

SPOUSE OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY:
REPORTS OF THE IMPACT OF SPOUSAL BEHAVIOR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Mark A. Slater
May 1983

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral marital researchers and therapists have used spouses themselves as observers of their partners' behavior for more than a decade. Lately, however, several researchers have questioned the basic assumptions underlying spouse observation techniques. The present study attempts to improve spouse observation methodology and reinterpret the data that it provides. Cognitive and communication models of marital interaction are employed to reconceptualize spouse observation reports, and hypotheses derived from these models are investigated. The results of this research indicate that spouse observations are best understood as proximal self-reports of the impact of spousal behavior, and not as objective reports of the actual events that transpire in a marriage. Exploratory analyses of spouses' idiosyncratic interpretations of their partners' behavior also indicate important cognitive processes that are involved in marital functioning. The implications of these findings for marital therapy and research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

The Spouse Observation Checklist (SOC) has enjoyed a long and fruitful history of use in behavioral marital research and therapy. Lately, however, several researchers have questioned the basic assumptions underlying this instrument, and spouse observation in general. Recent attempts have been made to improve spouse observation methodology and reinterpret the data it provides. Unfortunately, each of the suggested approaches has been fairly vague and lacks specific guidelines. The present effort attempts to implement the general suggestions of previous researchers and determine on an empirical basis the utility of spouse observation data. This study provides the initial groundwork necessary for more extensive systematic examination of the complex relationship between spouse observation and marital functioning.

Recent research indicates that spouse observations cannot be considered objective measures of behavior. Rather, spouse observation data should be treated as self-reports which "may tell more about the raters than those who are rated" (Vincent & Slater, 1982). With this conceptual move toward viewing spouse observation as a particular form of self-report, investigators have assumed

that the traditional checklist of spouse behaviors, with a priori categorization of items as either "pleasing" or "displeasing," is no longer appropriate. Since spouse observation measures appear to be tapping subjective interpretations of spousal behavior, it further has been assumed that allowing spouses to indicate the affective valence of rated events would be preferable to a mere frequency count of behaviors.

These assumptions, while face valid, have not been subjected to empirical scrutiny. The present study investigates the veracity of these assumptions by comparing the relationships between three methods of collecting spouse observation data and multiple measures of marital satisfaction and functioning. In addition, several exploratory analyses are conducted. Subjective reports of the impact of spousal behavior are studied via correlational analysis as an initial step in exploring hypotheses derived from a cognitive behavioral model of marriage. While strictly correlational in nature, these preliminary investigations should prove useful in delineating critical processes in marital functioning and in providing well-articulated hypotheses for further research.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's behaviorally oriented marital researchers and therapists turned to spouses themselves as observers of marital behavior (Slater & Vincent, 1983). Since that time couples have provided a wealth of spouse-collected data which has proven useful in both basic and applied research as well as in therapy. As background to the present study what has been learned about spouse observation methodology over the past decade will be reviewed. The development of this approach, its usefulness in studying marital behavior, as well as critical assumptions and problems of spouse observation will be discussed. Finally, a new approach to conceptualizing spouse observation will be presented, along with research hypotheses derived from this new approach.

Review of Previous Literature:

Objective, direct measures of behavior have been a trademark of behavioral approaches to marital research and therapy (cf. Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Stuart, 1980; Weiss & Margolin, 1977; Weiss, 1980). This preference has arisen largely out of skepticism over the validity of self-report data. Self-report methods have been criticized on a host of

grounds, including their susceptibility to response biases, reactivity, and social desirability sets, as well as the fact that spousal reports of the marriage relationship may be distorted by their subjective nature (cf. Weiss & Margolin, 1977; Cone, 1967; 1971; Edmonds, Withers & Dibatasta, 1972; Hawkins, 1966; Messerly, 1979; Anastasi, 1976, pp. 515-526). As an alternative to self-report measures, many marital researchers and clinicians have attempted to develop and implement complex observational systems designed to assess the actual behavior of spouses (e.g. Hops, Wills, Patterson & Weiss, 1972; Gottman, 1979). These methods, while providing a great deal of useful information, are extremely expensive to implement and maintain. Moreover, observational systems are quite limited in both the range of behaviors assessed and the contexts in which they may be applied.

The use of spouses as observers of their partners' behavior appeared to be the ideal alternative to direct observation by trained others. Spouse observation minimized the cost of data collection and concomitantly extended the range of both behaviors and situations which could feasibly be assessed, while supposedly eliminating the subjective nature of self-report. The fact that two potential observers are always available to monitor behavior within each marital interaction was very appealing from a reliability standpoint. Thus, it was believed that spouse

observation would provide comprehensive information about the behavioral environment of marital interactions with a minimum of practical problems.

The initial and prototypic instrument using this approach was the Spouse Observation Checklist (SOC) (Patterson, 1976; Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973; Weiss & Margolin, 1977). Although other methods of spouse observation have been devised (cf. Robinson & Price, 1980; Stuart, 1969; Rappaport & Harrell, 1972) the SOC has been the most extensively studied of any such procedure and is the spouse observation device used in the present study.

The SOC consists of 451 behavioral items which have been categorized a priori as either "pleasing" or "displeasing." Items refer to either dyadic behavior (e.g. "We listened to music on the radio or stereo," "We worked on the budget") or spouse behavior (e.g. "Spouse rejected my sexual advances," "Spouse prepared a meal"). SOC items have been classified into twelve content areas of marital interaction: companionship, affection, sex, consideration, communication process, coupling activities, child care, household management, financial decision making, employment, personal habits, and self-spouse independence. Typically, each spouse goes through the entire inventory independently each evening, indicating those items which occurred during the previous twenty-four hour period. This procedure is then repeated on consecutive days.

The SOC has been used in several basic research studies of marital behavior. In an early validation study, Birchler, Weiss and Vincent (1975) compared distressed and nondistressed couples on data collected with the SOC. The ratio of pleases to displeases significantly distinguished the two groups. Distressed spouses in this study reported a mean ratio of four pleasing events to every displeasing one. By contrast, nondistressed spouses reported a mean ratio of thirty pleasing events to every displeasing one.

Wills, Weiss and Patterson (1974) used SOC data to examine the behavioral correlates of global marital satisfaction. In this study couples completed the SOC daily and also rated their global satisfaction with their marriages three times daily (morning, afternoon, evening). These investigators found pleasing events to be positively correlated with ratings of daily satisfaction and displeasing events to be negatively related. However, displeasing events accounted for a far greater proportion of the variance in daily marital satisfaction.

