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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Research in Personality

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrp

Predicting relationship quality from self-verification of broad personality traits among romantic couples

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 27 March 2010

Keywords:

Self-verification
Relationship quality
Relationship satisfaction
Self-other agreement
Big Five
Five Factor Model
Personality traits
Actor-partner interdependence model

ABSTRACT

Self-verification – how much two individuals agree about one of the individual's attributes – has been found to be related to higher romantic relationship quality, primarily among married couples (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). The current research replicates and extends this finding in dating, cohabiting, and married couples within the domain of Big Five personality traits. The prediction of relationship quality from self-verification was analyzed using the actor–partner interdependence model (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). Self-verification – as assessed with overall profile correlations, distinctive profile correlations, and difference scores – predicted higher relationship quality. Self-verification most consistently predicted quality among married couples, supporting the theory that self-verification may be more important for quality among married couples than among other types of couples.

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Between 40% and 50% of first marriages in the United States eventually end in divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2002). Break-up rates are similar for cohabiting couples (40–80% separate after 5–10 years; Bianchi & Casper, 2000; Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Such high rates of relationship dissolution raise the question of why so many romantic relationships must be unsatisfying and likely to end badly. One possibility is that many relationships suffer from partners not having a good knowledge of each other. This lack of accurate knowledge may lead to a host of problems and create misunderstandings that put partners at odds. Conversely, being able to accurately predict how one's partner will react in a variety of situations and having a realistic sense of the other's strengths and weaknesses may lead to appropriate expectations and higher relationship quality.

The purpose of the current studies is to examine whether relationship quality is related to *self-verification of personality traits*, which occurs when one partner perceives the other's personality similarly to how that person perceives his or her own personality (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Although self-verification has been applied to many different characteristics, including intellectual abilities, attractiveness, and social skills, the present interest is in the generally neglected correspondence between the way an individual views his or her

own broad personality traits and the way a romantic partner views those same traits, and how this agreement is related to relationship quality. Before we further discuss self-verification research, we first turn to the question of how broad personality traits have been found to influence relationships in general.

Previous research has demonstrated the robust relationships between romantic relationship quality, functioning, and outcomes and broad personality traits such as the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993). The strongest and most consistent finding has been the moderate, negative relation between neuroticism and relationship quality (Barelds, 2005; Buss, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Shaver & Brennan, 1992). However, relationship quality is also related to the other Big Five traits (Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Luo et al., 2008; Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), and to specific facets of those traits (Noftle & Shaver, 2006). The Big Five have also been found to predict marital stability, relationship conflict, and relationship dissolution (Buss, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Another line of research has transcended individual partner effects on relationship quality by examining dyad-level transactions. Most of this work has focused on how personality similarity between partners on a variety of characteristics is related to relationship quality, with most research suggesting a positive connection (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; McCrae et al., 2008; McGlade, 2008; Nemechek & Olson, 1999). However, other research has found non-significant or even negative relations

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between personality similarity and relationship quality (Barelds, 2005; Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Shiota & Levenson, 2007; Watson et al., 2004).

An additional way to examine the connections between personality and relationship quality at the dyadic level is to investigate the importance of partner perceptions within self-verification processes (Swann, Pelham, et al., 1989; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, et al., 1992). Self-verification may have several benefits within relationships. One benefit of self-verification is an increase in perceptions of control and predictions of how one's partner will behave (Swann, Pelham, et al., 1989), which should contribute to smoother and more fulfilling interactions. A second benefit is an increase in the stability of the self-concept and in confidence in dealing with the world and interacting with others (Swann, Pelham, et al., 1989). For example, if another's view is overly positive, rather than accurate, the person is likely to have expectations and make demands that are not realistic and cannot be met. Unfulfilled expectations and failures to meet demands are likely to cause conflict within a relationship and decrease relationship quality.

Evidence for the benefits of self-verification has been demonstrated in research on romantic relationships. For example, people who feel more understood by their spouses report higher marital quality (Weger, 2005), possibly because being understood can increase acceptance and is an important way to verify one's self-image. Additionally, self-verification within marital relationships is positively related to the intimacy of the relationship, a sense of authenticity, feelings of having an orderly and coherent life, self-esteem and feelings of mastery, trust in one's spouse, and behavioral commitment; and is negatively related to depression and distress (Burke & Stets, 1999; Swann et al., 1994). Within dating relationships, self-verification of self-esteem is related to level of commitment to one's partner and greater intimacy, especially among seriously dating couples (Katz & Joiner, 2002).

