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The Effects Of The Meisner Technique On Interpersonal Relationships: A Pilot Study

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The Effects of the Meisner Technique on Interpersonal Relationships: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the usefulness of the Meisner Technique (a technique used in theatre to improve actors' performances) in increasing relationship satisfaction and closeness in friendships and romantic relationships. It was hypothesized that the Meisner Technique would increase relationship satisfaction and closeness through increases in mindfulness, self-expansion, I-sharing, and empathy. The present study builds upon previous research on relationship building activities, while also investigating a previously unstudied technique. Fifty-five undergraduate students along with a partner (of their choosing) were randomly assigned to participate for two 20-minute sessions, two days apart, of the Meisner Technique (the experimental condition) or a word game (the control condition). Dyads consisted of both platonic friends and romantic partners. Prior to the first session and following the second session, participants completed various measures to assess their closeness, relationship satisfaction, mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy and I-sharing. Results revealed no significant effect of the Meisner Technique on relationship satisfaction, closeness, or any of the hypothesized mediators. There were several limitations of the study that might have affected the results, including the brevity and intensity of the intervention, as well as the composition of the participants. Although the Meisner Technique did not prove to be effective for enhancing relationships in this study, considerable research suggests that interventions that enhance mindfulness, empathy, I-sharing, and self-expansion will bring couples closer and increase relationship satisfaction. Given anecdotal support suggesting that a Meisner-based treatment will impact empathy, I-sharing, and self-expansion, further

research is warranted to explore the impact of a Meisner-based treatment on improving closeness and relationship satisfaction.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

A group of actors were collaboratively creating a physical theatre piece. This process was much more challenging than they anticipated and they were constantly arguing. One of the actors had learned a theatre technique called the Meisner Technique that was created to help actors listen and react to each other (Meisner, Longwell & Pollack, 1987). She suggested that they try it, and for several rehearsals that was their focus. It was like magic: they began to listen to each other, work together, and create. Instead of each actor working individually, they became like a machine, each piece in synchrony with the others. They practiced this technique and they were better able to work collaboratively and effectively. In addition, they became closer, more satisfied, and had greater empathy for one another. They attributed not only their improved performance, but also improved relationships with one another to this experience.

Successful interpersonal relationships are vital to satisfaction and happiness in life. They affect our work, our leisure, and our physical and mental well-being. They provide comfort, support, and protection. Too often people take relationships for granted and let them take their course, letting break-ups occur with romantic partners as well as friends (Jackson-Dwyer, 2014). The psychological effects of interpersonal involvement and the detrimental effects of isolation have led to a great deal of research focusing on how to improve or save failing interpersonal

relationships. This is the focus of most couples therapy, as well as therapy involving parents and children (Jackson-Dwyer, 2014). Research on maintaining or improving relationships before they begin to fail is less common, but of potential importance (Wenzel & Harvey, 2001). Preventing problems from occurring may decrease the number of individuals and couples in treatment, which allows more resources to be directed toward those who need more help and may increase the quality of relationships for those who would not seek care.

Marriage counselors, therapists and others have often attempted to promote maintenance of relationships through activities or skills trainings to improve key areas that often arise as sources of problems, including economics, coping with stress, etc.—though interpersonal communication and empathy are common targets. These trainings and activities frequently involve psychoeducation, games and role-play, didactic training, and skills training, which research suggests are successful in improving empathy and satisfaction between partners (Teding van Berkhout & Malouff, 2016). The Meisner Technique is a theatre technique that is used to help actors improve their performance by teaching them to attend to their partners' present experience. It involves commenting on a partner's physical and emotional experience and repeating that comment back and forth until one partner notices a change. One partner then comments on that change and the new comment is then repeated. It is meant to teach actors to focus on the other individual rather than him or herself, focus on what is happening in the present moment, and act in a genuine manner (Meisner et al., 1987). It is proposed that the Meisner Technique could be used to improve interpersonal relationships in similar ways that it has influenced actors.

The Meisner Technique seems to exemplify "mindfulness" training. Mindfulness is a state of increased awareness and attention to living in the present moment, meaning paying

attention to what is happening in the present rather than thinking about the past or the future, without judgment or evaluation (Kozlowski, 2013). The Meisner Technique involves many of the 6 steps that Kramer (2007) argued are necessary for mindful dialogue: open, trust emergence, listen deeply, and speak the truth. These elements of mindful dialogue are key aspects of the Meisner Technique that are believed to be vital in increasing communication and empathy. Research has suggested that mindfulness in relationships contributes to overall positive functioning and improves relationship satisfaction (Carson, Carson, Gil & Baucom, 2004), and it is thus hypothesized that the Meisner activity could similarly improve partners' interactions and satisfaction as an exercise in mindfulness.

Although the Meisner Technique seems to exemplify mindfulness, it must be noted that it may impact relationships in other ways as well. It may benefit relationships through increasing expression of self-expansion, facilitating empathy and promoting I-sharing. Self-expansion theory states that love arises from a desire to expand the self by including the other in the self, as well as by associating expansion with that particular other. This suggests that the closer the relationship, the more likely elements of cognitive structures of the other and the self will overlap (Aron & Aron, 1996). Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the experiences of another person emotionally and cognitively (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010), and has been shown to be beneficial in satisfaction of intimate relationships. In addition, many types of couple's therapies directly or indirectly address increasing empathy. I-sharing is the degree to which an individual believes that he or she shares an identical subjective experience as another individual. Research has shown that I-sharing contributes to liking and feelings of connection beyond similarities (Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynski, 2006). I-sharing makes us feel existentially connected which then combats feelings of existential isolation (Pinel, Long,

Landau & Pzszczynski, 2004). The Meisner Technique could impact relationship satisfaction and closeness through each of these unique processes, which will also be examined in the current study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the Meisner Technique could improve relationship satisfaction and closeness between friends and romantic partners. There are several ways that the Meisner Technique may have increased relationship satisfaction and closeness. It has a focus on living in the present moment and being aware of the here-and-now, which may have increased mindfulness. In addition, it involves increasing awareness about a partner's experience as well as undergoing a novel activity, which may have increased self-expansion. It involves recognizing another's emotional experience and receiving feedback about that observation, which may have positively affected empathy. Finally, it involves having a shared experience and seeing that experience through a partner's eyes, which might have increased I-sharing. Mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing are all related to relationship satisfaction and closeness. Therefore, it was proposed that through these processes, the activity would increase participant reports of closeness and relationship satisfaction.

Significance of Study

Relationships are a vital aspect of our everyday life. Healthy relationships are important in terms of mental health and quality of life. Many mental disorders are defined by interpersonal deficits and improvements in interpersonal functioning have been found to improve mental health. In addition, interpersonal difficulties are among the most common reasons individuals seek therapy (Horowitz, Rosenberg & Bartholomew, 1993). The Meisner Technique is an easy to use, inexpensive, simple technique that could benefit relationship satisfaction and closeness. Not

only could it benefit troubled relationships, it may also help to prevent problems from developing. This could occur through multiple ways including increasing mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing.

The present study is significant because if the Meisner Technique was found to be beneficial for friendships and romantic relationships it could be incorporated into therapy with couples, parents and adolescents, and friends. This would be a simple and inexpensive technique to use in therapy. In addition, it could also be used to improve an individual's interpersonal functioning in general. Although it was hypothesized to be most beneficial to a specific relationship, the benefits may extend to each individual. The Meisner Technique could become a way to maintain relationships that are not in distress, as well as improve relationships that are. This study investigated these potential effects.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Meisner Technique

"The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply."

Unknown

Sanford Meisner created a theatre technique called "The Meisner Technique" designed to increase actors' abilities to live truthfully in the moment while performing. It consists of multiple stages that become increasingly more difficult. This study investigates the use of the first stage, repetition, in improving interpersonal relationships in the context of everyday life and potentially in therapy. While the later stages of the Meisner Technique are specifically focused on acting, the first stage could be generalized to other groups of people and situations. This stage involves two steps. In the first step, two partners sit across from each other and one person comments on something that they notice about the other person. Examples of observations are, "you are crossing your leg" or "you are shaking your foot." The other partner repeats back "I am crossing my leg" or "I am shaking my foot." The comment is repeated until one individual notices a change in their partner's behavior, comments on it and states the new observation. In the second step, partners begin to notice the other partner's emotional experience. For example they might

say, “you are mad” or “you are confused.” They once again continue to repeat this until one of the partners notices a change in the other partner, comments on it and the pattern continues (Meisner et al., 1987).

The Meisner Technique has been studied by award winning actors and actresses including Grace Kelly, Diane Keaton, Amy Schumer, Kathy Bates, and Peter Gallagher. One challenge actors often have is focusing on the present moment. As Diane Keaton once said “The main thing that Sanford Meisner gave me – not really just for acting but life – is just be in the moment” (King, 2014). In addition, the Meisner Technique encourages truthfulness and communication. Gregory Peck stated, “What he wanted from you was truthful acting…He was able to communicate, and the proof of that is the number of people that have come out of [the Neighborhood Playhouse] over a forty-year period who’ve gone on to become people who set standards of acting” (“About Sanford Meisner,” 2001). Sanford Meisner and his technique are extraordinarily influential on the world of theatre and on individual actors. Based on the impact this technique has made in the world of theatre, one might wonder if it has the capability of impacting lives of non-actors as well as actors.

The Meisner Technique has not only been praised by actors, but psychologists have also considered the benefits it may have in terms of the therapeutic relationship. Kindler and Gray (2010) used three case examples to demonstrate how the Meisner Technique may inform psychoanalytic therapy. They argued that the improvisation involved in the Meisner Technique involves moment-to-moment engagement that is similar to the interaction between analyst and patient. In order for this interaction to be authentic and therapeutic, the therapist and patient must improvise rather than rely on a “script.” They posit that understanding the Meisner Technique can help an analyst create that dynamic in the session.

Although psychological benefits of the Meisner Technique have not been explicitly researched, other theatre techniques have previously been used in therapy. Psychodrama refers to the use of theatre techniques and role-playing in the therapy setting. Kipper and Ritchie (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 studies that investigated the effectiveness of psychodrama. They found a strong average effect size of .95, which is higher than the average effect sizes for group psychotherapy in general (.50-.70). They note that the high effect size might partly be due to the halo effect that is frequently associated with psychodramatic interventions. However, in general, the effect size is similar to effect sizes of other group interventions, suggesting that psychodramatic techniques are empirically valid for use in psychotherapy. The two most commonly used psychodrama techniques are role reversal and doubling. Role reversal is when the patient portrays the role of someone else (either at the session or absent) and the patient is represented by the therapist or another individual in the session. The patient originally portrays himself and afterward switches to another role. Doubling is when both the patient and the therapist portray the patient, and the therapist makes statements that the patient may be withholding. The meta-analysis found that role reversal encouraged disinhibition, and led to greater attitude change, warmth, and trust in the patient, while doubling increased empathy. These results suggest that the use of psychodrama in therapy leads to positive changes. Although other studies have found mixed support in regard to the effectiveness of psychodrama, there is basis for more exploration.