The SOC was also the principle instrument in an interesting series of investigations designed to test hypotheses derived from behavioral models of marital satisfaction (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (a); Jacobson, Waldron & Moore, 1980; Vincent, Cook & Messerly, 1980; Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974). In this context Jacobson (1979) raised the possibility that distressed and nondistressed couples

differ in their reactivity to recent events in their marriages. "Reactivity" was defined as "the tendency for marital satisfaction to vary according to the frequency of recently-occurring positive or negative events" (Jacobson, Follette & McDonald, 1982). Distressed couples were expected to be more reactive to recent events than happily married couples. Jacobson, Waldron and Moore (1980) and Margolin (1981), using the methodology of Wills, et al. (1974) observed that distressed spouses exhibit greater reactivity to their partners' negative behavior than nondistressed spouses. However, neither study found significant differences between groups on measures of reactivity to positive behavior. In a more recent study, Jacobson, Follette and McDonald (1982), using the SOC with a larger sample and improved methodology, reported evidence that distressed couples were more reactive to both negative and positive events in their marriages than nondistressed couples.

Finally, the SOC has been cited as an outcome measure in marital therapy research. SOC data has been used to evaluate treatment effectiveness in case reports (Margolin, Christensen & Weiss, 1975), uncontrolled group studies (Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973), single subject experimental investigations (Jacobson, 1979), and controlled group studies (Margolin & Weiss, 1978). In general, the frequency

of pleasing events increased and the frequency of displeasing events decreased from pre- to post-treatment.

The clinical utility of spouse observation was initially explored by Stuart in 1967 (Stuart, 1967). His position was that unhappily married individuals become inordinantly adept at tracking their spouses' negative behaviors. Consequently, unhappy spouses have ample justification for their feelings of dissatisfaction. Stuart suggested that by enabling couples to refocus their attention on positive events in the marriage--assuming that procedures like contracting had previously been initiated to increase the frequency of such behaviors--one could provide a new pool of information from which positive feelings about the relationship may develop.

Since Stuart's work, spouse observation methods have figured prominently in most behavioral marital therapies. Data from such methods have been useful for more than just monitoring treatment progress and outcome. They aid both therapists and clients in identifying the specific content of marital difficulties. They also may serve as important catalysts to change in spousal affect and cognition. Finally, information gathered by spouse observation may provide a base upon which communication and problem-solving skills, as well as relationship negotiation skills, may be established and improved. Jacobson and Margolin (1979), in their recent book on marital therapy, have described several

creative methods by which therapists may aid couples to increase positive behavior by using information from the SOC.

The past ten years of spouse observation, however, have not been problem free. Recent work by Christensen (Christensen & Nies, 1980; Christensen, Sullaway & King, 1983) and Jacobson (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (b)) has uncovered rather serious concerns about the reliability of this methodology. Considering each spouse to be an independent observer of the same marital events, these researchers calculated interobserver agreement statistics on spouse observation. Depending on the sample examined, and the specific behaviors in question, these statistics have ranged from .11 to .67 when based on percentage agreement and .21 to .61 when based on kappa. Though interobserver reliability coefficients for spouse observation have generally been significantly above chance (averaging approximately .50) they are well below the generally acceptable levels for observational assessment systems (.70 to 1.00).

More critically, interspouse reliability tends to be highest for specific, molecular, public events which require a low degree of inference--for example, "We went out to a movie." Conversely, agreement tends to be the lowest on more general, molar, or private events which require a high degree of inference--such as, "We spent an enjoyable evening

at home." Unfortunately, this latter group of items tap the very events which spouses rate as most critical to their relationships (Christensen, Sullaway & King, 1983). Finally, some of the items with low interobserver reliability--for example those in the communication category--have been shown to be highly correlated with subjective ratings of marital satisfaction and are among the best discriminators of distressed and nondistressed couples (Jacobson, Waldron & Moore, 1980; Margolin, 1981).

Additional reliability problems have been found as well. Both Christensen (Christensen & Nies, 1980) and Jacobson (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (b)) found that reliability tends to be lower for distressed couples than for nondistressed ones. This point raises an important confound in research comparing spouse observation scores between distressed and nondistressed couples. Moreover, spouse observation data, regardless of its reliability, may not provide a very accurate account of actual marital behaviors. Robinson and Price (1980) report that spouses tend to disagree with independent trained observers as to what behaviors they observe during marital interactions. However, these findings are based on a rather small sample, the measurement of a limited range of behaviors, and the use of an observational coding system that requires extensive training for reliable coding and thus may underestimate

spouses' ability to collect accurate, reliable data (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (b)).

One should expect spouse observation data to be vulnerable to all the problematic methodological issues of any observational assessment method--such as observer bias, observer drift, and reactivity (cf. Johnson & Bolstad, 1973). Data on observational rating systems from other areas, such as the evaluation of assertiveness (Gormally, 1982) and parental ratings of child behavior (Griest, Wells & Forehand, 1979; Meese, Stollak, Larson & Michaels, 1979; Emery, 1982), indicate that rater involvement, rater characteristics, and the context in which ratings are made can have a powerful effect on behavioral ratings. Further, Gormally (1982) reported that competitive, or no win situations--as well as conflictual interactional styles and personal characteristics--affect ratings. Given the level of personal investment in intimate relationships and the strife and discord of marital distress it is likely that spouse observation data represent rather biased accounts of marital activities.

To complicate matters, the behaviors which spouses daily observe and report may provide little information about the manner in which they arrive at their subjective feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Spouse observation data typically account for only about twenty-five to thirty percent of the variance in ratings of

marital satisfaction over the same units of time (Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973). Thus, irrespective of the reliability or accuracy of spouse observation, these data would suggest that a great deal more than mere reports of daily marital events contribute to a couple's perception of the quality of their relationship.

Spouse observation procedures have been problematic in the clinical arena as well. Recall Jacobson's findings (Jacobson, Follette & McDonald, 1982) that distressed couples may be more reactive to immediate events in their relationship than nondistressed couples. Similarly, Gottman (Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, Yoppi & Rubin, 1976) suggests that many unhappy marital relationships are characterized by an exchange orientation; whereas happy couples are less concerned with specific exchanges and operate under what he terms a "bank account" model of marital interaction. Instructing couples to carefully observe one another's behavior (and perhaps alter the frequency of such behavior contingently) may inadvertently enhance their reactivity to immediate events and highlight exchange patterns in the marriage. This procedure may thus "therapeutically" reinforce propensities which are more characteristic of marital distress than marital bliss.

Further, clinicians who encourage spouse observation often face nearly insurmountable resistance from distressed spouses; especially those with strong ambivalence about

marital therapy. Besides basic resistance to the task, the tedium of completing long checklists daily (the SOC contains 451 items) is usually aversive enough to warrant compliance problems. At the very best, encouraging spouses to collect such data may deplete the client's resources for compliance, as well as the clinician's therapeutic leverage, on an exercise which may not be central to the aims of the treatment (Vincent & Slater, 1982).

The indiscriminant use of spouse monitoring has also been cautioned against by Weiss (1980). He argues that some types of behavior are best regulated by response control, as opposed to rule control. Sex, affection, companionship, and coupling activities are primary examples of this kind of behavior. Positive behaviors tend to be more pleasing to spouses when they occur spontaneously, without spouses feeling that they, or their partners, "have to" perform them. Encouraging distressed couples to focus their attention on such events, especially if attempts are made to change the frequency of these events, may inadvertently shift them to rule control and drastically alter their affective valence.