This relation between self-verification and relationship quality seems to be partly moderated by the type of relationship. For example, Swann et al. (1994) found that greater intimacy in married couples was related to verifying the partners' self-views but that greater intimacy in dating couples was related to more favorable views of the partner. Swann and colleagues suggest that it is more important to be accurately evaluated by one's spouse than by one's dating partner because meeting shared goals within a marriage depends on being able to accurately assess the spouse's strengths and weaknesses. Dating relationships, on the other hand, are primarily more evaluative, therefore favorable perceptions are more desirable than accurate perceptions. Swann et al. suggest that one explanation for this difference is that risk of rejection is more likely when commitment is more uncertain.

Self-verification has been studied using two main approaches. One approach has been to assess *motivation to self-verify* by asking participants to rank their characteristics from the ones on which they would most like feedback to the ones on which they would least like feedback. Then it can be determined whether the characteristics on which a person most desires to receive feedback are positive or negative. Other methods for assessing motivation to self-verify include asking participants whether they prefer to receive positive or negative information about characteristics that they perceive favorably or unfavorably in themselves or asking participants to decide between interacting with a person who either verifies or enhances the participant's self-image (Swann, Pelham, et al., 1989; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, et al., 1992).

A second approach to studying self-verification has been to assess the *actual extent of self-verification* in couples' ratings, which is commonly done by asking participants to rate themselves and their partners on a set of items, and then use the favorability of the ratings to group the participants (e.g., those who have negative, moderate, and positive self-concepts; Swann et al., 1994). Once

participants are placed into groups, it is possible to determine whether the ratings are self-verifying (if they fall within the same group) or favorable (if the partner's rating is more favorable than the self-rating). Other methods include calculating an absolute difference between two sets of scores (Burke & Stets, 1999) and using residuals from regressions in which self-ratings are predicted from other-ratings (Katz et al., 2002).

The current research offers a novel, third approach to assessing self-verification with the use of profile correlations that assess agreement between two sets of ratings (e.g., Funder & Dobroth, 1987; Letzring, Wells, & Funder, 2006). Our main approach will be to assess self-verification by calculating profile correlations between self-ratings and partner ratings of the same partner within couples. This approach has methodological benefits over that of past approaches. First, like the category approach described previously, it assesses the normal occurrence of self-verification, but instead of designating ratings as self-verifying or not, it reflects the degree of self-verification, and therefore is a more sensitive measurement. Second, it adds to the use of difference scores for assessing self-verification, which may provide different information than profile correlations (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), and may thus have different correlates.

The current studies address several theoretical predictions of self-verification theory within the domain of broad personality traits. In Study 1, we examine how self-verification predicts relationship quality among married, cohabiting, and dating couples. In Study 2, we further investigate self-verification of personality traits in only dating couples with a more comprehensive measure of relationship quality. Furthermore, Study 2 also examines the relation between favorability of perceptions of one's partner and relationship quality. We expect self-verification to be a positive predictor of relationship quality, and prediction to be strongest among married couples.

The current research is important for at least four reasons. First, the prediction of relationship quality from self-verification has examined factors such as athletic ability, physical attractiveness, and aptitude in art and music (Burke & Stets, 1999; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Swann et al., 1994). Broad personality traits, however, have been neglected in this area of research, which is a significant omission because traits arguably have more theoretical (and empirical) importance within relationships than attributes such as artistic ability. A single exception that we know of, a study by Neff and Karney (2005), provided evidence that higher self-verification for husbands' Big Five traits (but not wives') may be associated with more positive relationship processes for newlyweds, but they were unable to examine how self-verification was related to relationship quality due to ceiling effects in the latter variable. The current studies extend the examination of the role of self-verification in relationship quality to the domain of broad personality traits. Second, the current studies place the question of how personality is related to relationship quality within the domain of person perception, examining how shared *perceptions* of couple members' personalities (rather than just their personalities themselves) contribute to relationship quality. Third, the current research applies current methods of assessing agreement between two sets of personality ratings (Furr, 2008) to the study of self-verification processes in romantic relationships by using three approaches: the well-established difference score method, a traditional profile correlation method (overall profiles), and a less commonly used *distinctive* profile correlation method (*distinctive* profiles) to examine whether these methods produce the same or different results. Finally, the current research includes cohabiting couples, which have not commonly been included in research in this area. Cohabiting couples differ in important ways from dating and married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004), although some evidence exists