The Meisner Technique in particular has features that are comparable with existing therapeutic techniques. For instance, it is similar to a therapy technique created by Hendrix and Hunt called “Imago Dialogue” (Hendrix, Hunt, Luquet, & Carlson, 2015). Imago therapy teaches couples a type of dialogue that helps them to listen to each other empathically and to

better understand their own, as well as their partner's needs. This dialogue is different than everyday conversation because it encourages partners to put aside their desire to control and change the other person and, instead, listen to and understand them. The first stage of this dialogue involves being present and maintaining our awareness and connection of the other person (i.e., mindfulness). Eye contact is vital to this interaction and both partners are asked to look each other in the eye. The partners also learn how to calm themselves and use emotional regulation techniques to feel centered. Both of these aspects of Imago therapy are central to the Meisner Technique. Another similarity between the techniques is that they both involve mirroring. Although in the Imago technique partners are asked to say, "If I heard you correctly, you said…" or "If I understand what you are saying,…" and partners in the Meisner Technique comment on what they notice, rather than what their partner said, both techniques involve noticing what the other person is experiencing and commenting on it. Imago therapy also involves validation. This is when couples say validating statements such as, "What you are saying and feelings makes sense to me. I understand you." The Meisner Technique also involves validation; when an individual comments on their partner's emotions, they are showing that they recognize and understand their experience. In addition, both Imago therapy and the Meisner Technique should improve empathy with each partner feeling and understanding the other partner's emotional experience (Hendrix et al., 2015). Imago Dialogue has been used with couples for decades. The Meisner Technique has many of the core components of Imago therapy and therefore, should be similarly beneficial.

The Meisner Technique is designed to help actors focus on their partner instead of on themselves, live in the moment, and act truthfully under imagined circumstances (Meisner et al., 1987). It has also been considered beneficial to interpersonal relationships outside of the world

of theater, i.e., the therapeutic relationship (Kindler & Grey, 2010). This technique could therefore also be useful for couples, parents and adolescents, or friends. It is proposed that the Meisner Technique will increase relationship satisfaction and closeness. This technique is similar to other mindfulness techniques, which have been found to be beneficial in relationships. There are several additional mediators that may be contributing to these changes, including increases in self-expansion, increases in empathy, and experiences of I-sharing (the experience of sharing a similar reaction to a stimuli as another person). Multiple ways this activity may be beneficial in improving interpersonal relationships will be explored.

Although the effects of the Meisner Technique on relationships have not been studied, there are many reasons to suspect that it could have a positive impact. The technique involves observing and commenting on the present moment, rather than focusing on the past or a future goal, which is a core component of mindfulness. It involves increasing awareness about a partner's experience as well as undergoing a novel activity, which may increase self-expansion. In addition, it involves recognizing another's emotional experience and receiving feedback about that observation, which may positively affect empathy. Finally, it involves having a shared experience as a partner, which might increase I-sharing. Mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing have all been found to be related to relationship satisfaction and closeness. Therefore, it is proposed that both closeness and relationship satisfaction will increase as a result of participating in the Meisner Technique. The first mechanism of change that will be investigated further is mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state of increased awareness and attention to what is occurring in the present moment without judgment or evaluation (Kozlowski, 2013). It has been found to

promote psychological health and decrease psychological symptoms, as well as more specifically improve interpersonal relationships. It is posited that the Meisner Technique could increase a partner's ability to stay in the moment and focus on the here-and-now, rather than the past or the future. It involves noticing and commenting on a partner's experience in the present moment, which is an essential aspect of mindfulness. Nanda (2013) stated that mindfulness allows transformation and healing. It encourages acceptance, compassion, patience, and non-judgment. In addition, it brings interconnectedness to awareness and allows for relational change. Kramer (2007) created a framework (known as insight dialogue) for incorporating mindfulness into relationships with six steps: pause, relax, open, trust emergence, listen deeply, and speak the truth. As described below, the Meisner Technique incorporates four of these six steps.

The step of being "open" that Kramer (2007) described is when we focus on the external world rather than internally. We allow our awareness to extend beyond our own body and experience. This is a large component of the Meisner Technique. When individuals participate in the Meisner activity they are meant to focus on their partner rather than themself. They are not meant to withdraw from uncomfortable emotions, but instead experience them and note them in the other individual. "Trust emergence" is the fourth step in Kramer's insight dialogue. It consists of allowing the present moment to happen and trusting the change that inevitably occurs. Instead of focusing on what one is going to say or trying to gain a specific outcome from a conversation, it involves being present, and being okay with not knowing what is going to happen. This is the main purpose of the Meisner activity: to help us authentically experience what is happening in the present, and genuinely express that experience to another. According to Kramer, "listen deeply" consists of listening to our partner deeply and openly. The individual should be generous, empathetic and seek to understand the others' experience. This requires all

of the senses rather than solely relying on words. The Meisner activity encourages individuals to listen to the other person through ways other than words. Participants are meant to observe their experience through their partner's expressions and behaviors and comment on it. They then receive feedback on their perceptions. Essentially, this is an activity in active listening. The final step in Kramer's Insight Dialogue is to "speak the truth". This step involves awareness that the truth changes and evolves as the moment changes. When doing the Meisner Technique, participants are asked to say what they notice without censoring. When a change occurs, they are asked to note that. If nothing changes they are meant to repeat. It is an honest and open way to communicate. Kramer (2007) describes how insight dialogue has been found to help relationships become more mindful, calm and accepting. They become more genuine and intimate. Based on this framework, the Meisner Technique would be an ideal way to change dialogue and create more mindful interactions.

Recently, research has investigated the effects of mindfulness in promoting better quality romantic relationships. Kozlowski (2013) discussed how mindfulness promotes acceptance and decreases avoidance of challenging emotions. This may increase healthy modes of responding to others, therefore increasing the maintenance of healthy relationships. She also discussed how meditations meant to increase mindfulness have been found to increase empathy. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which involves multiple mindfulness components, has been shown to increase personal acceptance, which Kozlowski argues then generalizes to accept and empathize with other people's experiences. Other research has investigated the role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and in couples' reactions to relationship stress (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Cambell & Rogge, 2007). The researchers found that individual trait mindfulness predicted greater satisfaction and better ability to respond constructively to

stressors in the relationship. They also found that trait mindfulness was related to lower emotional stress responses and positive change in perceptions of the relationship after a conflict. In addition, state mindfulness predicted better communication quality during an argument. These results suggest that mindfulness plays a role in relationship satisfaction in general, as well as during romantic conflicts (Barnes et al., 2007).

Research suggests that improved communication is one mechanism behind the relationship between mindfulness and improved romantic relationships. Wachs and Cordova (2007) conducted a study with a sample of married couples that investigated the relationship between attending to the present moment, enacting emotions, and quality of the romantic relationship. They measured mindful awareness, emotion skills and marital quality. They found that both emotion skills and mindfulness were related to marital adjustment and suggest that attentiveness to the current moment helps partners improve their intimacy by improving their moment-to-moment interactions. In addition, the researchers found that the ability to identify and communicate emotions, as well as regulate anger, mediated the association between mindfulness and marital quality. Couples who have greater individual mindfulness are better able to control their angry impulses and therefore, decrease aggressive behaviors. They are also better able to communicate those negative emotions in an effective manner. Another study that also focused on communication found that mindfulness can be used to increase communication. Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, and Dewulf (2008) found that individuals who had greater ability to use mindful observation also engaged more empathically. In addition, acting with awareness, mindful description, and nonjudgmental acceptance were associated with better ability to identify and describe feelings, greater body satisfaction, less social anxiety and less distress contagion. The results of both of these studies suggest that improving mindfulness has the potential to

increase communication and regulate anger, contributing to greater interpersonal relationship quality.

Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron (2000) also discussed the relationship between mindfulness and interpersonal communication, focusing on nonverbal communication. They noted that when individuals communicate, they use nonverbal as well as verbal communication methods. Nonverbal communication includes gestures, body movements, environmental cues and facial expressions. They defined mindfulness as sensitivity to context and multiple perspectives, the ability to draw novel distinctions, and active and fluid information processing. They further noted that mindfulness increases an individual's ability to read nonverbal cues. They argued that increased mindfulness before and during communication can be very beneficial and lead to more successful communication.

Mindfulness interventions with couples have been the focus of several recent studies. Some have specifically looked at the effects of mindfulness on the brain and physiology, and relations of these biological processes to interpersonal relationships. Atkinson (2013), for instance, reviewed the neural and behavioral changes that occur with mindfulness training. He reported that 17 studies have found that mindfulness meditations lead to structural brain changes. These changes in the brain are important in regulating interpersonal behavior and therefore, impact relationships. Laurent, Hertz, Nelson, and Laurent (2016) measured differences in cortisol levels in romantic partners during a conflict discussion task. They found that partners who had higher mindfulness during the conflict had quicker cortisol recovery when their partners demonstrated negative behaviors. In addition, a partner's mindfulness was related to greater emotional regulation strategies and empathy in the relationship. These two studies demonstrate

that mindfulness has physiological effects on individuals, as well as a potential positive effect on relationships.

Other mindfulness intervention studies for couples have primarily focused on psychological and social changes. Carson, Carson, Gil, and Baucom (2004) studied a mindfulness-based relationship enhancement intervention with non-distressed couples. This intervention used loving-kindness meditations, with a focus on one's partner, partner yoga, mindful touch exercises, application of mindfulness to emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches to relationship difficulties, and encouraging mindfulness in-session and at home. The intervention increased couples' levels of satisfaction in the relationship, relatedness, closeness, autonomy, and acceptance, and it decreased their relationship distress. In addition, it impacted the individuals' optimism, relaxation, spirituality, and psychological distress. These results were maintained at the 3-month follow up. Gambrel and Piercy (2015) investigated a 4-week mindful transition to parenthood program with couples expecting their first child. They found positive gains for each individual, improvement in the couple's relationship, more preparedness for the baby and increased male involvement in pregnancy, birth, and parenting. These are important results because they studied non-distressed couples. This suggests that mindfulness may be beneficial for a wide range of relationships, rather than solely distressed ones.

Research suggests that there is a relationship between mindfulness approaches and the cultivation of empathy. Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, and Orsillo (2007) described several studies that have investigated this relationship. Correlational research has shown a relationship between mindfulness, perspective-taking, and empathic concern. In addition, an 8-week mindfulness-based program for premedical and medical students was found to increase levels of empathy (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). In another study, individuals

participated in a mindful awareness condition or a positive thinking condition (Block-Lerner, Orsillo, & Plumb, 2004). They were then asked to watch an emotional film clip and write their reactions to it. Individuals in the mindful awareness condition appeared to be better able to take others' perspectives compared to individuals in the positive thinking condition. This suggests that mindfulness may increase empathy (Block-Lerner et al., 2004). Block-Lerner et al. (2007) posit that mindfulness interventions with couples and families may have the ability to increase empathy; however, more research in this area needs to be conducted. Van Doesum, Van Lange, and Van Lange (2013) investigated social mindfulness, defined as paying attention to the needs of others in a way that respects their autonomy. They found that social mindfulness was positively associated with prosocial value orientation, empathy and the personality factors of honesty-humility and agreeableness. In addition, individuals who were perceived as socially mindful tended to be trusted and liked more so than individuals who were perceived as unmindful. These results suggest that social mindfulness and empathy have a positive relationship and that social mindfulness can influence trust and liking.

The Meisner Technique is very similar to many mindfulness techniques. It focuses on the present moment and asks participants to make observations about what is happening in the here-and-now. In addition, it encourages participants to focus on what they are noticing and verbally express those observations to their partner. This is very different than most of the interpersonal interactions we have in everyday life where almost all communication is goal-directed (Burgoon et al., 2000). Two examples of goal directed communication are creating a business relationship or trying to persuade an adolescent not to smoke. During goal-directed communication such as this, smaller goals (creating a business relationship or trying to persuade an adolescent not to smoke) are guided by larger superordinate goals, such as being successful or raising healthy

children. These goals act as guides or scripts when we interact with others. Rather than being in the moment and focusing on the present, our conversations are to some extent driven by these superordinate goals. As a result, we may miss important features of our partners in the immediate context (Burgoon et al., 2000). The Meisner Technique breaks this habit of goal-directed conversation and instead the interaction is fully motivated by observing the other person and living in the present moment. Neither the past nor the future matters during this interaction. In addition, each partner then has the opportunity to correct the other if the moment changes or he or she disagrees. In this way, they receive in the moment feedback on their experience with their partner in the here-and-now. Based on previous research on mindfulness activities and interpersonal relationships, the Meisner Technique would likely benefit interpersonal relationships.