Along the same lines, the Spouse Observation Checklist in particular has been a focal point for criticisms of behavioral marital therapy in general. For example, Gurman and Knudson (Gurman, 1978; Gurman & Knudson, 1978) have criticized behavioral approaches to marital therapy for

encouraging the repression of negative emotions, based on an analysis of items from the SOC. They argue that several of the behaviors labelled as displeasing on the SOC can potentially be important ways to express feelings, define relationships, and communicate respect. These authors feel that by labeling these behaviors as "displeasing" therapists implicitly set them up as targets for reduction or elimination. According to Gurman and Knudson (1978), this procedure leads to the repression of these behaviors and is thereby destructive to the process of change in distressed relationships.

What can be done to ameliorate this problematic situation? It has been proposed that low frequency items should be eliminated from spouse observation measures and couples should be more carefully trained to provide accurate data, in order to shore up the interobserver reliability of spouse observation (Christensen & Nies, 1980).

Alternatively, high inference items--those associated with the poorest reliability--could be dropped in favor of low-inference/high-reliability items. Unfortunately, any of these improvements in inter-rater reliability probably will come at the expense of eliminating critical information about the most important interactions in the relationship while retaining trivial--although reliable--information of little importance (Vincent & Slater, 1982).

A more appealing approach is to reconceptualize the nature of spouse observation data (Slater & Vincent, 1983). The first step is to dispense with the idea that spouse observation represents an objective measure of behavior and to consider the discrepancy between spouses in recall, interpretation, and affective weighting of behavior as an important target of study in its own right. Note the absurdity in expecting spouses to provide accurate, objective, and reliable accounts of the details of their interactions within the highly complex, comprehensive, intimate, and personal relationship called marriage.

A conceptual move toward viewing spouse observation as a particular form of self-report is needed to eliminate the methodological problems inherent in interpreting these data as objective, accurate observations (Slater & Vincent, 1983). This shift in understanding treats the divergence between spouse ratings, as well as the cognitive processes by which these ratings are generated, as important points of focus for the clinician and researcher (Vincent & Slater, 1982). Viewing spouse observation as a measure of the effect of spouse behavior on the partner, rather than a measure of the actual behavior emitted, is a critical step forward in the attempt to understand marital relationships. Further, spouse observation has demonstrated acceptable reliability as a self-report measure (Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974; Jacobson, Waldron & Moore, 1980). This

view of spouse observation as a particular form of self-report allows the data obtained by such methods to be interpreted in a whole new way.

Richard Lazarus and his colleagues (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman & Lazarus, in press; Coyne & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1966; 1975; 1981; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Lazarus, Kanner & Folkman, 1980; Lazarus, Averill & Opton, 1970; Kanner, Coyne, Schaeffer & Lazarus, 1981) have proposed an intriguing cognitive model of behavior that may be quite useful in understanding spouse observation data. These authors view responses on behavioral checklists not as reports of mere events only, but also of how the subjects felt about what happened. Thus, the endorsement of items is heavily weighted by appraisals of the meaning and significance of the interaction. These appraisals are based in part on existing commitments, beliefs, experiences, and expectations (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman & Lazarus, in press).

Lazarus also makes an important distinction between proximal and distal measures of various environments. The proximal-distal distinction refers to conceptual proximity "to experience, to perception, to interpretation, or to psychological response" (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman & Lazarus, in press). Proximal environments usually involve personal meanings--the most proximal being the perceived environment of immediate significance to the individual.

DeLongis and his associates (in press) assert that proximal measures are more strongly related to actual behavior than distal measures, and that they are more accessible to modification than the latter.

Using this distinction spouse observations would constitute a proximal measure of marital interaction. As such they are best conceptualized as reports of the impact of spouse behaviors, rather than reports of the behaviors themselves. Thus, from spouse observation data one is allowed a glimpse at the perceptual, affective, and cognitive interpretations spouses make of the meaning and significance of their partners' behavior. Given this perspective, spouse observation must be viewed as a highly complex process involving a great deal more than merely storing and retrieving accurate representations of daily marital events. This conceptualization of spouse observation data as proximal self-report accurately suggests that spouse reports are intimately related to marital functioning and unveils an important and complex cognitive process for future investigation.

Lazarus' cognitive model of emotions (Lazarus, 1966; 1968; 1975; Lazarus, Averill & Opton, 1970) is well-suited to spouse observation research. From this perspective, spousal interpretations are constantly being mediated by social and psychological processes. Moreover, while emotions arise from and reflect the nature of marital

transactions, personal attributes shape spousal interpretations of, and reactions to, these transactions--as well as alter and determine the transactions themselves. Thus, similar events may be construed differently by spouses because of different personality dispositions. It is therefore argued that subtle differences in cognitive appraisals of marital interactions underlie variations among spouses in somatic and affective behavior, as well as in overt behavior that in turn alters the marital environment.

Lazarus' conceptualization of self-report is heavily reliant upon Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1935; 1936; 1946; 1951). His position also parallels those of many attribution theorists (e.g. Weiner, 1974) and communication theorists (Borman, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Pike, 1966; LaRusso, 1973; Gottman, Notarius, Gonso & Markman, 1976). Finally, this notion of marital behavior being determined by the manner in which spouses' construe their partners' behavior is reminiscent of George Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955; 1958). Perhaps communication theory provides the clearest model of spouse interaction. Under this rubric distinctions are made between the communicator's intent, the message sent, the message received, and the impact of the message. Further, concepts which have been borrowed by communication theorists from computer science, such as information processing, input/output, servomechanisms, and feedback loops, can be useful for

organizing, understanding, and explaining marital interactions. By adopting a broad definition of communication, which encompasses all marital behavior, this model can be viewed as an applicable adjunct to Lazarus' cognitive perspective.

Research Hypotheses:

The cognitive and communication models discussed above, in conjunction with the remainder of the literature reviewed on spouse observation, suggest many important issues for research. The present study addresses two specific questions concerning spouse observation methodology: 1) What is the value of obtaining self-reports of the affective valence of spouse observed events? and 2) What is the significance of affective interpretations of spousal behavior which are discrepant from the commonly accepted connotations of these events? The present investigations are understood and interpreted from the perspective of a cognitive-communication model of spouse observation.

Adopting the position that spouse observation methods tap proximal self-reports of the impact of spouse behavior has direct implications for spouse observation methodology. From this perspective, it follows that allowing spouses to report the affective valence of rated events should be preferable to a priori assignment of events to discrete affective categories. By obtaining self-reports of the

affective impact of spousal behavior one may explicitly and directly tap the subjective manner in which spouses construe each other's behavior. Thus, weighting spouse observed events with self-reported affective ratings should provide a more valid assessment of the marital relationship than mere frequency counts of behaviors given affective weightings a priori by the investigator. If this is the case, one would expect spouse observations with self-reported affective valence ratings to be more strongly related to marital satisfaction and functioning than traditional spouse observations based on an a priori categorization of items.

