be summarized succinctly as follows:

1.) Long-distance individuals score higher on a direct measure of idealization than do short-distance individuals. This confirms H1.

2.) Individuals in long-distance relationships show greater amounts of satisfaction with their relationships and with their relationships' communication than individuals in short-distance relationships. This confirms H2a.
3.) Individuals in long-distance relationships tend to perceive their partner as being more satisfied than people in short-distance relationships perceive their partner to be. This confirms H2b.

4.) Individuals in both types of relationships tend to be about as satisfied with the relationship and with the communication as their partner.

5.) Individuals in both groups tend to see their partner as being less satisfied with the relationship and the communication than they are. This disconfirms H2c, which hypothesized that long-distance individuals would be more likely to perceive their partner's satisfaction to be similar to their own.

6.) Individuals in both groups tend to be pessimistic about their partner's satisfaction; that is, they tend to underestimate how satisfied their partner is with the relationship and with the communication. This disconfirms H3, as long-distance individuals were no more likely to be pessimistic than were short-distance individuals.

7.) Communication is more restricted in long-distance relationships than it is in short-distance relationships. This confirms H4.
8.) The greater the percentage of an individual's communication with his/her other was face-to-face, the less satisfied he/she was. This can be interpreted as saying that a smaller proportion of face-to-face interaction allows one to maintain idealization. This confirms H5a.

9.) The smaller the percentage of an individual's communication with his/her other was face-to-face, the more satisfied he/she thought his/her partner was. This can be interpreted as saying that a smaller proportion of face-to-face interaction allows one to maintain an idealized view of one's other. This also confirms H5a.

10.) Satisfied long-distance individuals were much more likely to report a higher percentage of their interaction was through writing letters to each other than was anyone else. This indirectly confirms H5a.

11.) Spending more time in focused interaction (as opposed to unfocused interaction) was not correlated with an individual's satisfaction; it was, however, correlated with a more pessemistic view of one's other's satisfaction. This confirms H5b.
Before discussing the results mentioned above, it is interesting to note that despite warnings to the contrary (e.g., Lloyd et al. 1984), length of relationship was not significantly correlated with any of the major variables (including satisfaction) and so did not need to be controlled for. This may atest more to the homogeneity of the subjects in this study than it does refute the warnings of previous research.

The finding that long-distance individuals were more satisfied with their relationship and with their communication than were short-distance individuals raises several interesting questions. Why would long-distance individuals report being more satisfied? Is it possible that being separated from one's partner by hundreds of miles is actually better for the relationship than being close? Intuitively, one would think that individuals in long-distance relationships would be less satisfied—if not with their relationship in general, than at least with their communication. Yet the individuals in this study reported being not only as satisfied but more satisfied with their relationship than were short-distance individuals. Even more perplexing is the finding that long-distance individuals were more satisfied with their communication than were short-distance individuals. Previous qualitative studies on
long-distance relationships have found that long-distance individuals frequently complain about the lack of daily interaction and "small talk" (Infield & Stafford, 1987; Gerstel et al., 1984), and generally do not like their situation. Yet the long-distance individuals actually scored higher on the measure of communication used in this study, which asked such questions as, "Do you help your other to understand you by telling him/her how you think, feel, and believe?" and "Do you and your other ever sit down just to talk things over?" Since Bienvenu's MCI is intended to measure the perceived quality of the communication in the relationship, and does not deal with the issues of modality and frequency of communication--areas that are most likely to be dissatisfying for the long-distance couple--the MCI may not be completely adequate for measuring communication in long-distance relationships. Long-distance individuals may score very high on the items on the MCI, yet still be dissatisfied with their communication.

Despite the fact that long-distance individuals perceived their communication as more satisfying than did short-distance individuals (modality and frequency notwithstanding), the findings of this study seem to bear out the hypothesis (H4) that communication is restricted in
long-distance relationships. Indeed, the results paint a picture of relationships with communication that is substantially different than the communication of short-distance relationships, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Not surprisingly, individuals in long-distance relationships tend to, because of their geographic separation, spend more of their interaction over the phone and through letters than face-to-face, indicating a definite qualitative difference. Quantitative differences were found as well. Long-distance individuals report spending less blocks of time with their other. Furthermore—perhaps because of the prohibitive cost of long-distance telephone service—the long-distance individuals in this study did not spend any more time over the phone than did the short-distance individuals (they actually spent less time on the phone, although the difference was not significant). If more of the total interaction in long-distance relationships is over the phone, and even then, they spend less time over the phone than individuals in short-distance relationships, one can infer that their total amount of communication is less than the amount for short-distance individuals.