Self-Expansion Theory

Another mechanism of change in the Meisner Technique could be self-expansion. Self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1996) states that people have a basic motive to expand the sense of self, increasing the breadth and depth of the self-concept by incorporating others' resources, perspectives, and characteristics as one's own. Multiple sources of research confirm a cognitive integration of close others into the self (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Aron & Aron, 1996), and according to self-expansion theory, passion for another arises from the process of expanding the self through interactions with the other, and people who experience self-expansion in their relationship report both positive affect toward their partner (Sheets, 2014) and greater satisfaction with their relationships (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993).

While self-expansion is believed to be a naturally occurring process when one forms a new relationship with another (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995), established couples may experience

decreased self-expansion opportunities as their intimate knowledge of the other reaches an asymptote (Aron & Aron, 1986). However, another way that people may experience expansion is through engaging in novel and exciting experiences; when done as a couple, those experiences are associated with the partner and seem to trigger increased positive affect toward them. Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, and Heyman (2000) found greater relationship satisfaction in couples who participated in a 7-minute novel and arousing activity together compared to couples who participated in a mundane task and that this effect was partially mediated by reduced feelings of boredom with the relationship. Reissman et al., (1993) randomly assigned 53 married couples to participate in activities together for 1 ½ hours a week for 10 weeks and measured relationship satisfaction pre- and post- intervention. Those assigned to engage in novel and exciting tasks experienced increased relationship satisfaction compared to couples engaged in other pleasant activities or a control group. While this increased satisfaction might reflect the positive affect experienced, research suggests that the increased cognitive overlap with the other is associated with increased commitment to the relationship as well as behaviors that sustain it (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). The Meisner Technique, which is both a novel and potentially stimulating activity, may thus create an opportunity for self-expansion that generates positive affect and supportive relational behaviors, increasing partners' satisfaction with each other.

As noted above, the Meisner Technique is hypothesized to generate mindfulness, and the relationship between mindfulness, self-expansion and relationship satisfaction has also been studied. One study investigated the mediators of the effects of a mindfulness intervention on improvements in couples' relationships. In this study, couples participated in a mindfulness-based relationship enhancement program that included novel activities such as partner yoga posture exercises, mindful touch exercises, and a dyadic eye-gazing exercise. They found that

partners' participation in self-expanding activities had a significant positive effect on relationship satisfaction, suggesting that part of the reason mindfulness improves relationships is through self-expansion (Carson et al., 2007). Thus, the Meisner Technique may impact self-expansion both directly and also indirectly (through increasing mindfulness), further contributing to feelings of closeness to and satisfaction with the partner.

Empathy

Another aspect of relationship satisfaction and closeness that may increase through the Meisner Technique is empathy. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the experiences of another person emotionally and cognitively (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). It is an important aspect of successful interpersonal functioning and vital in terms of satisfaction of intimate relationships (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). In addition, many types of couple's therapy directly or indirectly address increasing empathy (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). Participation in the Meisner activity should increase empathy in partners because observing and commenting on their partner's emotional experience and receiving feedback on these observations should improve their understanding of that experience.

There are several dimensions of empathy that have been found to be associated with different neurobiological systems. The anterior cingulate cortex, orbitofrontal cortex, anterior insula, and amygdala are involved in the affective components of empathy: visceral emotional responses and processing of other's emotions (Coutinho, Silva, & Decety, 2014). The precuneus, medial prefrontal cortex, orbitofrontal cortex, and temporal parietal junction are also involved in the cognitive components of empathy: reflecting on our own mental states, making inferences about the states of others, and differentiating between others and the self (Coutinho et al., 2014).

This indicates that improving affective and cognitive components of empathy may have neurobiological effects (Coutinho et al., 2014).

Research has also investigated the impact of perceived empathy on relationship satisfaction. Kimmes, Edwards, Wetchler, and Bercik (2014) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between dyadic empathy and relationship satisfaction. Dyadic empathy is the ability for someone to understand and share the experiences of their romantic partner. The researchers found that both perceived dyadic empathy and perceived dyadic empathy congruity (congruity between self and other ratings of empathy) were predictors of relationship satisfaction. Not only is the inner experience of empathy important, but the expression of empathy is as well. Another study found that perception of empathic effort, or the perception that one's partner is motivated to understand them, was strongly related to relationship satisfaction, more so than empathic accuracy (Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger, 2012). These results suggest that it may be more important that partners perceive their significant other as trying to have empathy, rather than their partner having accurate empathy.

Perrone-McGovern et al. (2014) investigated empathy, conflict resolution, and romantic relationship satisfaction. Participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship with their partner and completed several self-report measures. The researchers found that individuals with higher empathy reported greater relationship satisfaction compared to individuals with lower empathy toward their partners. These individuals also tended to show greater use of positive problem-solving approaches. The researchers suggest that increasing acceptance, understanding, and empathy may increase relationship satisfaction in couples. Cramer (2003) investigated the extent to which relationship satisfaction is related to negative conflict, demand for approval, self-esteem, unconditional regard, empathy, and congruence. The

level of unconditional regard and empathy were most related to relationship satisfaction. Both of these studies suggest that experiential activities focused on perspective-taking and empathic concern could be one way to increase relationship satisfaction. The Meisner activity may be one activity that increases empathy and perspective taking.

Maintenance of relationship satisfaction has also been investigated. Davis and Oathout (1987) proposed a model of relationship satisfaction that is based on three separate facets of empathy: empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress. They found that all three facets predicted partner behavior, which then in turn influenced the other partner's perception of partner warmth, positive outlook, possessiveness, and untrustworthiness. These perceptions then led to increased relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the researchers suggest that satisfaction is not influenced by the partner's actual behavior, but rather by perceptions of the partner's behavior. Their findings suggest that empathy, as well as perspective taking and personal distress, has a strong impact on relationship satisfaction. This model was found to be stronger for longer-term relationships and predicted female behavior slightly better than male behavior.

Not only has empathy been found to be related to relationship satisfaction but research has also found that empathy can be increased through empathy training programs. Teding van Berkhout and Malouff (2016) conducted a meta-analysis analyzing 18 randomized controlled trials of empathy training. Empathy training consists of experiential games, role-play, didactic training, and skills training. They found that overall, empathy-training programs are effective and have a medium effect size. These results indicate that empathy training is effective in increasing empathy. Long, Angera, Carter, Nakamoto, and Kalso (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of an empathy-training program. The program consisted of a structured, psychoeducational group for couples who wanted to increase their empathy for

their partner. Six components of empathy were described and modeled throughout the five two-hour sessions. They found that scores on three measures of empathy increased after the training program. In addition, perception of a partner's empathy was related to relationship satisfaction at the six-month follow up, suggesting that empathy is important in relationship satisfaction.

The Meisner activity could be a unique example of empathy training. It is an activity that consists of observing what the other partner is experiencing, commenting on it, and receiving feedback if it is incorrect. Although it is different than many other empathy-training activities, in that it does not involve psychoeducation, role-playing or modeling, it involves the same key components. There are three types of empathy that are generally targeted in training: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Some common training methods are experiential games and role-play, didactic training, and skills training (Teding van Berkhout & Malouff, 2016). The Meisner Technique could be an example of experiential training that would seem to target cognitive, behavioral, and also affective empathy. Perspective-taking and receiving feedback on your cognitions of the other person's experience is the key component of cognitive empathy that the Meisner Technique would target. The Meisner Technique targets affective empathy because it is based on instinctual reactions of the others' affective and emotional experience. Finally, it would target behavioral empathy because it is an active task that involves behaviorally demonstrating empathy and understanding, which is the key component of behavioral empathy. In addition, the Meisner activity will likely increase a partner's feelings that the other person is being empathic since their partner is telling them what they believe they are experiencing. This verbal expression of what their partner is experiencing will likely demonstrate empathy.

I-Sharing

Another reason The Meisner Technique may be beneficial for relationships is through an experience called I-sharing. Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, and Pyszczynski (2006) discussed how I-sharing is the degree to which an individual believes that he or she shares an identical subjective experience as another individual. Pinel, Long, Landau, and Pyszcynski (2004) stated that I-sharing occurs when people believe that someone else simultaneously and identically reacts to the same stimulus or event as they themselves are reacting to. Examples of this are when two or more people laugh at the same time after hearing a joke or cry simultaneously in response to the same movie. The Meisner Technique is a unique experience that seems to unify partners, coupling their perceptual experiences. Individuals who have participated in it have expressed amazement at the connection it creates between partners (Meisner et al., 1987). This process may therefore increase I-sharing, leading to increased relationship satisfaction.

Pinel et al. (2006) described three studies that support the hypothesis that I-sharing contributes to liking and feelings of connection above shared similarity. Participants indicated that they liked individuals who were objectively dissimilar to themselves when that individual I-shared with them more than they liked individuals who were objectively similar to themselves. In addition, they found that individuals with high needs for interpersonal closeness were more sensitive to I-sharing information, suggesting that this effect is stronger for people with a high need for intimacy. Shared subjective experiences appear to play an important role in liking and closeness in interpersonal relationships.

Echterhoff, Higgins, and Levine (2009) discussed how as humans we have a need to experience a shared reality with other individuals. They conceptualized a shared reality as having the same inner states, regarding an aspect of the world, as another individual. They proposed that

four conditions are needed to create a shared reality. First, the commonalities between people must be in inner states rather than outward behaviors. Second, there needs to be a specific target (e.g., object or belief) that is the focus of the shared reality. Third, shared underlying motives are equally important as the perceived reality. Fourth, a shared reality can only exist if people connect to each other's inner states. The researchers posit that there are several ways that individuals create a shared reality, including interpersonal communication and awareness of someone's inner state about the target. They discussed how shared reality and empathy are similar because they both involve subjectively experiencing commonalities between internal states. However, shared reality requires that the individuals share views about a specific target while empathy does not. Because of this important distinction, empathy and I-sharing are different mechanisms that both lead to liking. I-sharing is what takes place when people experience a shared reality with others.

I-sharing is inextricably linked to existential isolation: the feeling that occurs when we realize that we can never truly know how another person experiences the world. Pinel et al. (2004) discussed how I-sharing makes us feel existentially connected, which then combats feelings of existential isolation. They described how there are two parts of the self: the "me" and the "I". The "me" is our self-concept and represents what we see when we look in the mirror. The "I" is the part of the self that experiences life and represents the part of us that sees the reflection when looking in the mirror. They described how I-sharing is when people feel as if they are merging with one or more people and that those other individuals are having the same experience as they are in a given moment. These experiences decrease those strong feelings of existential isolation, which then decreases anxiety. In addition, it satisfies our need to know what others are experiencing and increases our feelings of interpersonal connectedness. One study

found that when individuals were primed with memories of past existential isolation they reported increased attraction to an I-sharer (Pinel et al., 2004). I-sharing may therefore increase feelings of connection and satisfaction with one's relationship.