While other researchers (Vincent, Cook & Messerly, 1980; Jacobson, Follette & McDonald, 1982) have assumed that allowing spouses to indicate the affective valence of rated events is preferable to mere frequency counts of behaviors, this assumption has not been evaluated empirically. The present study tests the relative validities of three methods of spouse observation by comparing the proportion of the variance in multiple measures of marital accord that each is able to explain. It is hypothesized that spouse observations with self-reported affective valence ratings will explain a significantly greater proportion of the variance in marital accord than spouse observation with a priori ratings of items.

A cognitive-communication model also has implications for understanding the effects of unique affective ratings of

marital events. Spouses may construe their partners' behavior in culturally uncommon ways. As these idiosyncratic interpretations become discrepant from common meanings the potential for misunderstanding and conflict is increased. Hence, the impact of spousal behavior may be quite different from the intent of the spouse emitting it. Since marital behavior is determined by the impact of events, rather than the events themselves, responses to spousal behavior which are not in accordance with the expectations of the spouse become likely. Further, self-perpetuating cycles of misunderstanding and conflict may result from such discrepant expectations and behaviors.

Given this model, idiosyncratic affective ratings of spousal behavior should be related to several critical measures of marital functioning in a predictable manner. In the present study idiosyncratic affective interpretations of events are defined as the tendency of spouses to override the manifest content of the Spouse Observation Checklist and report affective valence ratings contrary to the a priori categorization of the items. Due to the method of construction of the SOC (the items were selected and categorized by a panel of twelve judges to represent commonly agreed upon affective ratings of marital behavior) this instrument provides an adequate measure of the typical, "commonly accepted," affective impact of the marital events rated. The extent to which spouses find it necessary to

override these "commonly accepted" ratings of events and report different affective ratings should be an appropriate measure of idiosyncratic interpretations of spousal behavior.

Given the potential for misunderstanding and conflict among spouses who exhibit a tendency to interpret each other's behavior in uncommon ways, it is hypothesized that this tendency is related to measures of marital discord. Further, divergent expectations and interpretations are most clearly evident in the communication and problem-solving arena. Thus, it is hypothesized that the tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC with unique personal interpretations of spousal behavior is related to communication and problem-solving difficulties, as assessed by direct observation of marital interactions.

A cognitive-communication model of marital interaction may also increase one's understanding of the intracouple reliability of spouse observation reports. Recall Jacobson's (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (b)) and Christensen's (Christensen & Nies, 1980) reports that distressed couples tend to exhibit lower interspouse agreement on spouse observation measures than nondistressed couples. However, these authors merely analyzed interspouse agreement regarding the occurrence of marital events. The present study attempts to replicate and extend this finding by looking at interspouse agreement for both the occurrence and

the affective valence of reported events. Hence, it is hypothesized that the tendency for spouses to disagree as to either the occurrence or the affective valence of reported events is negatively related to marital accord. Thus, irrespective of whether spouses agree with the a priori ratings of events, it is hypothesized that intracouple agreement is critical to marital functioning.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Subjects:

The present investigation is part of a larger longitudinal study of married couples' transition into parenthood which has been described elsewhere (Vincent, Cook & Messerly, 1980; Vincent, Cook and Brady, 1981). Thirty couples were recruited for the study from Lamaze classes at a private obstetrical-gynecological clinic in Houston, Texas. Subjects were selected during the last trimester of pregnancy. To be included in the study each couple had to be expecting their first child and be free of any major medical problems facing the mother or child. Fifty-eight couples expressed interest in participating, of which twenty-eight did not complete data collection (six due to medical problems, seven lost interest, and fifteen were dropped due to failure to complete one or more instruments).

Characteristics: Subjects averaged 4.5 years married. The average age of the husbands was 30.3 years, while the average age of the wives was 28.8. The subjects were middle to upper-middle class (average 18.8 (class II) on the Hollingshead-Redlich two factor index). The average years of education were 16.5 and 16.2 for the husbands and wives respectively. Three husbands and four wives had been

married previously. One husband had been married twice previously.

Recruitment: Participants were recruited by a senior member of the research team. Couples were asked to volunteer to be a part of an intensive study of couples from late pregnancy through the first two months postnatally. Each couple was informed that the project was strictly for research and would not include any counseling.

Procedure:

Thirty days postnatal the couples were scheduled to come to the laboratory for assessment. These sessions were scheduled daily from Tuesday through Saturday so that the preceding twenty-four hours would be a weekday rather than a weekend. At this time spouses independently completed a self-report battery. A sample of each couple's communication behavior was also obtained at this time.

Sixty days postnatal the couples returned to the laboratory and completed the self-report battery again. However, samples of communication behavior were not taken at this time.

Measures:

Data for this study were obtained from the self-report instruments that were included in the battery administered at the thirty and sixty day postnatal assessment. The

observational data obtained at thirty days postnatal was also included in the analyses.

Daily Marital Satisfaction was assessed with the widely used Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) (Locke & Wallace, 1959) and the Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ) (Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973). Satisfaction scores from both instruments have been shown to differentiate distressed and nondistressed couples (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Vincent, Weiss & Birchler, 1975), and adequate reliabilities have been reported (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Weiss & Margolin, 1977). Standard instructions were modified so that spouses completed the instruments according to how they felt at the time of assessment rather than how they generally felt or how they felt prior to the baby's birth.

Daily Marital Behaviors were assessed with the Spouse Observation Checklist (SOC) (Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973). The SOC has been previously described above. Spouses independently rated each behavior listed in the SOC that had occurred during the preceding twenty-four hour period on a five point scale (1=very displeasing, 2=displeasing, 3=neutral, 4=pleasing, 5=very pleasing). If the behavior occurred more than once, spouses were instructed to provide an average rating for all occurrences.

Social Desirability was assessed with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (SD) (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). This scale measures the tendency to respond

in a socially desirable manner. The SD score has been used extensively in assessment research and has recently been used in studies of marital behavior. Messerly (1979) has shown that the SD scale correlates significantly with scores on the MAT and the SOC.

Communication Behaviors were measured by videotaped interaction samples coded with the Marital Coding System (MCS) (Vincent, Messerly, Harris, Brady & Cook, 1981; Vincent, Cook & Brady, 1981). The MCS is a behavioral coding system adapted from the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS) (Hops, Wills, Patterson & Weiss, 1972).

Previous research has indicated that distressed and nondistressed couples may be distinguished on the basis of their problem-solving skills (Vincent, Weiss & Birchler, 1975; Billings, 1979). Further, distressed and nondistressed couples have been found to vary in the topography of their behaviors leading to resolution, or nonresolution, of conflict (Gottman, 1979). These findings, which were based on cross-sectional studies, have been supported by Markman's (1979) longitudinal research demonstrating that communication deficits may predate marital dissatisfaction. Recent work by Weiss (1978) also emphasizes the importance of interactions which involve the expression and support of emotional content. Emotional communication may serve both to reinforce the bonds of intimacy and to discharge unpleasant feelings.

Thus, samples of intracouple communication behavior were obtained at the thirty day postnatal assessment. Each couple's skill at problem-solving and emotional expression/support was evaluated with scores derived from the MCS (cf. Vincent, Messerly, Harris, Brady & Cook, 1981).