The finding that communication was more restricted in long-distance relationships has serious implications when taken together with the
finding that long-distance individuals were more satisfied than were short-distance individuals. Despite the criticisms of the self-disclosure construct mentioned earlier in this paper, communication scholars have long felt that the quality of communication in a relationship is positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Beinvenu, 1970). Yet the results of this study suggest a positive correlation between the restriction of communication and satisfaction (results 8 through 11 above). Indeed, the group with the "worst" (i.e., the most restricted) communication achieved the highest satisfaction scores.

Though causality cannot be determined, one might suspect that it may well be that the lack of face-to-face and focused interaction in long-distance relationships actually works out to the benefit of their satisfaction; that perhaps they are more satisfied because they do not have the opportunities to communicate that short-distance individuals do. This would be consistent with other results of this study; namely, the findings that the smaller the percentage of face-to-face interaction reported by the individual, the more satisfied one was and the more satisfied one perceived his or her partner to be (numbers 8 and 9 above), and that spending more time in focused interaction was found to
have a detrimental effect upon one's image of one's partner's satisfaction (number 11 above).

Speculations about causality notwithstanding, the finding that restricted communication and high satisfaction go together in long-distance relationships is precisely what the work of previous research on idealization would lead one to expect. As mentioned earlier in this study, researchers studying perceptual accuracy and idealization (e.g. Schulman, 1974; Taylor, 1967) have maintained that "faulty" or "blocked" communication can cause idealization to occur. According to these authors, idealized couples will of course score higher on measures of satisfaction such as the ones used in this study; however, this is because they hold faulty romantic notions about their partner which are created and maintained through blocked communication. This explains the results of this study very well. It is speculated that long-distance individuals are reporting more satisfaction than short-distance individuals because they are more idealized, and they are more idealized because their communication is more restricted. This is in congruence with the finding (number 1 above) that long-distance individuals scored higher on a direct measure of idealization.
Additional insight into idealization in long-distance relationships is offered through the application of conventional theories of communication. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) theory of Uncertainty Reduction maintains that a goal of interpersonal relationships is to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability regarding one's other, and that this process is dependent upon frequent communication. As the results of this study show, individuals in long-distance relationships do not engage in frequent communication--or at least, not as frequent as their short-distance counterparts. The implication of this finding is that due to the restricted communication of long-distance relationships, uncertainty reduction may not be taking place. Though further research is necessary to establish the relationship between communication frequency and uncertainty reduction in long-distance relationships, and establishing this was admittedly not a goal of this study, the application of this theory to long-distance relationships is certainly consistent with the idea that long-distance individuals are more idealized than are short-distance individuals. Though long-distance individuals have not had the kind of communication necessary to reduce their uncertainty regarding their partner, they think that they have, as evidenced by a
higher propensity to respond positively to items such as "My partner and I understand each other perfectly" (from Olson's Idealization Subscale). Uncertainty reduction is most likely not taking place in long-distance couples; idealization is.

The rest of the results of this study; namely, numbers four, five, and six above, are not as easily explained by current work on idealization. Taken together, these results tell us that though the two members of a couple are usually about as satisfied as each other with the relationship and with the communication, individuals tend to think that their partner is less satisfied than themselves. Furthermore, they think that their other is less satisfied than he or she actually is. This is true of individuals in both long-distance and short-distance relationships. In other words, individuals in this study were not idealized, or optimistic, regarding their partner's satisfaction; they were **pessimistic**.