I-sharing and decreased existential isolation may contribute to liking and closeness in the present study. When partners repeat to each other what they are noticing about the other person, it is likely that they will feel a similar subjective experience with that partner. Individuals who have participated in this activity have often expressed that they felt similar emotions and thoughts as their partner expressed. They also frequently demonstrate similar facial expressions and behaviors as each other throughout the activity (Meisner et al., 1987). Pinel et al. (2004) stated that people conclude they are I-sharing when they react the same way as someone else to a stimulus. For example, when two individuals laugh or cry in response to the same event they are I-sharing. Since many individuals have similar perceptual reactions throughout the Meisner Technique, it is possible that they are I-sharing. In addition, individuals tend to have similar reactions to the Meisner Technique as a whole (Meisner et al., 1987). Therefore, it may not only entrain perception but it may also generate I-sharing at this larger level. In addition, feedback would reassure people that their partner understood them and their experience. As discussed earlier, existential isolation is a difficult experience to have and people prefer to keep these feelings at bay (Pinel et al., 2004). I-sharing may be one of the mechanisms for change via the Meisner Technique.

Relationship Satisfaction and Closeness

Relationship satisfaction and closeness are both common ways to assess relationships. They are closely related, but distinct constructs. Relationship closeness is defined as the strength of the emotional bond between people, as well as the degree that each individual knows the other

(Dibble, Levine, & Park, 2012). Relationship satisfaction determines how happy an individual is in a relationship (Hendrick, 1988). Dibble et al. (2012) found that although relationship satisfaction and closeness correlated strongly (r = .73), they appeared to be distinct constructs. Some research studies use one or the other to assess relationships. The present study considers both relationship satisfaction and closeness in order to more extensively investigate the impact of the Meisner Technique on relationships.

Summary

The Meisner Technique was created by Sanford Meisner and is used to help actors live truthfully in the moment. Many award winning actors and actresses have been trained with the Meisner Technique and swear by its success. It involves commenting on a partner's physical and emotional experience and repeating that comment back and forth. It is meant to help actors to focus on the other individual rather than him or herself, stay present, and live truthfully in the moment (Meisner et al., 1987).

The Meisner Technique is similar to exercises in mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of increased awareness and attention to living in the present moment without judgment or evaluation (Kozlowski, 2013). The Meisner activity is similar to mindfulness in that it has a focus on living in the moment. Mindfulness in relationships improves relationship satisfaction and contributes to overall positive functioning (Carson et al., 2004) and may also impact a number of other interpersonal factors. Although the Meisner Technique is similar to exercises in mindfulness, it has unique elements that could contribute to relationship satisfaction and closeness in ways that mindfulness is unable to. The Meisner activity is an active exercise that engages both partners. Mindfulness requires you to focus internally (on your breath or emotions), which can be very challenging for people. The Meisner Technique is different than mindfulness

because partners are focusing externally and actively commenting on what they notice in the other person. This is likely easier to learn and grow comfortable with compared to some mindfulness activities. In addition, although mindfulness exercises have been found to enhance relationships, the Meisner Technique is specifically geared toward relationships. Other mindfulness interventions have been adapted for relationships, while this one was created for relationships. In that way it may be more beneficial for interpersonal relationships than other mindfulness techniques.

Other ways that the Meisner activity may contribute to relationship satisfaction and closeness are through generation of self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing. Increased self-expansion, empathy and I-sharing are all related to relationship satisfaction and closeness. The Meisner Technique is a novel activity, which will likely increase self-expansion and I-sharing. In addition, it involves paying attention to and understanding a partner's experience which will likely increase empathy.

The Present Study

Mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing, have all been shown to increase relationship closeness and satisfaction. The present study tested if a technique used in theatre, the Meisner Technique, would lead to increased closeness and relationship satisfaction in friendships and romantic partners through the processes stated above. In the current study, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: the Meisner Technique condition or a control condition. In the Meisner Technique condition, participants completed two 20-minutes sessions of the Meisner activity with a friend or romantic partner of their choosing. In the control condition, they completed two sessions of a different joint activity. Participants completed a set

of questionnaires assessing demographic information, mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing prior to the first session and after the second session.

Based on the research literature the following hypotheses were considered:

1) Participants in the Meisner Technique condition will report greater increases in relationship satisfaction and closeness compared to participants in the control condition after the completion of the second session.
2) Mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing will mediate the relationship between the Meisner Technique and closeness/relationship satisfaction after the completion of the second session.
3) At the one-week follow up, participants in the Meisner Technique condition will report greater increases in relationship satisfaction and closeness compared to participants in the control condition.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The goal of this study was to test whether using the Meisner Technique with pairs of friends and romantic partners increases relationship satisfaction and closeness. In addition, this study investigates the effects of the Meisner Technique on mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing on relationships and the relationship of these constructs with changes in relationship satisfaction and closeness. The methodology to test these research questions is presented in this chapter. This chapter is organized into the following sections: design, participants, materials, procedure, and data analysis plan.

Design

This study used a two-group experimental design. Participants were obtained via a convenience sample of undergraduate psychology students. Participants consisted of pairs of friends and romantic partners. Each pair was randomly assigned to either complete the Meisner activity (the experimental condition) or participate in a word activity together (the control condition). They participated in the activity for two 20-minute sessions two days apart. Prior to the first session and following the second session, participants completed various measures to assess their closeness, relationship satisfaction, mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy and I-sharing.

Participants

Participants were recruited through introductory and upper-level undergraduate psychology courses at Indiana State University and received course credit for their participation (for the "registered" participant/s). They included 110 friends/partners. Of the 110 original participants, 104 also completed the second part of the study and 95 completed the follow up. Of the 110 participants, 69.1% identified as female and 30.9% identified as male. Regarding ethnicity, 54.5% were Caucasian, 33.6% were African American, 7.3% were Latino(a), and 4.5% were biracial. Participants' ages ranged from 18-33 (M = 19.55, SD = 2.32). The participants consisted of 66.4% friends and 32.7% romantic partners. Regarding gender type, 56.4% of participant's partners were the same gender and 43.6% of participant's partners were a different gender. Participant's length of relationship ranged from 1-216 months (M = 29.52, SD = 37.44).

Materials

The Meisner Technique Script

The researcher used the Meisner Technique Script to introduce the Meisner Technique to participants. It instructed participants on basic information regarding the Meisner Technique as well as a step-by-step process of the technique. Although the script was structured, the feedback the researcher provided to the participants during the first step of the process varied. In addition, there were times the researcher needed to adjust the script to meet each pair's needs. There were several prompts that the experimenter provided during the two sessions when the participants engaged in off-task behavior in order to redirect them to the task. To review the full Meisner Technique script and prompts, see Appendix A.

The Meisner Technique Demonstration Video

The researcher showed a three-minute recorded demonstration of the Meisner Technique. The video consisted of the researcher and a trained colleague participating in the Meisner Technique together.

Cover Sheet

A cover sheet that included participant ID number, their assigned condition, a rating of their engagement in the activity, and any comments or concerns the experimenter had was attached to each participant's data. The Measure of Engagement of the activity consists of an observer-rated question assessing the level of engagement the participant displayed during the activity. Items were rated on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (*low engagement)* to 5 (*high engagement).* To review the full cover sheet, see Appendix B.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. The Demographic Questionnaire consists of 9 questions regarding age, race, gender, if their partner was a friend or romantic partner, if their partner was the same or different gender from them, the length of the relationship, how often they saw each other, how important the relationship was, and how willing they were to disclose personal information to their friend/partner. To review the demographic questionnaire, see Appendix C.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) consists of 15 self-report items measuring state mindfulness. It measures the presence or absence of awareness and attention to what is happening in the current moment. Items are rated on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*almost always)* to 6 *(almost never)* where high scores reflect more mindfulness. Previous research found strong test-retest reliability and high convergent and discriminate validity. Further, this measurement has been used in other

studies to investigate interpersonal relationships (e.g., Wachs & Cordova, 2007). In the current sample, the MAAS was found to have high internal consistency reliability at both time points (Cronbach's α = .78; .84) with an average score of 60.43 (*SD* = 7.81) at time point one and 59.82 (*SD* = 7.55) at time point two. To review the full Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, see Appendix D.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010) is a self-report measure composed of 13 items measuring empathy in couples. It measures both cognitive and emotional empathy expressed in a romantic relationship. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*does not describe me well*) to 4 (*describes me very well)*. When the measures were used with friends, the items were altered to refer to friendship rather than romantic relationships. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index consists of two subscales: Dyadic Perspective Taking and Dyadic Empathic Concern. The researchers found that the scale had high convergent validity with other measurements of general and dyadic empathy. They also found strong discriminate, concurrent and predictive validity. Finally, the IRIC was found to be moderately correlated with relationship satisfaction, suggesting it is a related but distinct construct. In the current study's sample, the IRIC was found to have high internal consistency reliability at both time points (Cronbach's α = .74; .81) with an average score of 51.79 (*SD* = 5.24) at time point one and 49.67 (*SD* = 5.91) at time point two. It is important to note that research on the IRIC with friendships has not been conducted. To review the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, see Appendix E.

The Self-Expansion Scale. The Self-Expansion Scale (Lewandowski & Aron, 2002) is a self-report measure composed of 14 items measuring self-expansion in a relationship. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all)* to 7 *(a great deal)*. When the

measure was used with friends, the items were altered to represent friendships rather than romantic relationships. In the current study's sample, the Self-Expansion Scale was found to have high internal consistency reliability at both time points (Cronbach's α = .94; .96) with an average score of 4.94 (*SD* = 1.05) at time point one and 4.78 (*SD* = 1.27) at time point two. This scale has been used to measure self-expansion in many different research studies. There is no research on using this scale with friendships rather than romantic relationships. To review the Self-Expansion Scale, see Appendix F.

The Existential Isolation Scale (EIS). The Existential Isolation Scale (Pinel, Long, Murdoch, & Helm, 2017) consists of 6 items designed to measure existential isolation. This was used to assess I-sharing since existential isolation is related to I-sharing and there is no measure that directly assesses I-sharing. Items were reversed in order to assess I-sharing. Items are rated on a ten-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree)* to 9 (*strongly agree).* The scale has two factors: existential isolation and the desire for existential connectedness. Test-retest reliability, as well as convergent and discriminate validity were found to be strong. In the current study's sample, the EIS was found to have high internal consistency reliability at both time points (Cronbach's α = .81; .88) with an average score of 5.48 (*SD* = 1.33) at time point one and 4.78 (*SD* = 1.27) at time point two. To review the Existential Isolation Scale, see Appendix G.

The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS). The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (Dibble et al., 2012) is a 12-item measurement assessing relationship closeness. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree)*. The reliability and validity of the scale has been assessed with college dating couples, female friends and strangers, friends, and family members. The scale correlated strongly with relationship satisfaction and had high convergent and discriminate

validity. In the current study's sample, the URCS was found to have high internal consistency reliability at all three time points (Cronbach's α = .96; .97; .97) with an average score of 5.15 (*SD* = 1.46) at time point one, 5.07 (*SD* = 1.60) at time point two and 4.82 (*SD* = 1.59) at time point three. To review the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale, see Appendix H.

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) is a 7-item measurement assessing relationship satisfaction. Items are rated on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*low satisfaction*) to 5 *(high satisfaction*). The items were revised to refer to friendships rather than romantic relationships when the participants were friends. This scale has been used to measure friendship satisfaction previously (e.g., Morry, 2005; Cramer, 2004; Emmers-Sommer, 2004). They found that it had strong convergent and discriminate validity. In the current study's sample, the RAS was found to have high internal consistency reliability at all three time points (Cronbach's α = .77; .74; .84) with an average score of 4.24 (*SD* = .62) at time point one, 4.13 (*SD* = .68) at time point two and 3.93 (*SD* = .89) at time point three. To review the Relationship Assessment Scale, see Appendix I.