Each spouse was asked to generate examples from their own relationships of two types of communication: problem-solving and emotional expression/support. Problem-solving communication involved instances when one spouse desired to request a change in some aspect of the other spouse's behavior. Emotional expression/support communication involved instances when one spouse was upset about something that occurred outside the marriage relationship and wanted to discuss it with the other spouse. Situations exemplifying each type of communication were generated by both spouses independently. Each couple was then asked to reenact the four situations, each for five minutes, as if they were occurring for the first time. The interactions were videotaped and the order of situation and initiator was counterbalanced across the total sample of couples. Trained coders then used the MCS to classify each husband and wife behavior as one of twenty-five predefined types of communication behavior. The MCS differed from the MICS in that it had no separate categories of nonverbal behavior and included additional categories reflecting emotional expression, supportive and nonsupportive

listening, and more subtle distinctions between types of problem-solving behavior (Vincent, Cook & Brady, 1981).

Principle components analysis was used to reduce the large array of data generated by the MCS. Since problem-solving and emotional expression/support situations may require different behaviors, separate principle components (with varimax rotation) were computed on couple totals from the two types of interactions. The reliability of each factor was then assessed using methods suggested by Gottman (1979). The generalizability coefficients (Chronbach's alpha) based on independently coded data obtained are presented in Table 1. Only five of the nine factors from the emotional discussions, and seven of the eight factors from the problem-solving discussions, met an acceptable level of reliability. Only those factors with acceptable reliability were included in the statistical analyses.

TABLE 1.

Behavior Code Categories and Reliabilities of Emotional
Expression/Support and Problem-Solving Factors

Emotional Express./Sup. Factors	Reliability (Chronbach's Alpha)	Behavior Code Categories	Factor Loadings
1	.74	Clarify Reasons Why State Label Vague Complaint Uncodable	.73 .67 -.45 .52 .78
2	.35	Specific Positive Suggestion Invalidate Criticize Defend/Justify Paraphrase/Elaborate	.74 -.46 -.52 -.64 .80
3	.00	Specific Negative Suggestion Vague Negative Suggestion Put Down Defend/Justify	.87 .74 .57 .42
4	.97	Back Pat Invalidate Empathize	.83 .46 .64
5	.80	State Label Focused Complaint Vague Positive Suggestion	-.48 -.61 .87
6	.00	Put Down Humor Sarcasm/Tease Vague Complaint	.45 .68 .68 -.45
7	.00	Mind Read Process Comment	.77 .85
8	.71	State Clarify Approve/Caring	.54 .59
9	.96	Approve/Caring Owning Up	.43 -.66

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued).

Problem-Solving Factors	Reliability (Chronbach's Alpha)	Behavior Code Categories	Factor Loadings
1	.65	Criticize Put Down Defend/Justify Mind Read Clarify	.81 .63 .78 .54 .44
2	.72	Specific Positive Suggestion Invalidate Focused Complaint Vague Complaint	.41 .69 .79 .78
3	.98	Approve/Caring Own Up State Label	.79 .43 .70
4	.99	Specific Positive Suggestion Mind Read Back Pat Clarify Reasons Why	.59 -.44 .45 .58 .78
5	.99	Humor Paraphrase/Elaborate Process Comment	.68 .79 .49
6	.93	Empathize Own Up Sarcasm/Tease State/Clarify Uncodable	.67 .47 .62 .76 .42
7	.00	Specific Negative Suggestion Put Down Process Comment	.79 -.45 .72
8	.92	Vague Positive Suggestion Vague Negative Suggestion Back Pat	.81 .63 .52

From Vincent, Cook & Brady (1981).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Analyses:

Three measures of daily marital behavior were compared to determine the most appropriate method of spouse observation. First, the SOC was scored in the traditional manner by taking a frequency count of a priori defined pleasing and displeasing events. The absolute frequencies were then transformed into proportions by the following formulae:

$$\text{Proportion P} = P/P+D$$

$$\text{and, Proportion D} = D/P+D$$

where, P= frequency of pleasing events

and, D= frequency of displeasing events

Second, self-reported pleasing events ("P's") and displeasing events ("D's") were counted by the following procedure. Any item rated 1 or 2 was counted as a "D", while any item rated 4 or 5 was counted as a "P". Those items rated 3 were categorized "N" (Neutral). Proportions were calculated as above.

Third, a frequency by intensity weighted average measure of reported spouse behaviors was used. By this method, "Proportion P" equals the weighted sum of those items rated 4 or 5 divided by a weighted sum of all the

items rated. Items rated 4 received an intensity rating of 1, while items rated 5 received an intensity rating of 2. "Proportion D" was calculated similarly, with items scored 2 receiving an intensity weighting of 1 and items scored 1 being weighted with a 2. Neutral items were weighted with a 1 and "Proportion N" was calculated in the same manner as "Proportion P" and "Proportion D."

A regression analysis was employed to determine which method explains the greatest proportion of the variance in daily marital satisfaction (as measured by the MAT and ACQ) and couple communication behaviors (as measured by the MCS) after controlling for social desirability (as measured by the SD). Since both spouse observation measures and measures of marital satisfaction have been found to be susceptible to social desirability response sets (Messerly, 1979) it is critical to statistically control for the effects of subjects habitually responding in this manner. By partialing Marlowe-Crowne SD scores from any relationship examined it becomes possible to ascertain whether dependable relationships exist between the variables. Thus, spurious relationships due only to subjects' tendency to respond to marital inventories in a socially desirable manner are statistically eliminated.

An exploratory correlational analysis of the extent to which spouses override the manifest content of the SOC was also conducted. The degree of override, or shift in

affective valence, was measured in several ways. Items a priori defined as pleasing ("P") that were scored 1, 2, or 3 were considered to be shifted in a negative direction. "P" items scored 1 or 2 were given an intensity rating of 2. Items a priori defined as displeasing ("D") that were scored 3, 4, 5 were considered to be shifted in a positive direction. "D" items scored 4 or 5 were given an intensity rating of 2 as well. Any item scored 3 was assigned an intensity rating of 1 and an appropriate directional sign. "P" items scored 4 or 5, and "D" items scored 1 or 2, were not considered to be shifted. From these measures the frequency, intensity, and direction of shifted affective valence ratings were obtained for correlational analysis.

Several hypotheses derived from a cognitive-communication model of marital interaction were investigated within this exploratory context. Specifically, the correlations between the tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC with personal affective meaning and the four sets of variables which follow were examined:

- 1) Daily Marital Satisfaction, as measured by the MAT and ACQ;
- 2) Communication and Problem-Solving Skills, as measured by the MCS;
- 3) Perceptual Inaccuracies, as measured by the ACQ-Perceptual Inaccuracies scale; and
- 4) Social Desirability, as measured by the SD.