that they are more similar to dating couples (Manning & Smock, 2005). The levels of commitment, happiness with the relationship, feelings of being constrained within the relationship, and expectations about the longevity of the relationship are likely to vary among couple types, with an increase in these factors from dating to cohabiting couples and another increase from cohabiting to married couples (Nock, 1995; Stanley et al., 2004). The higher the constraint, the more important being understood becomes because ending an unsatisfying relationship is more difficult. Expectations of the length of the relationship may also be related to the importance of being understood because the longer one expects to spend with another person, the more important it is to be understood by that person. Furthermore, cohabitation is becoming increasingly common and therefore should be included in studies of relationship quality (Stanley et al., 2004).

1. Study 1: dating, cohabiting, and married couples

The goal of Study 1 was to examine relationship type as a potential moderator of the relations between self-verification of broad personality traits and relationship quality among dating, married, and cohabiting couples. Two hypotheses will be tested in Study 1. First, it is predicted that self-verification will explain a significant amount of variance in relationship quality, especially among married couples. Second, it is predicted that self-verification will predict unique variance beyond the personality ratings of each partner.

1.1. Method

1.1.1. Participants

Participants were 134 couples (36 dating, 30 cohabiting, 68 married), at least one of whom was an undergraduate student at Idaho State University. Participants were recruited using the Psychology Department subject pool and were only able to participate if they brought their romantic partner with them to the data collection session. Couples were included in the analyses if they reported being together for at least 6 months. On average, dating couples had been together 18.44 months ($SD = 13.21$, range = 6–62) and were 21.10 years old ($SD = 3.62$, range = 18–37), cohabiting couples had been together 27.29 months ($SD = 19.96$, range = 6.5–96) and were 23.63 years old ($SD = 6.72$, range = 18–53), and married couples had been together 84.15 months ($SD = 78.93$, range = 6.75–357) and were 27.69 years old ($SD = 6.98$, range = 18–50). Among all couple types, 243 participants were Caucasian, 12 were Hispanic, 5 were Asian, and 8 were of another ethnicity. Participants from the subject pool received research credit in exchange for participation and participants not from the subject pool received two tickets to a local movie theatre.

1.1.2. Measures

1.1.2.1. Big Five Inventory. The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) assesses five broad traits of personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. The BFI is a commonly used 44-item measure of these traits. Both a self-report and a partner-report were used such that each participant completed the scale once about him or herself and once about his or her partner. The scales were reliable for the self-report (Cronbach's α ranged from .62 to .83) and the partner-report (Cronbach's α ranged from .78 to .87).

1.1.2.2. Buunk's Relational Interaction Satisfaction Scale. Buunk's Relational Interaction Satisfaction Scale (Buunk's RS; Buunk, 1982) assesses the frequency of positive or satisfying interactions. This eight-item measure asks participants to indicate their level of

agreement with items such as "I feel happy when I am with my partner" and "My partner irritates me." The scale has been found to have high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$; Buunk, 1982). In the current study, the alpha reliability was .84.

1.1.2.3. Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is a 32-item scale that was designed to assess marital adjustment. The DAS includes the following types of items: level of agreement with one's partner for issues that couples frequently disagree on; frequency of relationship-related positive and negative events such as confiding in one's partner and quarreling, number of outside interests the partners engage in together, yes/no items about "being too tired for sex" and "not showing love", and rating of happiness and feelings about the future of the relationship. There is good empirical support for a single adjustment factor that has been reliably assessed (Sharpley & Cross, 1982; Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Thompson, 1982). For the current study, the DAS was modified to be appropriate for unmarried couples by changing references to spouse or marriage to partner or current relationship. In the current study, the alpha reliability was .90.