It should be noted that pessimism in perceptions of one's other is not a new phenomenon. Schulman (1974) found as she was studying idealization in engaged couples that a number of them were pessimistic in their images of their partner. She suggested that further research examine the phenomenon, and left it at that. Yet serious questions
remain; most prominent among these regard why couples would be pessimistic about their partner's satisfaction in the first place. Perhaps the occurrence of pessimism in the present investigation is the result of social desirability. Individuals may be reacting to the perception that it is somehow bad to be idealized. It may be more socially desirable to come across as being more aloof and unattached than one's partner. This would be consistent with Hill et al.'s (1981) finding that people tend to attribute greater involvement to their partner and greater power to themselves. People may realize that coming across as more idealized is equivalent to admitting that they are somewhat powerless in the relationship. The effect of this is that when completing the questionnaires for the way they perceived their other's satisfaction, they may have felt that it is better to guess on the "low side" than to guess high and appear idealized.

It is precisely this social desirability that demands that studies of idealization utilize more sophisticated research designs. When one considers the way idealization has been measured in the past (explained in more detail earlier in this paper), it is clear that measures of idealization have been somewhat global and ambiguous, ranging from
describing general attributes of one's partner (e.g. Hill et al. 1976) to using general scales of love and romance to measure the amount of romantic feeling one has toward's one's partner (e.g. Dion et al. 1973; Sternberg et al. 1985).

The present investigation is not immune to this criticism. It may be safe to say that this study found that long-distance couples were more idealized than were short-distance couples, yet in some ways it did not operationalize the construct of idealization adequately. If idealization is perceptual inaccuracy with a positive skew, then this study should have measured the perceptions of individuals more carefully in order to determine whether they are accurate or not. Scales measuring general relationship satisfaction (such as the ones used in this study) are not adequate for the task; individuals need to be asked specific questions about their other in order to determine if they are seeing their partners accurately. There is a world of difference between asking someone to estimate whether or not they think their partner feels that his or her communication needs are being met (as the measure of communication satisfaction used in this study did), and asking them, say, to describe what specifically their partner enjoys talking about. The first type of
question allows an idealized couple to escape detection entirely. They will be identified as idealized only if one of the two says his or her needs are being met and their partner claims that they are not. Obviously, this would be a case of inaccurate perceptions. If they are both idealized, however, one of them would claim that his or her communication needs are being met perfectly, and their partner would agree that they are. The general measure of communication satisfaction used in this study would not be able to indicate that this couple is idealized.

If, however, on a specific measure of communication both members of a couple claim that they enjoy talking about the same things, and--when asked to specifically describe their communication--they offer two totally different lists of topics that they discuss, one can more safely say that they are idealized regarding their communication.

To summarize, in order to measure idealization, individuals in romantic relationships need to be asked if they perceive agreement to exist in very specific areas of their relationship, and then asked very specific questions about their other to determine if they really do agree in these areas. If a large discrepancy exists between perceived agreement and actual agreement, and if this discrepancy is in a positive
direction, then it can be said that the couple is suffering from the effects of idealization.

Despite its shortcomings, the present investigation has made several contributions to the literature. The first of these is the finding that pessimistic views regarding one's other may be more prevalent among dating couples than are overly optimistic ones. Whether or not this is actually the case or simply the effects of social desirability, pessimism in romantic relationships is a totally neglected topic in the literature, and deserves to be researched more thoroughly. Second, the methods for examining idealization need to be revised if the construct is to be operationalized adequately. Perceptual inaccuracies may be present in romantic couples, but they may also be eluding research which utilizes broad, ambiguous measures.

The third and perhaps most important contribution of this study is the conclusion that individuals in long-distance relationships suffer more from the effects of idealization than do individuals in short-distance relationships due to their restricted communication. This suggests that the warnings of premarital researchers and counselors regarding idealization are particularly applicable to the long-distance
couple. It is hoped that the findings of this study can help researchers and counselors meet their goals.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix A:

Demographic Questions

1. Are you male or female? ___ male ___ female
2. How old are you? _____

3. We are interested in the length of time you and your other spent at different stages of your relationship. Please estimate the amount of time the two of you spent at each of the stages below. (Answer "0" for those stages the two of you never went through.)
   ______ know each other before dating
   ______ dating, but not exclusively (while in same geographical area)
   ______ dating exclusively (while in same geographical area)
   ______ dating long distance, but not exclusively
   ______ dating long distance exclusively
   ______ engaged long distance
   ______ engaged (while in same geographical area)
   ______ living together but unmarried

[NOTE: The individual items under number 3 were summed to obtain an estimate of the total length of time the couple had been dating.]