Interspouse agreement statistics were also calculated on the mutual ("We") items of the SOC. These statistics were based on percentage agreement and were calculated separately for 1) the occurrence of events, and 2) the affective ratings of the events. Percentage agreement statistics regarding the occurrence of an event ranged from .00 to .75, with a mean of .58 and a median of .48. These interobserver reliability coefficients were quite similar to those found by Jacobson (Jacobson & Moore, 1981 (b)) and Christensen (Christensen & Nies, 1980; Christensen, Sullaway & King, 1983). The correlations between interobserver reliability and measures of marital accord (MAT, ACQ, and MCS) are reported below.

Comparison of Three SOC Scoring Methods:

In order to determine which method of scoring SOC data would best explain variations in marital accord, partial correlation coefficients were calculated between each of the three methods of scoring SOC data described above and multiple measures of marital accord, controlling for social desirability scores. Results varied depending upon the time of the assessment (thirty or sixty day) and the particular measure in question (see TABLE 2.).

TABLE 2.

PARTIAL CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS
CONTROLLING FOR MARLOWE-CROWNE SD SCORES

SOC Summary Category	Measure of Marital Accord	Partial Correlation Coefficient
Traditional P(& D)	30-DAY MAT	.3325 (p<.078)
Self-Rep. P	30-DAY MAT	.3067 (p<.106)
Self-Rep. N	30-DAY MAT	.2753 (p<.148)
Self-Rep. D	30-DAY MAT	-.3127 (p<.099)
Weight. Ave. P	30-DAY MAT	.2895 (p<.128)
Weight. Ave. N	30-DAY MAT	-.2379 (p<.214)
Weight. Ave. D	30-DAY MAT	-.2496 (p<.192)
Traditional P(& D)	30-DAY ACQ	-.5588 (p<.002)
Self-Rep. P	30-DAY ACQ	-.4471 (p<.015)
Self-Rep. N	30-DAY ACQ	.2340 (p<.222)
Self-Rep. D	30-DAY ACQ	.5531 (p<.022)
Weight. Ave. P	30-DAY ACQ	-.3425 (p<.069)
Weight. Ave. N	30-DAY ACQ	.2001 (p<.298)
Weight. Ave. D	30-DAY ACQ	.4657 (p<.011)
Traditional P(& D)	60-DAY MAT	.2414 (p<.207)
Self-Rep. P	60-DAY MAT	.4288 (p<.020)
Self-Rep. N	60-DAY MAT	.3583 (p<.056)
Self-Rep. D	60-DAY MAT	-.4028 (p<.030)
Weight. Ave. P	60-DAY MAT	.2444 (p<.201)
Weight. Ave. N	60-DAY MAT	-.3000 (p<.114)
Weight. Ave. D	60-DAY MAT	-.3564 (p<.058)
Traditional P(& D)	60-DAY ACQ	-.2888 (p<.129)
Self-Rep. P	60-DAY ACQ	-.6187 (p<.001)
Self-Rep. N	60-DAY ACQ	.4980 (p<.006)
Self-Rep. D	60-DAY ACQ	.6253 (p<.001)
Weight. Ave. P	60-DAY ACQ	-.6200 (p<.001)
Weight. Ave. N	60-DAY ACQ	.4869 (p<.007)
Weight. Ave. D	60-DAY ACQ	.5692 (p<.001)

Generally, each of the various spouse observation measures tended to be more strongly related to the marital satisfaction measures at the sixty day postnatal assessment than at thirty days. At the thirty day assessment none of the spouse observation measures were significantly related to MAT scores. The traditional method of scoring "P's" and "D's" was the most strongly related spouse observation index at this time, explaining about ten percent of the variance in MAT scores. The traditional method was also most strongly related to ACQ scores at the thirty day assessment, explaining about thirty-one percent of the variance in this measure of marital satisfaction. It must be noted, however, that self-reported displeasing events also accounted for approximately thirty-one percent of the variance in ACQ scores at this time. Four of the seven spouse observation measures were significantly related to ACQ scores at thirty days.

At the sixty day assessment both methods of spouse observation which incorporated self-reported affective valence ratings outperformed the traditional SOC categorizations. While a priori "P's" and "D's" were not significantly related to either MAT or ACQ scores, eight of the twelve categories relying upon self-reported affective valence ratings were significantly related to these measures of marital satisfaction. Self-reported "P's" and "D's" were the most strongly related category to MAT scores, explaining

approximately eighteen and sixteen percent of the variance respectively. Self-reported "D's" accounted for almost forty percent of the variance in ACQ scores at sixty days. Both self-reported "P's" and weighted average "P's" accounted for approximately thirty-eight percent of the variance in sixty-day ACQ scores.

In general, the self-report scoring methods appear to be more strongly related to measures of marital satisfaction than the traditional scoring method. However, it is difficult to directly interpret these results due to the different calculations and meanings of the various categories in each scoring system. Traditional "P's" and "D's" are related equally (though in opposite directions) to marital satisfaction measures. This is because they are completely dependent upon each other and thus provide totally redundant information. This is not true of the self-report methods. Thus, direct comparisons of the strength of the relationships between the various categories of "P's" and "D's" and measures of marital satisfaction can be misleading.

In order to compare the relative abilities of the three scoring methods to explain the variance in measures of marital satisfaction, regression equations were calculated incorporating all of the various categories in each scoring method collectively. The R-SQUARED CHANGE between each method of scoring and marital satisfaction after entering

social desirability scores was determined and comparisons were made between methods (see Table 3.). The results of this analysis are quite clear. The R-SQUARED CHANGE values are directly interpretable as the proportion of the variance in marital satisfaction that each measure is able to explain after controlling for social desirability response sets.

None of the three methods of scoring spouse observation reports significantly explained MAT scores during the thirty-day assessment. However, there was a trend in the data toward the combined self-report categorizations producing the highest R-SQUARED (explaining almost seventeen percent of the variance). The traditional scoring method did not significantly explain the variance in any of the measures, except for ACQ scores during the thirty-day assessment. The self-report scoring method predicted the greatest amount of the variance in each measure at each time.

TABLE 3.

R-SQUARED CHANGE AFTER CONTROLLING
FOR MARLOWE-CROWNE SD SCORES

SOC Scoring Method	Measure of Marital Accord	R-SQUARED Change
Traditional	30-DAY MAT	.1090 (n.s.)
Self-Report	30-DAY MAT	.1666 (n.s.)
Weight. Ave.	30-DAY MAT	.0897 (n.s.)
Traditional	30-DAY ACQ	.3082 (p<.005)
Self-Report	30-DAY ACQ	.4301 (p<.005)
Weight. Ave.	30-DAY ACQ	.2176 (p<.05)
Traditional	60-DAY MAT	.0557 (n.s.)
Self-Report	60-DAY MAT	.1983 (p<.05)
Weight. Ave.	60-DAY MAT	.1593 (n.s.)
Traditional	60-DAY ACQ	.0778 (n.s.)
Self-Report	60-DAY ACQ	.4309 (p<.001)
Weight. Ave.	60-DAY ACQ	.4014 (p<.001)

An inspection of Table 3 indicates that categorizing items rated 4 or 5 as "P," items rated 3 as "N," and items rated 1 or 2 as "D" was preferable to creating weighted averages of these categories. The self-report categorizations explained more of the variance in each measure of marital accord at each time and was more stable across time than the weighted average scoring system.