1.1.2.4. Relationship questions. Participants also responded to questions that asked them to identify the type of relationship they were in and the length of the current relationship.

1.1.3. Procedure

Couples arrived at the lab together and were seated in separate parts of the room. They completed the consent form and a packet of questionnaires. They were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and would not be shared with their partner.

1.1.4. Assessing self-verification

Self-verification was assessed in three ways. First, *overall profile self-verification* was computed using raw score profile correlations across the 44 items of the BFI for one partner's self-rating and the other partner's partner-rating.¹ Second, *distinctive profile self-verification* was assessed to address the possibility that overall profile self-verification scores could be inflated due to the normativeness of ratings (Furr, 2008). To compute distinctive profile self-verification, differences between individual ratings and the average across all ratings were calculated. In this case, differences were calculated between the individual male self-ratings and the average male self-ratings, individual female self-ratings and the average female self-ratings, individual male partner ratings and average male partner ratings, and individual female partner ratings and average female partner ratings. Then, to compute distinctive self-verification with the male as the target, the distinctive male self-ratings were correlated with the distinctive male partner ratings; and to compute distinctive self-verification with the female as the target, the distinctive female self-ratings were correlated with the distinctive female partner ratings. Finally, *difference score self-verification* was computed by summing the absolute difference scores between the two sets of ratings for each partner. This sum was then multiplied by -1 so that higher scores would indicate higher self-verification (and less difference between ratings). There were two of each type of self-verification scores for each couple; the term *female self-verification* will be used to refer to ratings by both partners of the female partner and the term *male self-verification* will be used to refer to ratings by both partners of the male partner.

¹ This can also be referred to as self-other agreement.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for all measures of self-verification in Study 1.

	All couples	Dating	Cohabiting	Married	Comparisons across couple types	Correlations with relationship length
Male overall profile SV	.45 (.19)	.44 (.22)	.48 (.17)	.46 (.18)	$F = .40, p = .67$.02
Male distinctive profile SV	.27 (.22)	.23 (.22)	.31 (.18)	.26 (.23)	$F = 1.21, p = .30$.05
Male difference score SV	-.99 (.22)	-.97 (.22)	-1.04 (.22)	-.98 (.22)	$F = .97, p = .38$	-.04
Female overall profile SV	.35 (.18)	.37 (.17)	.33 (.20)	.35 (.18)	$F = .36, p = .70$.03
Female distinctive profile SV	.23 (.20)	.21 (.19)	.23 (.23)	.25 (.19)	$F = .44, p = .64$.05
Female difference score SV	-1.00 (.23)	-.98 (.24)	-.95 (.19)	-1.04 (.24)	$F = 1.72, p = .18$	-.01

Note: SV = self-verification. Cells display means with SDs in parentheses. Difference score self-verification is negative because the difference scores were multiplied by -1 so that larger numbers would indicate more agreement. Dating $n = 36$, cohabiting $n = 30$, married $n = 68$. All F -values have 2 and 131 df.

1.2. Results

1.2.1. Self-verification

The means and standard deviations for the three types of self-verification are reported in Table 1. Table 1 also includes the results from the one-way analysis of variance tests that were used to examine whether levels of self-verification differed across couple type. Levels of self-verification did not differ as a function of couple type. Table 1 also includes the correlations between each type of self-verification and relationship length, and none of the correlations were significant (all r 's $< .05$), similar to past findings (Watson et al., 2004).

There is concern that overall profile correlations may be inflated due to profile normativeness, or the fact that most profiles fit an average group profile to at least some degree (Furr, 2008). One way to respond to this problem is to compute random profile correlations (in this case, between the self-ratings of one partner and the partner ratings of a random other partner) to determine the normative level of similarity that can be expected in a given sample. Thirty males were randomly paired with 30 females, and male and female random overall profile self-verification were computed. Across the 30 random pairs, the average profile correlation was .24 for both male and female self-verification. Based on the results of one-sample t -tests with a comparison value of .24, actual levels of overall profile self-verification (calculated between actual partners) were greater than the average random profile self-verification for ratings of males ($M = .46, SD = .19, t(133) = 12.48, p < .001$) and females ($M = .35, SD = .18, t(133) = 7.88, p < .001$).