Manipulation Check. The manipulation check consists of 10 questions assessing whether participants felt like the activity was pleasant, exciting, novel, stimulating, mindful, and involved empathy, as well as closeness of the relationship. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 *(Strongly Disagree)* to 7 *(Strongly Agree).* To review the full manipulation-check, see Appendix J.

Measure of General Relationship Satisfaction. The Measure of General Relationship Satisfaction consists of 4 questions assessing how satisfied participants were with their interactions with others. Items are rated on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (*low satisfaction*) to 7 (*high satisfaction*). The Measure of General Relationship Satisfaction was

found to have high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α = .92) with an average score of 3.50 (*SD* = .81). To review the full measure of general relationship satisfaction, see Appendix K.

Ten-item Personality Inventory. The Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) is a 10-item measurement assessing the Big-Five personality dimensions. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). As the developers of this short version predicted, internal consistency reliabilities were low reflecting the use of a few items to capture different facets of these broad constructs (which increasing content validity). In the current study, the Cronbach alphas were .70, .25, .50, .60, and .48 for extraversion, agreeableness, contentiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, with average scores of 4.59 (*SD* = 1.17), 4.68 (*SD* = .87), 5.75 (*SD* = .89), 4.32 (*SD* = .94), and 5.58 (*SD* = .84). Previous research suggests that this scale has been found to have strong convergent validity with other measures of the Big-Five personality traits, strong test-retest reliability, and external validity. To review the full scale, see Appendix L.

Procedure

Participants were asked to participate with a close friend (either the same or opposite sex) or romantic partner and scheduled a time outside of class to participate. Upon arrival at the lab, the researcher provided them with an informed consent document (see Appendix M) that states that participation is optional and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were then randomly assigned to either the experimental condition or the control condition.

Individuals in both the control and experimental conditions completed several questionnaires prior to starting the dyadic activity (Meisner Technique or word game). Questionnaires included the Demographic Questionnaire, the Mindful Attention Awareness scale, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples, the Self-Expansion scale, The

Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale, the Existential Isolation Scale, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Ten-Item Personality Inventory. The experimenter attached a cover sheet with the subject's ID number condition, rating of engagement with a comment section, to the collected data. There was also an experimental record sheet with the participant's ID number and e-mail address that was collected at the first session.

Individuals in the control condition were asked to sit in a chair across from their friend or romantic partner and spend 20 minutes playing a word game. They were asked to role two dice and choose a card with a word on it. They each thought of the number of rhyming words, for the word on the card, based on the number rolled on the dice (e.g., 5 rhyming words if 5 on the dice). They were provided with dice, cards with words on them, paper, and pencils. After the completion of the activity they completed a manipulation check. They were then reminded to come to the second scheduled session in the lab two days later where they repeated this procedure. They were asked to complete the same questionnaires a second time after completion of the second session, as well as the manipulation check. The researcher also completed the ratings of engagement at the end of both of the sessions. At the end of the second session participants received a reminder that they would receive an e-mail asking them to complete a follow-up questionnaire in a week. A week following the second session, they received an e-mail asking them to complete the surveys assessing relationship satisfaction and closeness, as well as a measure assessing general relationship satisfaction. These questionnaires were completed online.

Individuals in the experimental condition were asked to sit in a chair across from their friend or romantic partner. The researcher then explained the Meisner Technique using a script (See Appendix A). She then showed them a short, recorded demonstration of the technique. She

asked them to complete the technique for a brief period of time (i.e., 5-10 minutes) in order for the experimenter to provide feedback on their performance of the Meisner technique. The experimenter had participants start with basic statements (e.g., you are tapping your foot) and move to more complex statements (e.g., you are confused). After they felt comfortable with the technique, the friend/partner dyad were asked to continue using the technique for 20 minutes on their own. During this time, the experimenter did not coach them, however; she did provide specific prompts if necessary due to off-task behavior (See Appendix A). After the completion of the activity, they completed the manipulation check. They were reminded of their second 20-minute session using the Meisner Technique, two days later. During the second session, the experimenter did not coach them; however he or she did provide the same prompts provided during the first session. After the second session, participants completed the same survey that the control condition completed. The researcher also completed the ratings of engagement at the end of both of the sessions. At the end of the second session participants received a reminder that they would receive an e-mail asking them to complete a follow up questionnaire in a week. A week following the second session, they received an e-mail asking them to complete the online surveys assessing relationship satisfaction and closeness, as well as a measure assessing general relationship satisfaction. See Table 1 for the temporal sequencing of the measures.

All participants were provided a debriefing in e-mail form (to see the full debriefing form, see Appendix N) after they completed the surveys online a week following the second session. Students in psychology classes were given class credit for participating. In total, the entire procedure required approximately 1.5 hours split between two sessions and the one-week follow up.

Table 1

Temporal Sequencing of the Measures

Pre-session Measures	Following Session 1	Following Session 2	One Week Follow-up
Demographic Questionnaire	The Manipulation Check	Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale		Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples	The Relationship Assessment Scale
Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples		The Self-Expansion Scale	Measure of General Relationship Satisfaction
The Self-Expansion Scale		The Existential Isolation Scale	
The Existential Isolation Scale		The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale	
The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale		The Relationship Assessment Scale	
The Relationship Assessment Scale		The Manipulation Check	
Ten-Item Personality Inventory			

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Due to the dyadic nature of the data, intraclass correlation coefficients were conducted on all the measures. As seen in Table 2, couples shared high levels of correspondence on all three dependent measures and some of the hypothetical mediators. Because there was no clear way of distinguishing between partners to control for this non-independence, scores were averaged across partners and each couple was treated as a unit in most analyses.[1]

Table 2

Intraclass Correlation Coefficients Between Partners

	Time 1	Time 2
Dependent Variables		
Closeness	.70*	.84*
Relationship Satisfaction	.46*	.66*
General Relationship Satisfaction	NA[a]	.47*
Mediators		
Mindfulness	.17	-.08
Self-Expansion	.51*	.69*
I-Sharing	.37*	.18
Empathy	.17	.31*

Potential Moderators		
Extraversion	.04	NA[a]
Agreeableness	.13	NA[a]
Continuousness	.26*	NA[a]
Emotional Stability	-.06	NA[a]
Openness	.16	NA[a]
Manipulation Checks		
Manipulation check- Self expansion[b]	.60*	
Manipulation check- Empathy[b]	.49*	
Manipulation check- Mindfulness[b]	.17	

[a] Not administered at this time point. [b] The average of time 1 and time 2.
* p< .05.

The results are presented in four parts. First, the outcome of the manipulation check is addressed. Next, the effects of the Meisner condition versus the control condition on relationship satisfaction and closeness are examined. Next, the effects of the Meisner condition on mindfulness, empathy, self-expansion, and I-sharing are discussed. The final section consists of additional analyses that examined several potential moderators, including openness, gender, and relationship type. Most analyses were conducted via regression to support the inclusion of multiple covariates. Group means for each of the measures were calculated. See Tables 3, 4 and 5 for specific group means for each variable.

Table 3

Group Means for Time 1

	$M_{experimental}$	$M_{control}$
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	60.90 (*SD* = 8.16)	59.91 (*SD* = 7.50)
Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples	51.26 (*SD* = 6.11)	52.38 (*SD* = 4.08)
The Self-Expansion Scale	5.15 (*SD* = 1.10)	4.68 (*SD* = .96)
The Existential Isolation Scale	5.64 (*SD* = 1.43)	5.30 (*SD* = 1.20)
The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale	5.53 (*SD* = 1.24)	4.71 (*SD* = 1.58)
The Relationship Assessment Scale	4.41 (*SD* = .50)	4.05 (*SD* = .70)
Extraversion	4.68 (*SD* = 1.27)	4.48 (*SD* = 1.06)
Agreeableness	4.32 (*SD* = .86)	5.09 (*SD* = .68)
Contentiousness	5.81 (*SD* = .96)	5.67 (*SD* = .82)
Emotional Stability	4.38 (*SD* = 1.01)	4.26 (*SD* = .87)
Openness	5.47 (*SD* = .93)	5.69 (*SD* = .72)

Table 4

Group Means for Time 2

	$M_{experimental}$	$M_{control}$
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	60.00 (*SD* = 8.06)	59.59 (*SD* = 7.02)
Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples	49.98 (*SD* = 6.44)	49.28 (*SD* = 5.29)
The Self-Expansion Scale	5.04 (*SD* = 1.29)	4.44 (*SD* = 1.19)
The Existential Isolation Scale	5.62 (*SD* = 1.40)	5.30 (*SD* = 1.21)
The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale	5.48 (*SD* = 1.38)	4.56 (*SD* = 1.73)
The Relationship Assessment Scale	4.27 (*SD* = .59)	3.96 (*SD* = .76)

Table 5

Group Means for Time 3

	$M_{experimental}$	$M_{control}$
The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale	5.05 (*SD* = 1.48)	4.53 (*SD* = 1.72)
The Relationship Assessment Scale	4.09 (*SD* = .77)	3.72 (*SD* = 1.01)
Measure of General Relationship Satisfaction	3.49 (*SD* = .79)	3.52 (*SD* = .85)

Manipulation Check

Immediately after each experimental session, a manipulation check was given containing multiple items pertaining to mindfulness, self-expansion, and empathy. A principle components analysis was conducted to identify the distinct items associated with each dimension. The following items appeared to reflect components of self-expansion: this activity was pleasant, this activity was novel, participating in this activity was exciting, participating in this activity made me see things from a different perspective, and participating in this activity was stimulating. Additionally, empathy seemed reflected in four items: I felt connected with my partner while participating in this activity, I felt understood by my partner while participating in this activity, participating in this activity helped me understand my partner better, and I expect to still have a close relationship to this partner in the future. One question seemed to represent mindfulness: I felt like I was paying attention to the present moment while participating in this activity. Items associated with each component were combined to create composite scores that reflected experiences of mindfulness, self-expansion, and empathy, and these scores were averaged across the two sessions. Means for each group are shown in Table 6. Significant differences between

the control and Meisner groups were observed for mindfulness and self-expansion, but not for empathy. However, the means on the measures were in the opposite direction from what was expected. As seen in the table, participants in the *control group* reported significantly greater mindfulness and self-expansion than those experiencing the Meisner Technique. Those in the control group also reported experiencing slightly (but not significantly) more empathy during the sessions.

Table 6

Control and Experimental Differences on Manipulation Check Items

	Experimental (Meisner)	Control	t (53)
Mindfulness	3.89	4.71	2.58*
Self-Expansion	5.58	6.11	2.04*
Empathy	4.98	5.12	.91

* $p < .05$

To try to understand these unexpected patterns, dependent sample t-tests were conducted to determine if ratings on the manipulation checks were different during two laboratory sessions. As seen in Tables 7 and 8, there was a significant difference between time one and time two for empathy in the experimental condition, such that individuals reported experiencing less empathy during the second session compared to the first session.

There was also a significant difference between Times 1 and 2 for ratings of engagement in the experimental condition: Participants were perceived as more engaged during the second session compared to the first session although participants in the control group were still rated as more engaged than those in the experimental condition (see Table 7). While this change might be dismissed as a measurement artifact (as there were two experimenters rating engagement in the

first session, but only one in the second), it is notable that no such change occurred in the control condition (See Table 8).