4. Prior to this relationship, in how many "serious" romantic relationships had you been involved? _____
Appendix B:

Questions Regarding Interaction Patterns

Different couples have different ways of spending their time together. Please indicate how many times during the last month you and your other have spent an entire morning, afternoon, or evening doing each of the following:

1. ____ Together but engaged in separate tasks or activities (e.g. both of you reading in the same room)
2. ____ Alone together engaged in the same activity (e.g. going to a movie, out to dinner, watching TV together, etc.)

[NOTE: Items 1 and 2 were summed to obtain an estimate of the total number of blocks of time the couple spent together in the previous month. Each of the above items was then divided by that total to obtain an estimate of the proportion of time spent in unfocused (#1) and focused (#2) interaction.]

3. In an average month, what percentage of your interaction is:
   ____ face to face
   ____ over the phone
   ____ through letters
   ____ other: ______________

4. How often do you talk to each other on the phone each week, on the average?
   ____ less than once a week (How often? ____)
   ____ once a week
   ____ twice a week
   ____ 3 times a week
   ____ 4 times a week
   ____ 5 times a week
   ____ 6 times a week
   ____ 7 times a week
   ____ more (____)

5. The average phone call lasts: ______________

[NOTE: Items 4 and 5 were multiplied to obtain an estimate of the amount of time spent talking on the telephone in the average week.]
Appendix C:
Olson's Idealization Distortion Subscale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. My partner and I understand each other completely. 5 4 3 2 1
2. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood. 5 4 3 2 1
3. Our relationship is a perfect success. 5 4 3 2 1
4. I have some needs that are not being met by our relationship. 5 4 3 2 1
5. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment. 5 4 3 2 1
Appendix D: Locke Wallace MAT Adapted for Premarital Couples

1. Check the dot on the scale below which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness which most people get from relationships, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those who are very unhappy in relationships, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy in relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Unhappy</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Perfectly Happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always Agree</td>
<td>Almost Agree</td>
<td>Occasionally Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Handling finances
3. Matters of recreation
4. Demonstrations of affection
5. Friends
6. Sex relations
7. Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct)
8. Philosophy of life
9. Ways of dealing with each other's family

10. When disagreements arise, they usually result in:
    ______ male partner giving in
    ______ female partner giving in
    ______ agreement by mutual give and take

11. Do you and your other engage in outside interests together?
    ______ all of them
    ______ some of them
    ______ very few of them
    ______ none of them

12. Do you ever wish you had not dated your other?
    ______ frequently
    ______ occasionally
    ______ rarely
    ______ never

13. In leisure time do you generally prefer:
    ______ to be "on the go"
    ______ to stay at home

Does your other generally prefer:
    ______ to be "on the go"
    ______ to stay at home

14. If you had your life to live over, do you think you would:
    ______ date the same person
    ______ date a different person
    ______ not date at all

15. Do you confide in your other:
    ______ almost never
    ______ rarely
    ______ in most things
    ______ in everything

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Appendix E:  
Beinvenu's Marital Communication Inventory Adapted for Premarital Couples

[NOTE: The higher the score, the better. Items 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, and 19 are reversed.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USUALLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does your other have a tendency to say things which would be better left unsaid?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you find your other's tone of voice irritating?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does your other complain that you don't understand him/her?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does your other insult you when s/he gets angry with you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you fail to express disagreement with him/her because you're afraid s/he will get angry?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does it upset you a great deal when your other gets angry at you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you hesitate to discuss certain things with your other because you're afraid s/he might hurt your feelings?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you find it difficult to express your true feelings to him/her?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Is it easier to confide in a friend rather than your other?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Does s/he seem to understand your feelings?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Do you help your other to understand you by telling him/her how you think, feel, and believe?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Does your other nag you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Do you feel s/he says one thing but really means another?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Do you pretend you're listening to your other when actually you are not really listening?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Does s/he try to lift your spirits when you're depressed or discouraged?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Does your other accuse you of not listening to what s/he says?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Do you and your other engage in outside interests and activities together?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Are you and your other able to disagree with one another without losing your tempers?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you and your other ever sit down just to talk things over?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B-MCI
Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Possible Nuisance Variables by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SDR(^a)</th>
<th>LDR(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20.85</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship</td>
<td>27.64</td>
<td>27.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Previous Relationships</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a_n = 74. \ ^b_n = 68.\)