The correlations between types of self-verification are reported in Table 2. Self-verification of each type had a small to moderate positive correlation between partners within the same couple (on the diagonal), which means that partners were somewhat likely to have similar levels of the same type of self-verification. Overall and distinctive profile self-verification were highly correlated among males and females, and correlations between both types of profile self-verification and difference score self-verification were all positive and small to moderate in magnitude. These findings suggest that different methods of assessing self-verification result in similar scores.

Table 2

Correlations between types of self-verification in Study 1.

	Overall profile SV	Distinctive profile SV	Difference score SV
Overall profile SV	.20*	.75**	.33**
Distinctive profile SV	.85**	.17*	.24**
Difference score SV	.27**	.25**	.37**

Note: SV = self-verification. Values on the diagonal are between males and females for the same type of SV. Values above the diagonal are for males and values below the diagonal are for females for different types of SV.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

1.2.2. Relationship quality

Scores on the two measures of relationship quality, Buunk's RS (Buunk, 1982) and the DAS (Spanier, 1976), were sufficiently correlated (among females: $r = .80, p < .001$; among males: $r = .73, p < .001$) to justify combining the scores. To combine the scores, they were z-transformed and then averaged. Among females, quality differed as a function of relationship type, $F(2, 131) = 6.29, p = .002$. According to post hoc Tukey HSD tests, married females ($M = .25, SD = .88$) were more satisfied than cohabiting females ($M = -.45, SD = .90, p = .002$) and did not differ from dating females ($M = -.00, SD = .94, p = .36$), and cohabiting and dating females did not differ ($p = .12$). Among males, there was not a difference in quality as a function of relationship type (married $M = .10, SD = .83$; cohabiting $M = -.25, SD = 1.08$; dating $M = -.11, SD = 1.02$), $F(2, 131) = 1.56, p = .22$.

1.2.3. Self-verification as a predictor of relationship quality

The data were analyzed using the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).² This model allows one to analyze dyadic data by examining both the effects of the actor and the partner on an outcome variable. Using APIM terminology, the actor is the partner whose relationship quality is being predicted, actor self-verification reflects similarity of ratings of the partner whose relationship quality is being predicted, and partner self-verification reflects similarity of ratings the partner whose relationship quality is not being predicted. In this case, it was possible to examine how the actor's level of self-verification and the partner's level of self-verification uniquely predict the actor's relationship quality. It is also possible to run models with different numbers of predictors and use a likelihood ratio test to determine if one model fits the data better than the other model by comparing the -2 Log Likelihood Values.

Two models were run for each type of self-verification. The first model included actor self-verification, partner self-verification, actor sex, and ratings of the actor's personality traits by both the self and the partner as predictors of actor relationship quality.³ In the second model, relationship type and the interaction of relationship type with actor and partner self-verification were added as predictors. Adding these variables to the model did not significantly increase the model fit for overall profile self-verification ($\chi^2(3) = 3.20, p = .36$), distinctive profile self-verification ($\chi^2(3) = 6.40, p = .09$), nor difference score self-verification ($\chi^2(3) = 5.40, p = .14$). The regression coefficients for the second set of models are reported in Table 3. Partner overall profile self-verification ($b = 1.30, p < .0001$) and actor difference score self-verification ($b = .70, p = .004$) were significant predictors of relationship quality, and the interaction between partner distinctive self-verification and

² We thank Richard Lucas for the suggestion to use the APIM model.

³ The model fit was better when ratings of the actor's personality were included in the models for all couples (overall profile self-verification: $\chi^2(10) = 42.70, p = .00001$; distinctive profile self-verification: $\chi^2(10) = 39.30, p = .00002$; difference score self-verification: $\chi^2(10) = 44.60, p = .00001$.

relationship type approached conventional significance ($b = .53$, $p = .07$). Agreeableness as rated by the actor was also a significant positive predictor of relationship quality for all types of self-verification (overall profile self-verification model: $b = .28$, $p = .002$; distinctive profile self-verification model: $b = .31$, $p = .001$; difference score self-verification model: $b = .32$, $p = .0007$), and openness as rated by the partner was a significant negative predictor for all types of self-verification (overall profile self-verification model: $b = -.19$, $p = .01$; distinctive profile self-verification model: $b = -.20$, $p = .01$; difference score self-verification model: $b = -.17$, $p = .03$). For overall profile self-verification, partner ratings of neuroticism were another significant negative predictor of relationship quality ($b = -.16$, $p = .04$).