Table 7

Experimental Differences at Each Time Point

	Time 1	Time 2	t (28)
Mindfulness	5.79	5.45	1.86
Self- Expansion	4.19	3.76	1.57
Empathy	5.20	4.78	3.11*
Engagement	4.18	4.39	-2.45*

* p< .05

Table 8

Control Differences at Each Time Point

	Time 1	Time 2	t (22)
Mindfulness	6.35	5.85	1.76
Self- Expansion	4.53	4.56	-.12
Empathy	5.45	4.92	1.86
Engagement	4.41	4.48	-.55

* p< .05

Dependent Variables

Two steps were taken to examine the treatment effects on the dependent variables of closeness and relationship satisfaction. First, the various dependent variables (closeness and relationship satisfaction) immediately after treatment were regressed onto a dichotomous "treatment" predictor. Then differences were re-examined controlling for a variety of covariates, including the pre-study measures of closeness or relationship satisfaction, gender of the dyad, and relationship type (friend vs. romantic).

Initial results showed that there was a significant treatment effect on closeness prior to including any covariates, $\beta = .29$, $t\ (50) = 2.12$, $p < .05$; those who experienced the Meisner

condition reported greater closeness ($M = 5.48$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.56$). However, when covariates- including prior levels of closeness, relationship type and gender composition were included- the effect was eliminated, $\beta = .02$, $t\ (47) = .59$, $p = .56$; those who experienced the Meisner condition did not report greater closeness ($M = 5.09$) than those in the control condition ($M = 5.01$). The only significant predictor proved to be the prior measure of closeness, $\beta = .90$, $t\ (47) = 15.49$, $p < .001$.

There was not a significant treatment effect on relationship satisfaction in the initial analysis (excluding covariates), $\beta = .23$, $t\ (50) = 1.63$, $p = .11$, reflecting a small difference between control ($M = 3.96$) and experimental ($M = 4.27$) groups. There was still no significant effect of treatment on relationship satisfaction when the gender composition, relationship type and the pre-study measure of relationship satisfaction were added, $\beta = -.04$, $t\ (47) = -.55$, $p = .59$. The only significant predictor of relationship satisfaction post-treatment was the pre-treatment measure of relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .90$, $t\ (47) = 11.56$, $p < .001$.

Closeness and relationship satisfaction were also measured at a one-week follow-up. Results showed that there was not a significant treatment effect on closeness at the one week follow-up prior to controlling for the covariates, $\beta = .16$, $t\ (39) = 1.02$, $p = .31$ (this reflects the difference between the control mean of 4.53 and the experimental mean of 5.05). Nor did a treatment effect emerge when the covariates were added, $\beta = -.02$, $t\ (36) = -.46$, $p = .64$; the only significant predictor was the prior measure of closeness, $\beta = .96$, $t\ (36) = 13.24$, $p < .001$.

Similarly, there was no treatment effect on relationship satisfaction at the one week follow-up prior to controlling for covariates, $\beta = .21$, $t\ (39) = 1.35$, $p = .18$ (this reflects the difference between the control mean of 3.72 and the experimental mean of 4.09), nor after

controlling for them, β = -.01, *t* (36) = -.08, *p* = .93; the only significant predictor was the prior measure of relationship satisfaction, β = .83, *t* (36) = 9.54, *p* < .001.

An additional variable, general relationship satisfaction (assessing satisfaction across social relationships) was measured at the one-week follow-up to examine whether treatment effects might have occurred across relationships generally. Analyses showed no significant treatment effect on general relationship satisfaction, β = .01, *t* (46) = .03, *p* = .97; this reflects the difference between the control mean of 3.52 and the experimental mean of 3.49. There was still no treatment effect on general relationship satisfaction when the gender composition, and relationship type were controlled, β = -.01, *t* (44) = -.09, *p* = .93.

Mediators

Although there were no identified effects of the treatment on the dependent variables, it remains possible that the treatment impacted one or more of the hypothesized mediating variables, but that the brevity or intensity of the treatment did not result in the expected transference to impact couples' closeness or relationship satisfaction. Treatment effects on the hypothesized mediators (mindfulness, empathy, self-expansion and I-sharing) were therefore examined despite the absence of effects on the dependent variables. Because pre-study measures of these variables were available, a similar approach as used in the prior analyses was taken. See Table 9 for means prior to controlling for the pre-study measures or covariates. See Table 10 for correlations between the mediators and outcome variables.

Results showed that there was not a significant treatment effect on couple mindfulness prior to controlling for the pre-study measure or covariates, β = .03, *t* (50) = .19, *p* = .85, nor after gender composition, relationship type and pre-study measures were added, β = -.03, *t* (47) =

-.32, $p = .75$. The only significant predictor was the prior measure of mindfulness, $\beta = .84$, $t\ (47) = 10.97$, $p < .001$.

Results showed that there was not a significant treatment effect on couple empathy prior to controlling for the pre-study measure or covariates, $\beta = .06$, $t\ (50) = .42$, $p = .68$. When the gender composition, relationship type and pre-study measures were added there was still no evidence of a significant treatment effect, $\beta = .11$, $t\ (47) = 1.11$, $p = .27$. The only significant predictor was the prior measure of empathy, $\beta = .59$, $t\ (47) = 5.31$, $p < .001$.

Results showed that there was not a significant treatment effect on couple self-expansion prior to controlling for the pre-study measure or covariates, $\beta = .27$, $t\ (50) = .1.93$, $p = .06$. When the gender composition, relationship type and pre-study measures were added there was again not an effect on self-expansion, $\beta = .06$, $t\ (47) = .91$, $p = .37$. The only significant predictor was the prior measure of self-expansion, $\beta = .86$, $t\ (47) = 11.14$, $p < .001$.

Results showed that there was not a significant treatment effect on couple I-sharing prior to controlling for the pre-study measure or covariates, $\beta = .12$, $t\ (50) = .88$, $p = .38$. When the gender composition, relationship type and pre-study measures were added there was again not an effect on I-sharing, $\beta = .002$, $t\ (47) = .02$, $p = .98$. The only significant predictor was the prior measure of I-sharing, $\beta = .70$, $t\ (47) = 8.70$, $p < .001$.

Table 9

Means of the Mediators in the Control and Experimental Groups

	$M_{experimental}$	$M_{control}$
Mindfulness	60.00	59.59
Empathy	49.98	49.28
Self-expansion	5.04	4.37
I-sharing	5.63	5.30

Table 10

Correlations Between Post-Session Mediators and Post-Session Outcome Variables

	Closeness	Relationship Satisfaction
Mindfulness	.17	.24*
Empathy	.65*	.59*
Self-Expansion	.79*	.83*
I-sharing	.07	.08

* $p < .05$

Additional Analyses

There exists a potential that certain qualities of the individuals and relationship may have impacted the effects of the treatment on closeness. Several possible moderators of each treatment's effectiveness were examined, including couples' openness, gender, and relationship type. Following approaches of Aiken, West, and Reno (1991) interaction terms were created between each hypothesized moderator and the treatment variable. Results showed that there was not a significant interaction between treatment and openness, $\beta = -.169$, $t\ (47) = -1.28$, $p = .21$,

treatment and gender, $\beta = -.14$, $t\ (47) = -1.11$, $p = .27$, nor treatment and friend vs. romantic relationship type, $\beta = -.11$, $t\ (47) = -.58$, $p = .56$. These results give no evidence to support a claim that the treatment may have worked for some subgroups of the sample.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to contribute to the research literature on techniques that improve interpersonal relationships. Previous research suggests that exercises in mindfulness may be beneficial in improving relationship satisfaction and closeness. In addition, increases in self-expansion, empathy and I-sharing have also been associated with enhanced relationship satisfaction and closeness. A technique used in theatre to improve actor's ability to pay attention to their partner in the current moment, called the Meisner Technique, was examined as a therapeutic tool to improve interpersonal relationships, possibly through one or more of these mediators.

The Meisner Technique has a focus on living in the present moment and being aware of the here-and-now, which was hypothesized to increase mindfulness. In addition, it involves increasing awareness about a partner's experience, as well as undergoing a novel activity, which was predicted to increase self-expansion. It involves recognizing another's emotional experience and receiving feedback about that observation, which was hypothesized to positively affect empathy. Finally, it involves having a shared experience and seeing that experience through a partner's eyes, which was predicted to increase I-sharing. Mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy, and I-sharing have all been found to be related to relationship satisfaction and closeness. Therefore, this study proposed that through these processes, the Meisner activity would increase reports of closeness and relationship satisfaction between friends and romantic partner dyads.

Counter to what was hypothesized, results of the current study suggested that the Meisner Technique did not result in increases in relationship satisfaction or closeness in friends and romantic partners. Although initial results suggested a significant difference between closeness in the experimental and control group, further analyses showed that these differences reflected pre-study patterns, rather than effects of the treatment. Results also suggested that there was not a difference between the control and experimental group on any of the potential mediators: mindfulness, empathy, self-expansion, and I-sharing. Further, there was no evidence that the treatment might have been effective for certain subgroups of the sample.

There are several reasons why the study might not have demonstrated treatment effects of the Meisner Technique, including participants feeling uncomfortable by the activity, the frequency of the sessions, the personality of participants, and participants not being motivated to participate. Participants might have been initially uncomfortable by the Meisner activity and may have even avoided paying attention to the present moment (by "tuning out") and therefore, failed to gain benefits of even a short experience. More practice with the activity would likely increase their comfort level, allowing them to achieve the psychological state of mindful attention, as well as potentially allowing more opportunity for the mediators and therefore, the outcomes, to be affected. This was evidenced in observations by the researchers of participants seeming more comfortable during the second session compared to the first session. In addition, ratings of engagement were significantly higher in the second session compared to the first session for participants in the experimental condition. This suggests that an increased number of sessions might have been beneficial. Further, due to time and financial constraints, participants in the current study only participated in two 20-minute sessions. Actors who learn the Meisner Technique usually spend at least several sessions, and frequently months or even years, studying

and practicing it. Therefore, the expected results may not have been found due to too little exposure. Moreover, other interventions targeting the hypothesized mediators (mindfulness, empathy and self-expansion) have also typically consisted of four to ten sessions, suggesting that these may not be changed in just a couple of brief experiences (Carson et al., 2004; Carson et al., 2007; Gambrel & Piercy, 2015; Long et al., 1999; Reissmen et al., 1993; Shapiro et al., 1998).

Another reason why the study may have failed was reliance on a broad sample of college students. On the whole, actors tend to be more comfortable participating in unusual and unique activities compared to the general population. They may be more willing to participate fully in the Meisner activity than the participants in the current study were. The technique may therefore be beneficial, but only for certain types of people. Or, it may require more time for certain individuals, such as those who are less comfortable participating in new activities. In order to explore this, the possibility that the personality trait of openness might predict effectiveness of the treatment was examined. Although there was no evidence of this in the analysis, this might have been due to the small number of participants, which limited the power of the interaction, as well as the averaging across couples, which may have masked effects of openness for individuals. If this study had been conducted with actors rather than college students, or had more participants been involved, a difference between the intervention and control groups might have been found.

Further, participants in the study were not seeking treatment, but rather participating in the activity as a requirement for their classes. Numerous studies suggest that therapeutic interventions work best when participants are motivated (Arkowitz, Miller & Rollnick, 2015); lack of participant motivation for this type of intervention surely would have negatively impacted its apparent effectiveness. For instance, actors are often introduced to the Meisner

Technique as a technique to improve acting performance, but if individuals participating in the Meisner Technique are not motivated to improve their performance or some skill (i.e., attending to a relationship partner), they may not engage fully and experience the benefit. While college students were primarily motivated to earn course credit (which was not dependent on their engagement), couples seeking therapy to improve their relationship would likely be more motivated to engage in the activity. Thus, the Meisner Technique might still prove beneficial for those couples despite the findings here. A measure of motivation to engage in the activity (Meisner or word game) would have been a valuable addition to the current study to explore as a possible moderator.