Partial correlation coefficients were also calculated between each of the methods of scoring the SOC and communication scores on the MCS. No significant interpretable relationships were found between any of the SOC measures and MCS scores. These partial correlation coefficients were quite small and approached zero.

Analysis of Idiosyncratic Interpretations:

Idiosyncratic affective ratings were found to significantly correlate with measures of marital discord, as predicted. The number of items on the SOC which spouses overrode the a priori ratings was negatively related to Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment scores at both the thirty day ($r = -.3859$; $p < .05$) and the sixty day ($r = -.3597$; $p < .05$) assessment. This tendency to interpret spousal behavior in an idiosyncratic manner was positively related to Areas of Change Questionnaire scores at both thirty days ($r = .5132$; $p < .005$) and sixty days ($r = .4841$; $p < .01$). Both subscales of the ACQ were significantly correlated with the override

scores, with the Perceptual Inaccuracies Scale (Avg. $r=.5012$; $p<.01$) being slightly more strongly related than the Desired Changes Scale (Avg. $r=.4762$; $p<.01$). Thus, spouses who exhibited more uncommon interpretations of their partner's behavior were, in general, less satisfied with their relationship than those who did not override the common interpretations of their partner's behavior.

In an attempt to tease out the critical elements of the relationship between marital satisfaction and the tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC with personal meanings, correlations between both the size and the direction of the shifts in affective valence and marital satisfaction scores were calculated. Positive shifts (rating "D's" 3-5) were not significantly correlated with any of the marital accord measures. However, negative shifts (rating "Ps" 1-3) were related to MAT scores at both the thirty ($r=-.3935$; $p<.05$) and sixty ($r=-.3875$; $p<.05$) day assessments. Negative shift scores were also significantly related to ACQ scores at both assessments (Thirty-Day Assessment $r=.5034$; $p<.005$; Sixty-Day Assessment $r=.5307$; $p<.005$). Both the Perceptual Inaccuracies scale of the ACQ (Avg. $r=.4935$; $p<.01$) and the Desired Change scale (Avg. $r=.4998$; $p<.01$) were significantly related to negative overrides.

Among these negatively shifted affective valence ratings, small shifts (rating "P's" 3) were more strongly

related to MAT scores and ACQ-Perceptual Inaccuracies scores than large shifts (rating "P's" 4-5). However, large shifts were more strongly related to ACQ scores and ACQ-Desired Change scores (see TABLE 4.). Given this pattern of results, a simple statement cannot be made about the relative effects of small versus large override scores.

TABLE 4.

PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SIZE OF
SHIFT AND MEASURES OF MARITAL ACCORD

Size of Negative Shift	Measure of Marital Accord	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Large	30-DAY MAT	-.2509 (ns)
Small	30-DAY MAT	-.3721 (p<.05)
Large	30-DAY ACQ	.5009 (p<.005)
Small	30-DAY ACQ	.4547 (p<.05)
Large	30-DAY ACQ-P	.4350 (p<.025)
Small	30-DAY ACQ-P	.4369 (p<.025)
Large	30-DAY ACQ-D	.6108 (p<.001)
Small	30-DAY ACQ-D	.3949 (p<.05)
Large	60-DAY MAT	-.2789 (n.s.)
Small	60-DAY MAT	-.3630 (p<.05)
Large	60-DAY ACQ	.5366 (p<.005)
Small	60-DAY ACQ	.4784 (p<.01)
Large	60-DAY ACQ-P	.3803 (p<.05)
Small	60-DAY ACQ-P	.4897 (p<.01)
Large	60-DAY ACQ-D	.4449 (p<.025)
Small	60-DAY ACQ-D	.4391 (p<.025)

No significant relationships were found between shift scores and communication scores on the MCS. Further, shift scores were not related to social desirability scores on the Marlowe-Crowne SD scale (First Assessment $r=.0039$; Second Assessment $r=.0892$). All correlations between derived shift scores (i.e. direction of shift and intensity of shift) and social desirability scores approached zero and were not significant at $p<.25$. Thus the tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC with personal affective meanings appears to be independent of the tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner.

Analysis of Interspouse Reliability

Percentage agreement statistics were calculated for each couple on their ratings of both the occurrence and affective valence of "We" items. Neither measure of agreement alone, nor a combination of both measures, was significantly correlated with measures of marital accord (MAT, ACQ, or MCS). However, at the thirty-day assessment, agreement as to the occurrence of events was negatively correlated with large negative overrides of the manifest content of SOC items ($r=-.3942$; $p<.031$). Discrepancies in the affective ratings of events was correlated with total overrides (Thirty-Day Assessment $r=.3972$; $p<.030$; Sixty-Day Assessment $r=.4247$; $p<.019$), total negative shifts (Thirty-Day Assessment $r=.3593$; $p<.051$; Sixty-Day Assessment

$r=.4254;p<.019$), and small negative shifts (Thirty-Day Assessment $r=.3906;p<.033$; Sixty-Day Assessment $r=.4453;p<.014$). Thus couples with more overrides tended to disagree among themselves more often as to the affective valence of events, but no more often as to the occurrence of events, than those with fewer overrides.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study may be summarized in the following manner. 1) The self-report method of scoring the SOC explained more of the variance in measures of marital satisfaction than the traditional scoring technique. Thus, self-reports of the impact of spousal behavior were more strongly related to marital satisfaction than mere frequency counts of behaviors. 2) The tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC with personal affective meanings was significantly related to measures of marital satisfaction. Measures of override were also significantly related to perceptual inaccuracies on the ACQ. Further, overriding the manifest content of the SOC in a negative direction accounted for the majority of the relationship between idiosyncratic interpretations and marital satisfaction. Finally, idiosyncratic interpretations were found to be independent of the tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. 3) Interspouse agreement regarding the occurrence or affective valence of SOC items was uncorrelated with measures of marital accord. Agreement on the affective valence of items, however, was negatively correlated with measures of the tendency to override the manifest content of the SOC.

In general, spouse observation methods were somewhat more strongly related to marital accord at sixty days postnatal than they were at thirty days. This finding is congruent with Vincent, Cook & Messerly (1980), who asserted that spouses tend to increase in reciprocity of behaviors over these same units of time. Several factors may influence this process. To begin with, one would expect the family to be more imbalanced the closer to the actual birth of the first child. It is unlikely that the family unit is able to redefine itself as a triad completely in one month. By sixty postnatal days, while the infant still has a tremendous impact on the family unit, and each of its members, family relationships are probably beginning to approach equilibrium and become more routinized.

It is likely that spousal behaviors exert less of an impact on general satisfaction at thirty postnatal days than usual because of other events occurring at this time. Events pertaining to the infant and reconstituted family triad probably are more salient at this time and "color" spouses' perceptions of their relationship. Thus, the sixty day assessment is likely to be more representative of the normal relationship between spousal behavior and marital satisfaction since it is more distant in time from the major relationship altering event of the birth of the first child.