Although the interactions between self-verification and relationship type were not significant predictors of relationship quality, the models were run separately for each relationship type in order to explore the data more fully (see Table 2). This was done despite the lack of interaction for two reasons. First, statistical power was possibly too low to detect such differences, and second, any differences that are found could be theoretically interesting and of interest to other relationship researchers. However, the differences reported must be replicated before they can be considered to be anything but preliminary. Among married couples, partner overall profile self-verification ($b = 1.61$, $p < .0001$), partner distinctive profile self-verification ($b = .95$, $p = .004$), and actor difference score self-verification ($b = .88$, $p = .003$) remained as significant positive predictors of relationship quality. Actor distinctive profile self-verification was also a significant positive predictor ($b = .77$, $p = .02$) among married couples. Among dating couples, partner overall profile self-verification ($b = 1.46$, $p = .005$) and actor difference score self-verification were significant positive predictors ($b = .91$, $p = .04$) and partner difference score self-verification was actually a significant negative predictor of relationship quality ($b = -.89$, $p = .05$). Among cohabiting couples, partner difference score self-verification was also a significant negative predictor ($b = -1.31$, $p = .01$).

1.3. Discussion

The first hypothesis, that self-verification would explain a significant amount of variance in relationship quality, especially among married couples, was partially supported. When all relationship types were analyzed together, partner overall profile self-verification and actor difference score self-verification were significant predictors of relationship quality. The interactions between self-verification and relationship type were not significant, suggesting that relationship type does not moderate the relationship between self-verification and relationship quality. However, some differences were seen between relationship types when models were run separately for each type. Relationship quality was significantly and positively related to four types of self-verification among married couples, but to only two types among dating couples and none among cohabiting couples. This pattern tentatively suggests that verifying one's partner is more highly related to relationship quality among married couples than among dating and cohabiting couples. Surprisingly, difference score self-verification was related to lower relationship quality among dating and cohabiting couples. Support was also found for the second hypothesis, that self-verification would predict unique variance beyond the personality ratings of the partners. All of the relations reported between self-verification and quality are based on models that include the personality ratings of the actor by both partners, and therefore any significant relations are predicting unique variance beyond these personality ratings.

Table 3
Regression coefficients for relationship quality predicted from self-verification, relationship type, and personality in Study 1.

	Overall profile self-verification			Distinctive profile self-verification			Difference score self-verification			
	All types	Dating	Cohabiting	Married	All types	Dating	Cohabiting	Married	Cohabiting	Married
Intercept	.15	-.145	-.65	1.25	-.24	-.232	-.73	-1.02	-.64	-3.23*
Actor SV	.13	-.88	-.28	.54	.09	-.01	-.68	.77*	.70**	.91*
Partner SV	1.30*	1.46**	.73	1.61**	.34	.22	-.51	.95**	-.27	-.89**
Rel. status	.12	–	–	–	.12	–	–	–	.12	–
RS × ASV	.18	–	–	–	.53*	–	–	–	–	–
RS × PSV	.22	–	–	–	.48	–	–	–	.43	–
Sex	-.02	-.08	-.02	.00	-.05	-.07	-.09	-.04	-.05	.20
Actor E	-.03	.06	-.10	-.08	-.04	.11	-.11	-.11	-.02	.08
Actor A	.28*	.76*	.37**	.11	.31*	.86*	.38*	.38*	.13	.32**
Actor C	.15	-.04	.09	.22	.13	-.09	.40	.20	.18	.01
Actor N	-.11	-.16	-.32*	-.03	-.12	-.02	-.38*	.03	-.10	-.03
Actor O	.04	.29	-.02	-.01	.10	.25	.10	.03	.10	.30
Partner E	.05	-.21	-.02	.13	.06	-.22	-.05	.16	.08	-.18
Partner A	-.13*	-.10	.08	-.18*	-.12	-.16	.13	-.17	-.13	-.18
Partner C	-.03	.04	.15	-.20*	.03	.07	.09	-.19	-.05	-.00
Partner N	-.15*	-.30*	-.15	-.11	-.10	-.19	-.09	-.08	-.09	-.11
Partner O	-.19*	-.09	-.10	-.17*	-.20*	-.06	-.09	-.16*	-.19*	-.02