Related to this, there are several options that could have been used in this study, and that practitioners could use in therapy, to increase motivation for engaging in the activity. First, providing education regarding the intervention might be beneficial. Before therapists do interventions with their clients, they explain the rationale, so that the clients understand why they are being asked to engage in the specified activities. It is likely that this increases "buy in" in the treatment. No such rationale was provided here (to avoid biasing participants' responses) but in retrospect, it might have increased participants' willingness to fully engage in the intervention activities. Another way to increase motivation would be to ask people how they felt about the activity, what the barriers to engagement were, and what would increase their willingness. These types of questions are used in Motivational Interviewing, a therapeutic technique used to increase change and motivation for change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Many therapists incorporate Motivational Interviewing into their therapy in order to increase clients' motivations to engage in treatment, and it may have similarly increased participants' engagements with the Meisner Technique in this study, and consequently, its effectiveness. Building rapport and using humor

can also help people feel more comfortable with an intervention and may also increase motivation. The Meisner Technique, in particular, can feel awkward and uncomfortable at first, a feeling that may be exacerbated when someone is watching you. Humor might have been used to diffuse the tension and help participants feel more comfortable. Further, in a real therapeutic intervention, therapists may spend several sessions prior to starting a new technique working on building rapport so that the clients trust them, particularly when the technique is known to generate anxiety. This was not done in the current study due to time constraints, but it is likely that if the participants felt more comfortable with, and trusted the researchers, they would have engaged more. Another option for the study that might have helped the participants feel more comfortable would have been to use a one-way-mirror through which to observe, rather than remaining in the room while they participated in the activity.

One especially surprising result of the study was that the control group reported greater mindfulness and self-expansion than the experimental group in the lab meeting (as evident in results of the manipulation check assessing participants' in-session experiences). This was counter to the prediction that the Meisner Technique would increase mindfulness and self-expansion. This might have been due to the control group activity playing a word game, which required them to pay constant attention to the "here-and-now." In order to think of words, participants had to focus on the activity-at-hand. In addition, if experimental participants found the Meisner Technique to be aversive, experimental participants may have avoided paying attention to the present moment. This would explain higher mindfulness reports by the control condition participants. Similarly, the word-game (created for this study) may have proven novel enough that it was experienced as self-expanding (particularly relative to an activity that was not ultimately engaged in). Another surprising result was that empathy was rated as lower in the

experimental condition after the second session compared to the first session. If the participants were more engaged (as was found), one would expect them to experience more empathy for their partner. However, this might be due to the fact that participants might have been more focused and engaged on the feedback given to them by their partner during the second session, rather than on their partner's experience. It might require another session, or several more sessions before empathy increased.

Although self-expansion and mindfulness were found to be higher in the control group compared to the experimental group in the manipulation check, the same patterns were not present in the measures of mindfulness and self-expansion in their relationships beyond the lab session. Experimental participants actually reported slightly higher levels of self-expansion than participants in the control condition, although this finding was not significant. Thus, this discrepancy between the two sets of measures (manipulation check versus mediator versions) may be an artifact of the temporal focus of these measures. Nonetheless, they suggest that the technique was not experienced as anticipated (or desired) while in the lab.

Significance

If the results are accurate and the Meisner Technique is not beneficial for relationships, then this is significant for several reasons. First, it is important to examine whether the intervention was not effective because it does not increase mindfulness, self-expansion, I-sharing and empathy, or that the intervention *does* increase these phenomena, but that these processes do not lead to increases in closeness and relationship satisfaction. Whereas the results suggested that there were not increases in those potential mediators, and there is a significant amount of research that suggests that these mediators *do* lead to increases in relationship satisfaction and closeness, the most likely possibility is that the Meisner Technique does not impact these

variables (or that the procedures did not allow for the influence of the Meisner Technique to take place). This is unexpected because actors who have participated in the activity have indicated that it *has* led to increases in paying attention to the present moment, as well as their connection to others. However, subjective reports are different than objective data, and are frequently inaccurate (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). If the Meisner Technique does not lead to changes in these phenomena, then it is unsurprising that there would be no increases in relationship satisfaction or closeness.

There are a couple reasons why the Meisner Technique might not lead to increases in these variables: mindfulness, empathy, self-expansion and I-sharing. Although it was hypothesized that the Meisner Technique would improve relationship satisfaction and closeness in friends and romantic partners, this was not the original purpose of the technique. Rather, it was designed as an acting technique. It is possible that the Meisner Technique is very effective in improving actor's ability to live in the present moment on stage, but that these effects do not generalize to life off-stage or to outside relationships.

As discussed above, it is also possible that participants did not enjoy the Meisner Technique, especially because they likely felt uncomfortable when they first learned it. Because of this, they may have actively tried to *not* pay attention to the present moment and instead just repeated what their partner said and/or made random inaccurate observations. In addition, if the activity was not enjoyable, that might have suppressed experiences of self-expansion and I-sharing. Further, if participants were feeling frustrated by the activity, they might have been preoccupied by their own emotional experiences and therefore, did not experience increased empathy for their partner. One option that might have resulted in greater understanding and engagement in the activity, despite it being uncomfortable, would be to have participants watch

an example, participate in it, and then *teach* it to two other individuals. Incorporating teaching into the activity might have increased their motivation to understand the activity, as well as to engage with it, particularly in the second session, despite not enjoying it initially. Although teaching the Meisner activity would not directly target relationship satisfaction and closeness, it could potentially expand side benefits, which as noted above may take time. This could be something that is examined in future research.

Previous research has suggested that psychodrama leads to increased disinhibition, attitude change, warmth, trust and empathy. Two psychodrama techniques that have been investigated are role reversal and doubling, where the patient and therapist role-played certain social situations (Kipper & Ritchie, 2003). The Meisner Technique seems like an example of psychodrama; however, it is very different than the psychodrama techniques that have been previously researched. It does not consist of role-playing, nor does it directly involve therapist participation (other than teaching the technique). Further, the only outcome that both the previous research and the current study both investigated was empathy. Prior research on psychodrama has targeted disinhibition, attitude change, warmth, and trust—none of which were measured here—and it has not examined the primary measures of relationship satisfaction, closeness, mindfulness, I-sharing or self-expansion, of interest here. Due to these differences, it would be a mistake to take the current results as evidencing a failure of psychodrama techniques in general.

If these results are accurate and the Meisner Technique does not have the effects that were anticipated, then it further reminds us that it is necessary to conduct research on interventions before implementing them. It is far too easy to delude oneself on the basis of anecdotal and subjective reports. It is further important to examine what specific, or non-

specific, factors of interventions create change, as well as the ”dose-response” relationship, in order to apply it effectively with clients. Further, there is the potential that the dose may need to vary (as is the case with other types of therapy) based on the client's background and personality. For example, some clients may gain benefits of the Meisner technique faster than other clients do, and therefore they may not need to participate in as many sessions compared to others.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations of the current study. First, several of the measures used were created for romantic relationships and edited to refer to friendships. Some of them have not been tested for use with friendships and may not validly assess the same constructs in these populations. Further, most of the justification for this study was developed from research on romantic relationships, but the majority of participants in the current study were friends (66.4%). It is possible that the Meisner Technique would have led to positive outcomes for romantic partners. The technique may seem more awkward to friends than romantic partners, in part because romantic partners are more willing to be intimate with each other than friends are. There is also the potential that romantic partners would be more motivated to engage in a relationship-building activity with one another than pairs of friends would be.

Another limitation of the study is that the I-sharing measure was a new measure that had not yet been used in many studies, and its validity and reliability is thus unknown. Further, the I-sharing measure, as well as the mindfulness measure, assessed I-sharing and mindfulness in general, rather than I-sharing and mindfulness between the two partners in the study. There is a potential that the participants experienced increased I-sharing and mindfulness with their partner specifically, but that this did not generalize to other relationships and therefore, did not “move” the measures. A better measure should be developed for future research.

Another limitation that might have impacted the results of the study was that the measure used to assess openness to experiences had poor reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .48). This suggests that the measure for openness might not have accurately reflected each participant's actual level of openness. Future research might use a more reliable measure to better assess the impact of openness on the effectiveness of the Meisner Technique.

Another limitation that might have impacted the results of the study was the choice of control condition. Several control conditions were considered, including having participants play a board game, converse about a topic of their choosing, or complete an artistic activity. The word game that was used was selected for several reasons, including the fact that it was verbal (and thus compared with the experimental activity that was also verbal). In addition, it was expected that the word game would not be engaging or interesting to participants (decreasing the chance of self-expansion to occur); but as noted earlier, participants reported that the control sessions generated greater self-expansion and mindfulness than the experimental sessions. Because this was an initial study, it might have been beneficial to start with a more standard, no-treatment control, rather than a condition that relied on an activity whose effects were unestablished. Perhaps the best option would have been to have control participants engage in an activity that was slightly uncomfortable, since this may have been an aspect of the Meisner Technique that impacted its effectiveness.

Future Research

There are several directions that future research could take to further investigate the potential positive effects of the Meisner Technique on interpersonal relationships. The Meisner Technique could be implemented as part of a couple's intervention over a longer period of time (e.g., 6–10 weeks). Implementing the Meisner Technique as part of a couple's intervention could

have several benefits that might increase its effectiveness. First, the majority of research on the relationship of mindfulness, self-expansion, empathy and I-sharing has been conducted with romantic partners. Therefore, focused study on the impact of the Meisner Technique on couples might yield evidence of the technique's impact. Second, couples seeking services may have greater motivation to engage in the practice, so implementing it as part of an intervention with couples in distress may also demonstrate its value (though this also introduces greater risk). Finally, implementing the technique as part of a treatment over a longer time period would also allow the therapist more time and flexibility to incorporate motivational interviewing techniques and build rapport with the clients in order to increase their motivation and provide opportunity for the participants to become comfortable with the activity. The longer time period would also give greater chance for a measurable change to take place.

Future research could examine additional factors that might moderate the treatment effectiveness. For instance, a self-report measure of participants' comfort or interest in the treatment could be included to address some of the motivational concerns raised as explanations for the null effects of the current study. Future research might also assess participants' self-monitoring. Actors tend to have a greater ability to change their behavior according to the situation they are experiencing, like high self-monitors. Thus, it may be that high self-monitors would similarly have an easier time participating in (and benefiting from) the Meisner activity.

In general, although the current study did not find positive results of the Meisner Technique, future research could address some of the limitations that likely impacted its effectiveness. If these limitations were addressed, there is the potential that the Meisner Technique could be found to be beneficial for some romantic relationships.

Conclusion

The hypotheses that the Meisner Technique would lead to increased relationship satisfaction and closeness through increases in self-expansion, empathy, I-sharing, and mindfulness, were not supported. Results suggested that the Meisner Technique does not lead to increases in these phenomena. There are several reasons why this might be the case, including the limited intensity and brevity of the intervention, the nature of the sample studied, and the motivation of the participants. Future research could investigate a 6–10 week intervention with couples in order to better assess the effects of the Meisner Technique. Although the Meisner Technique has not been demonstrated to be effective for enhancing relationships, considerable research suggests that interventions that enhance mindfulness, empathy, I-sharing, and self-expansion will bring couples closer and increase relationship satisfaction. While there is considerable anecdotal support suggesting that a Meisner-based treatment should affect these things, further research is warranted.