*** \(p < .001. \ **) \(p < .01. \ *) \(p < .05.\)

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Possible Nuisance Variables and the Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Locke-Wallace</th>
<th>MCI</th>
<th>OIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of Subject</td>
<td>-.1106</td>
<td>.0137</td>
<td>-.1362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship</td>
<td>.1284</td>
<td>-.0679</td>
<td>-.0188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Previous Relationships</td>
<td>-.1528*</td>
<td>-.0624</td>
<td>-.0917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** \(p < .001. \ **) \(p < .01. \ *) \(p < .05.\)
Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for scores on LW and MCI by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>SDR&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>LDR&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locke Wallace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT***</td>
<td>107.53</td>
<td>86.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>***</td>
<td>36.62</td>
<td>29.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup><sub>n = 74</sub>,<sup>b</sup><sub>n = 68</sub>.

*** p. < .001, ** p. < .01, *p. < .05.

Table 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Subject's Score and Other's Score on the Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Locke-Wallace</th>
<th>Bienvenu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locke-Wallace MAT</td>
<td>.428***</td>
<td>.341***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI</td>
<td>.368***</td>
<td>.438***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p. < .001, ** p. < .01, *p. < .05.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for Subject's Score on Major Variables vs. Subject's Partner's Score on Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Self&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Other&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locke Wallace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT</td>
<td>113.09</td>
<td>20.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.39</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup><sub>n = 142</sub>,<sup>b</sup><sub>n = 142</sub>.

*** p. < .001, ** p. < .01, *p. < .05.
Table 6

**Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Subject's Score on Major Variables and Subject's Perception of Other's Score on Major Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Locke-Wallace</th>
<th>Bienvenu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locke-Wallace MAT</td>
<td>.626***</td>
<td>.585***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI</td>
<td>.579***</td>
<td>.773***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p. < .001. ** p. < .01. *p. < .05.

Table 7

**Means and Standard Deviations for Subject's Score on Major Variables vs. Subject's Perception of Other's Score on Major Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Self&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Perception of Other&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locke-Wallace MAT***</td>
<td>113.09</td>
<td>20.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI***</td>
<td>39.39</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>n = 142. <sup>b</sup>n = 142.

***p. < .001. ** p. < .01. *p. < .05.
Table 8

Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Subject's Perception of Other's Score and Other's Actual Score on Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Locke-Wallace</th>
<th>Bienvenu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locke-Wallace MAT</td>
<td>.493***</td>
<td>.409***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI</td>
<td>.354***</td>
<td>.471***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05.

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations for Subject's Perception of Partner's Score on Major Variables vs. Partner's Actual Score on Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Perception of Other a</th>
<th>Other's Actual Score b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locke Wallace MAT**</td>
<td>108.74</td>
<td>20.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bienvenu's MCI**</td>
<td>37.49</td>
<td>8.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 142. b n = 142.

***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05.
Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Communication Variables by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SDR&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>LDR&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Spent Face to Face***</td>
<td>72.97</td>
<td>26.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Spent Over the Phone***</td>
<td>26.13</td>
<td>45.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Through Letters***</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>23.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Minutes Spent on Phone per Week</td>
<td>249.92</td>
<td>177.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Interactions per Month (Blocks)**</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>12.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interactions/Month Focused</td>
<td>61.67</td>
<td>68.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interactions/Month Unfocused</td>
<td>37.61</td>
<td>31.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup><sub>n = 74</sub>, <sup>b</sup><sub>n = 68</sub>. ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.
Table 11

Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Communication Variables and Major Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>MCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Spent Face to Face</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.228**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Spent Over the Phone</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interaction Through Letter</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Minutes Spent on Phone per Week</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Interactions per Month (Blocks)</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interactions/Month Focused</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Interactions/Month Unfocused</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.