Further, the phenomenon of positive sentiment override which has been explicated by Weiss (1978) is probably more

active near to the birth of the child and dissipates with time. "Positive sentiment override" is the temporary tendency for couples at various times in their relationship (e.g. courtship, honeymoon, birth of first child, etc.) to view the relationship as quite positive and disregard spousal behaviors which may be displeasing at other times. This process would function to attenuate the relationship between spousal behaviors and marital satisfaction. In the present case positive sentiment override may be more pronounced at thirty days postnatally than at sixty days.

The self-reported affective valence categories explained a greater proportion of the variance in marital satisfaction than either of the other methods regardless of time of assessment or measure of marital satisfaction. This method was also the most stable method accross time, increasing only slightly at the second assessment. This finding reflects the change in relationship between spousal behaviors and marital satisfaction over time (cf. Vincent, Cook & Messerly, 1980).

Collecting self-reported affective ratings of spousal behaviors was an inexpensive and simple change in SOC procedure which improved this measure's ability to explain differences in marital satisfaction. Thus, future spouse observation measures should allow the individuals themselves to rate their affective reactions to their partners' behavior rather than rely on investigator-determined

categorizations of items. The results of the present study argue that the impact of spousal behavior (or the way spouses understand each other's behavior) is more strongly related to feelings of marital satisfaction than the objective events themselves. Allowing spouses to indicate this impact provides increased understanding of the marital relationship and is preferable to a mere frequency count of behaviors.

The number of uncommon affective interpretations of spousal behaviors was significantly related to two indices of marital accord (MAT and ACQ) and a measure of perceptual inaccuracy (ACQ-Perceptual Inaccuracy scale). Further, the tendency to override the manifest meanings of items on the SOC was not related to social desirability response sets. It is interesting to note that the strongest relationships between idiosyncratic interpretations and measures of marital accord were found for negative shifts. This "negative filtering" of events, which appears to be characteristic of less satisfied spouses, is a commonly observed cognitive phenomenon in various clinical disorders (c.f. Goldfried & Goldfried, 1980; Ellis, 1962; Ellis & Grieger, 1977; Beck, 1972; Rehm, 1977). This finding opens the door for more extensive, well-designed investigations to test hypotheses concerning the cognitive processes involved in marital relationships.

The fact that the reliability of spouse observation reports in this study did not significantly correlate with any measure of marital accord represents a failure to replicate Jacobson's (Jacobson & Moore, 1981(b)) and Christensen's (Christensen & Nies, 1980) findings. This incongruence with previous literature may be attributable to differences in methodology, as well as the limited range of subject satisfaction in the present study.

The observational measures of communication behavior did not significantly correlate with any of the variables in the present study. This is probably the result of the extremely small range of variance in marital communication scores. Further, since the factor analysis was based on scores of extremely low base rate, it is likely that most factors are quite unstable, thereby attenuating any relationship with SOC scores. Finally, it has long been known that behavioral measures and self-report measures of marital accord do not correlate highly (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Weiss, Hops & Patterson, 1973; Weiss & Margolin, 1977; Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974; Weiss, 1978). Thus, it is difficult to conclude with any degree of certainty whether the SOC measures are not related to communication behavior or whether the means of assessing this relationship were inadequate.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The gradual shift in emphasis toward cognitive processes among behavioral marital investigators parallels the zeitgeist in the behavioral field at large, especially in the area of depression. Three noteworthy depression researchers, Beck (1972), Seligman (1975), and Rehm (1977) argue that the cognitive processes which affect people's interpretations of events are critically related to depression. Depressed people distort events that happen to them in the direction of self-blame (Beck, 1972); make inappropriate attributions regarding their failures in performance (Seligman, 1975); and attend selectively to negative events and immediate versus delayed outcomes (Rehm, 1977). The similarity of these findings to those discriminating distressed couples from nondistressed ones should be obvious. Further, the congruence between these conceptualizations of depression and the present study is quite fascinating.

The work with cognitive variables in depression and marital distress, in conjunction with Lazarus' cognitive models of self-report, may be quite valuable in advancing our understanding of cognitive processes in general. Lazarus' work may provide a good conceptual framework for

more extensive study in this area. The present investigations were generated from Lazarus' cognitive theory and communication analogies. These models were found to be quite useful in delineating critical interactional processes and in providing well-articulated hypotheses for future study.

What does the future hold for spouse observation? It is likely that an increasing number of researchers and clinicians will adopt the view of spouse observation as proximal self-report. Moreover, with the increasing interest in cognitive processes, additional attention is likely to be placed on the methods by which spouses attribute personal meanings to events and act upon this information. In this context it may be fruitful to employ methods which have been used to study other cognitive processes. For example, some of the models of how clinicians combine information to arrive at clinical judgments of psychopathology (e.g. Brunswick's lens model--see Hammond, Hirsch & Todd, 1964) may be applicable to the study of how spouses gather and combine behavioral cues to arrive at subjective feelings of satisfaction. There is no reason to suspect that the process by which spouses form judgments in the marital relationship is any different from the human judgment process in general. The idiosyncratic ways husbands and wives store, process, retrieve, and use behavioral data is an important phenomenon

to study and not just a methodological artifact (Slater & Vincent, 1983).

As for the clinical uses of spouse observation, it has been argued elsewhere that spouse observation methods should be used more judiciously (Vincent & Slater, 1982). These methods may not be appropriate for every couple seeking therapy, and are probably ill advised for couples in crisis or those with tenuous motivation for therapy in the first place. Further, when spouse observation is appropriate, perhaps instruments of more limited scope which are designed for the particular couple would be more appropriate than comprehensive reserch instruments like the SOC (Vincent & Slater, 1982).

Moreover, the personal meanings spouses place on each other's behavior is a legitimate focus of therapy itself (Slater & Vincent, 1983). Currently, the clinical relevance of spousal interpretations of their partner's behavior is best recognized by strategic models of marital therapy. These approaches place considerable emphasis on challenging the attributional underpinnings of accounts of spouse behavior. Further, techniques like positive reframing (Soper & L'Abate, 1977) and behavioral methods of cognitive restructuring (Michenbaum, 1977) have been used effectively to alter the phenomenal reality of the marriage. Thus, for the therapist, the way spouses understand each other's

behavior is more critical than whether those behaviors can be accurately counted.

In conclusion, after a decade of spouse observation, this methodology has not lived up to its promise to replace the highly subjective self-report method with an inexpensive, comprehensive, objective, and accurate observational account of the actual events which transpire in a marriage. However, a great deal of useful, readily interpretable information has been collected using this method. Further, it is becoming evident that spouse observation data is best understood as self-reports of the impact of spouse behavior, rather than objective reports of the actual behavior per se. This reconceptualization has opened the door to new areas of research which promise to add depth and breadth to understanding the complexity of marital relationships. Rather than dismissing spouse observation methods as psychometrically unsound, we may benefit from using these techniques to explore intriguing new facets of marital interactions. Most critically, researchers and therapists should not neglect the valuable information about the interpretive processes of the observer in their quest for information about the behavior of those who are rated.

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