Footnotes

[1]In addition, main analyses were also conducted with individual-level data following procedures designed by Kenny, Sashy and Cook (2006), to control for non-independence between partners. These analyses showed identical patterns of effects/significance and are therefore, not reported.

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APPENDIX A: THE MEISNER TECHNIQUE SCRIPT

Hello, today and tomorrow you will be participating in an activity with your friend. At the beginning, the activity may seem confusing or strange. This is a normal reaction. Please do your best to fully participate even if it feels uncomfortable at times. I will help you at the beginning until you both feel comfortable participating with each other. Throughout the activity you will be sitting across from your friend and making eye contact. I am going to ask you to make a statement about something you notice about your partner. To start these will be physical observations such as "you are moving your arm." Your partner will repeat that observation "I am moving my arm."

Before we begin I am going to show you a short, recorded demonstration and you will have a chance to ask any questions. (Play video)

Do you have any questions? (Pause for questions)

Okay, lets try an example. (Ask one participant) Can you make an observation about your partner? (Coach them if they have difficulty) Now I would like you to repeat that observation back and forth.

So, what I would like you to do is continue to repeat that observation until one of you notices a change in your partner. For example if you notice that your partner rolls his eyes state "you rolled your eyes" Once a new observation is made that will be repeated.

Do you have any questions? (Pause for questions)

Okay, lets try this for a while. (Have them complete this part of the activity until they seem comfortable. Coach them if they have difficulty.)

So now I would like you to start making observations about the emotional experience of your partner. For example, if your partner seems annoyed you can say "You are annoyed" and this will be repeated. This is the same as the physical observations you made about your partner; however, it is focused on their emotional experience.

Do you have any questions? (Pause for question)

Lets try this for a while (Have them complete this part of the activity until they seem comfortable. Coach them if they have difficulty)

Good job. Okay, so now you are going to do exactly that until I tell you to stop. Go with your gut instinct. If you do not know what to say just repeat the previous observation. Do not feel like you need to make a new observation. Only make an observation if you notice something new. It is important that you continue to participate in the activity until I ask you to stop. Do you have any questions before we begin?

You may begin.

Prompts

If participants stop speaking: "Please continue. If you can't think of anything new to say just repeat."

If participants start having an unrelated conversation: "Please continue to make observations and repeat until I tell you to stop."

Any other off-task behavior: "You still have some time left in the task. Please continue to make observations and repeat until I tell you to stop.

APPENDIX B: COVER SHEET

ID Number:

Condition:

Day 1 Engagement:

1	2	3	4	5
low engagement				high engagement

_____ 1) How engaged was the participant in the activity?

Day 2 Engagement:

1	2	3	4	5
low engagement				high engagement

_____ 1) How engaged was the participant in the activity?

Day 1 comments:

Day 2 comments:

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your race/ethnicity?
   a. Caucasian
   b. African American
   c. Latino(a)
   d. Asian
   e. Biracial
   f. Other

3. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Other

4. Are you participating with a friend or romantic partner?
   a. Friend
   b. Romantic partner

5. Is your friend or romantic partner the same or different gender than you are?
   a. Same
   b. Different

6. How long have you been with your friend/partner? _____

7. How often do you see your friend/partner?
   a. Every day
   b. Every week
   c. Every couple of weeks

8. How willing are you to disclose personal information to your friend/partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Willing				Very Willing

9. How important is your friendship/relationship to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not important				Very Important

APPENDIX D: MINDFUL ATTENTION AWARENESS SCALE

Using the 1–6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what *really reflects* your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.

Use the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost Always	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Very Infrequently	Almost Never

1. _____ I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.

2. _____ I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.

3. _____ I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.

4. _____ I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.

5. _____ I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.

6. _____ I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.

7. _____ It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

8. _____ I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

9. _____ I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I am doing right now to get there.

10. _____ I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

11. _____ I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.

12. _____ I drive places on “automatic pilot” and then wonder why I went there.

13. _____I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.

14. _____ I find myself doing things without paying attention.

15. _____ I snack without being aware that I’m eating

APPENDIX E: INTERPERSONAL REACTIVITY INDEX

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations occurring in your friendship or romantic relationship. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by writing the appropriate number. Please write the name of your partner here

_____

Use the following scale:

0	1	2	3	4
Does not describe me well				Describes me very well

1. _____ I often have tender, concerned feelings for my partner when he/she is less fortunate than me.

2. _____ Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for my partner when he/she is having problems.

3. _____ I try to look at my partner's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

4. _____ When I see my partner being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward him/her.

5. _____ I sometimes try to understand my partner better by imagining how things look from his/her perspective.

6. _____ My partner's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.

7. _____ If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to my partner's arguments.

8. _____ When I see my partner being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for him/her.

9. _____ I am often quite touched by things I see happen in my relationship.

10. _____ In my relationship, I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

11. _____ In my relationship, I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

12. _____ When I'm upset at my partner, I usually try to "put myself in his/her shoes" for a while.

13. _____Before criticizing my partner, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in his/her place.

APPENDIX F: THE SELF-EXPANSION SCALE

INSTRUCTIONS: Answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale. Please place your answer in the space next to each item.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Very Much						Very Much

_____ 1) How much does being with your partner result in your having new experiences?

_____ 2) When you are with your partner, do you feel a greater awareness of things because of him or her?

_____ 3) How much does your partner increase your ability to accomplish new things?

_____ 4) How much does being with your partner make you more appealing to potential future partners?

_____ 5) How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?

_____ 6) How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?

_____ 7) Do you often learn new things about your partner?

_____ 8) How much does your partner provide a source of exciting experiences?

_____ 9) How much do your partner's strengths as a person (skills, abilities, etc.) compensate for some of your own weaknesses as a person?

_____ 10) How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things because of your partner?

_____ 11) How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?

_____ 12) How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?

_____ 13) How much does being with your partner increase the respect other people have for you?

_____ 14) How much does your partner increase your knowledge?

APPENDIX G: EXISTENTIAL ISOLATION SCALE

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
strongly disagree									strongly agree

_____ 1) I usually feel like people share my outlook on life.

_____ 2) I often have the same reactions to things that other people around me do.

_____ 3) People around me tend to react to things in our environment the same way I do.

_____ 4) People do not often share my perspective.

_____ 5) Other people usually do not understand my experiences.

_____ 6) People often have the same "take" or perspective on things that I do.

APPENDIX H: THE UNIDEMENSIONAL RELATIONSHIP CLOSENESS SCALE

Instructions: The following questions refer to your relationship with your friend or romantic partner. Please think about your relationship with your partner when responding to the following questions. Please respond to the following statements using this scale:

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. _____ My relationship with my partner is close.

2. _____ When we are apart, I miss my partner a great deal.

3. _____ My partner and I disclose important personal things to each other.

4. _____ My partner and I have a strong connection.

5. _____ My partner and I want to spend time together.

6. _____ I'm not sure of my relationship with my partner.

7. _____ My partner is a priority in my life.

8. _____ My partner and I do a lot of things together.

9. _____ When I have free time I choose to spend it alone with my partner.

10. _____ I think about my partner a lot.

11. _____ My relationship with my partner is important in my life.

12. _____ I consider my partner when making important decisions.

APPENDIX I: RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
Very Little				A Great Deal

_____ 1) How well does your partner meet your needs?

_____ 2) In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

_____ 3) How good is your relationship compared to most?

_____ 4) How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

_____ 5) To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

_____ 6) How much do you love your partner?

_____ 7) How many problems are there in your relationship?

APPENDIX J: MANIPULATION CHECK

Instructions: The following questions refer to how you viewed the activity you just participated in. Please rate the questions on the scale provided below.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. _____ This activity was pleasant.

2. _____ This activity was novel.

3. _____ Participating in this activity was exciting.

4. _____ Participating in this activity made me see things from a different perspective.

5. _____ I felt connected with my partner while participating in this activity.

6. _____ Participating in this activity was stimulating.

7. _____ I felt understood by my partner while participating in this activity.

8. _____ I felt like I was paying attention to the present moment while participating in this activity.

9. _____ Participating in this activity helped me understand my partner better.

10._____ I expect to still have a close relationship to this partner in the future.

APPENDIX K: MEASURE OF GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

1. _____ I felt satisfied with my interactions with others this week.
2. _____ I felt connected to others during my interactions this week.
3. _____ I felt engaged during interactions with others this week.
4. _____ I felt like my interactions with others met my needs this week.

APPENDIX L: TEN-ITEM PERSONALITY INVENTORY

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

Disagree Strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree moderately	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I see myself as:

1. _____ Extraverted, enthusiastic.

2. _____ Critical, quarrelsome.

3. _____ Dependable, self-disciplined.

4. _____ Anxious, easily upset.

5. _____ Open to new experiences, complex.

6. _____ Reserved, quiet.

7. _____ Sympathetic, warm.

8. _____ Disorganized, careless.

9. _____ Calm, emotionally stable.

10. _____ Conventional, uncreative.

APPENDIX M: INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Effects of a Relationship Building Activity on Interpersonal Relationships

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Rachel Magin, M.S. in association with Dr. Virgil Sheets from the Psychology Department at Indiana State University as part of a graduate student project. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an 18-years or older and are able to participate with a friend or romantic partner. Approximately 120 people will participate in this study. The only requirement to participate is that you are 18 years or older and are willing to participate with a friend or romantic partner.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will examine the effects of a relationship building activity on interpersonal relationships.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study you will be asked to do the following things:

You will first complete some demographic and background questions. You will then participate in one of two activities for 20 minutes with the friend or romantic partner of your choosing. You are being asked to return to complete a second session of the same activity for 20 minutes in two days. Following this, you will complete several questionnaires about your experience as well as some questionnaires your relationship again. Finally, a week after your lab session, you will be e-mailed a link to a follow-up survey about how your relationships are going. Your participation is expected to require approximately one and a half hours in total.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a risk that you may experience some boredom or discomfort from the activities you are assigned to do; however, this is expected to dissipate with greater engagement in the session or when the session ends.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While you may not benefit directly from your participation, the knowledge of whether/how your involvement affects your relationship will benefit psychologists who work with groups/couples to address relationship problems.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not receive any payment for your involvement, nor will your participation cost you anything.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your e-mail and name will need to be provided in order for you to receive the follow-up questionnaire. However, you will be assigned a code number that will be recorded on all your questionnaires from this study. To protect your confidentiality, the list of IDs and names will be destroyed after data have been collected and entered in the computer. Your data will be combined with that of others for analysis so that your individual responses will be identifiable.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. You may quit the study at any time simply by informing the experimenter of your desire to do so. If you choose to withdraw, your research materials will be destroyed. Quitting the study will not result in any penalty to you except the loss of this research opportunity and potential to participate in the follow-ups.

Note that even if you agree to participate, you may skip any questions or procedures that you do not wish to complete, and participating today does not obligate you to participate in the next session or in the follow-up survey.

If you are a student in a psychology course, your participation will be recorded in SONA. You can earn up to 12 SONA credits for your involvement: 4 for today, 4 for the next session, and 4 for doing the follow-up survey). You should see your instructor's syllabus for information in how these are converted for credit in any given class, and for the list of alternate possibilities for earning this credit.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Ms. Rachel Magin (via email: rmagin@sycamores.indstate.edu; or via phone: 860-331-1800).

or Dr. Virgil Sheets (in person: Root Hall: B-205; via email: Virgil.Sheets@indstate.edu; or via phone:812-237-2451).

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date