Note: SV = self-verification, Rel. status = relationship status, RS × ASV = interaction between relationship status and actor self-verification, RS × PSV = interaction between relationship status and partner self-verification.
E = extraversion, A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, N = neuroticism, O = openness. Dating $n = 36$, cohabiting $n = 30$, married $n = 68$.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

Study 1 has three main limitations. First, the sample sizes of dating and cohabiting couples were relatively small, which means that power for detecting some relationships is also low. Furthermore, some of the relations that were found were opposite of the hypothesized positive relation between self-verification and relationship quality. For these reasons, it is important to attempt to replicate these null or negative relations. Another limitation is that Study 1 did not include a direct measure of favorable evaluations of one's partner, which did not allow for a test of whether higher *dating* quality is related to more favorable evaluations of one's partner rather than to self-verification. A final limitation is the use of unifactorial measures of relationship quality. Although researchers have subsequently created subscales for Spanier's measure, the subscales have not been psychometrically supported (e.g., Kazak, Jarmas, & Snitzer, 1988; Sharpley & Cross, 1982), and the scale's author has argued that the measure is best used as a global summary (Spanier, 1988). A more stringent test of the lack of connection between self-verification and relationship quality in non-married couples would involve assessing several dimensions of relationship quality.

2. Study 2: a further investigation of dating couples

Study 2 used a larger sample of dating couples than was used in Study 1, included a measure of favorable evaluations of one's partner, and used a measure of relationship quality that assesses several dimensions. Two hypotheses were tested. First, it was predicted that there would be a weak or non-significant relation between self-verification and relationship quality among dating couples, even with a more comprehensive measure of quality. Second, it was predicted that there would be a significant relation between favorable evaluations of one's partner and relationship quality.

2.1. Participants

Seventy-six dating couples were recruited from the Psychology Department subject pool, at least one of whom was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Davis. Six dyads did not return one of the packets or had substantial missing data and were excluded from further analyses. The final number of dyads in the sample was 70. Men were 22 years old on average (ranging from 18 to 32), and women were 21 years old on average (ranging from 18 to 24). The sample was fairly diverse: 4% African-American, 24% Asian, 61% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic (of any race), 3% Native American, and 8% other or unknown. Participants from the subject pool received research credit in exchange for participation.

2.2. Procedure

In one of two psychology courses, participants were given a set of two questionnaire packets, one for themselves and one for their dating partner. They were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and would not be shared with their partner. Each of the packets included all of the questionnaires discussed below. A number of other measures were also collected that will not be reported on in the current study. Participants and their partners were instructed to seal their packets in an envelope after completing them and were given a map and instructions indicating when and where the questionnaires should be returned. Participants with partners who did not live nearby were given postage and an addressed envelope in order to mail the packet to the experimenter.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Self and partner-reports of Big Five personality traits

Three traits of the Big Five, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability (i.e., neuroticism reversed), were assessed with eight personality descriptive adjectives (extraversion: enthusiastic, sociable, assertive, outgoing, shy, reserved, withdrawn, bashful [$\alpha = .81$]; agreeableness: trusting, cooperative, warm, sentimental, cold, suspicious, harsh, distrustful [$\alpha = .71$]; emotional stability: relaxed, calm, insecure, anxious, fearful, emotional, nervous, jealous [$\alpha = .77$]).⁴ Extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism have been found to have an influence on momentary personality processes related to interpersonal behavior and affect (Cote & Moskowitz, 1998). These are also the traits subsumed within the combination of the interpersonal and affective circumplexes (Saucier, 1992), which theoretically should have the closest association with relationship functioning. One of the three traits, agreeableness, was by far the most strongly correlated with relationship quality in Study 1.

2.3.2. Relationship quality

The 18-item Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) was used to assess six intercorrelated domains of relationship quality: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. In the present study, the six subscales were highly intercorrelated, so all items were averaged to form a single global relationship quality index ($\alpha = .89$ for males and $.91$ for females). For some analyses, analyses using the six specific domains of quality were also conducted (α 's ranged from $.45$ to $.95$; median $\alpha = .84$). Alpha reliabilities were much lower for the Intimacy subscale (.67 for males and .45 for females) than for all other subscales. All other reliabilities were above $.80$.

2.3.3. Favorable evaluations of one's partner

The 20-item Respect for Partner scale (RPS; Frei & Shaver, 2002) was included to assess positive, favorable evaluations of relationship partners that are specific to the relationship domain (i.e., rating one's partner as more worthy of respect). Sample items include "S/he shows interest in me, has a positive attitude, is willing to spend time with me" and "S/he fosters good, open, two-way communication" ($\alpha = .88$ for males and $.91$ for females).

2.3.4. Relationship length

Participants were asked to report the length of time they had been in the current relationship. In addition, couples also indicated how long they had known each other. Given our null results regarding the role of relationship length for Study 1, we thought self-verification might be related to length of time that one has known a person, but not just the time spent in a relationship. Couples' agreement was extremely high for both variables, $r = .94$ and $.99$ for time known and time in relationship, respectively. Therefore, partners' ratings were averaged. On average, couples had been dating for a little over 2 years ($M = 25.19$ months; $SD = 23.56$; range = 1–102 months),⁵ and had known each other for about 3 years on average ($M = 36.79$ months; $SD = 31.17$; range = 2 to 144 months).

⁴ A subset of 58 participants was also administered a self-report version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John et al., 2008), which assesses the five broad traits of personality. The adjective scales were highly correlated with the equivalent scales on the BFI: extraversion ($r = .86$), agreeableness ($r = .65$), emotional stability ($r = .75$), which supports the use of the current adjective scales to assess these Big Five personality constructs.

⁵ We also restricted our analyses to participants who were dating for at least 3 months ($N = 61$) and at least 6 months ($N = 54$). None of the main findings changed substantially.

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Self-verification

As in Study 1, self-verification was computed based on the personality descriptive adjectives using overall profile correlations, distinctive profile correlations, and difference scores. The means and standard deviations for self-verification are reported in Table 4.

Within couples, self-verification had small to moderate positive correlations for overall profile self-verification ($r = .17$; $p = .15$), distinctive profile self-verification ($r = .30$, $p < .05$), and difference score self-verification ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). All types of self-verification were highly correlated with each other, among both males and females: overall profile and distinctive profile self-verification (male $r = .58$, $p < .001$; female $r = .53$, $p < .001$), overall profile and difference score self-verification (male $r = .80$, $p < .001$; female $r = .77$, $p < .001$, and distinctive profile and difference score self-verification (male $r = .54$, $p < .001$; female $r = .59$, $p < .001$).

Self-verification was also not related to relationship length for males (male overall profile self-verification: $r = -.02$, $p = .92$; female overall profile self-verification: $r = -.05$, $p = .69$; male distinctive profile self-verification: $r = .18$, $p = .14$; female distinctive profile self-verification: $r = .12$, $p = .34$; male difference score self-verification: $r = .06$, $p = .62$; female difference score self-verification: $r = .03$, $p = .84$). Level of self-verification was also unrelated to the length of time one had known one's partner. Thus, we do not consider either length variable further.

2.4.2. Relationship quality

Partners had a moderate level of agreement on relationship quality ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), which is similar to past findings using the PRQC (Friesen, Fletcher, & Overall, 2005). There were no gender differences in global relationship quality ($t(69) = 1.04$, $p = .30$). Analyzed by subscale, correlations between partners were significant for Intimacy ($r = .40$), Satisfaction ($r = .50$), and Passion ($r = .51$) (all p 's $< .001$). Partner correlations among the remaining subscales – Commitment, Trust, and Love – were marginally significant (r 's = .19–.22; p 's = .07–.12).

2.4.3. Self-verification as a predictor of relationship quality

The main goal of Study 2 was to examine the relation between self-verification and relationship quality among a larger sample of dating couples. As in Study 1, a significant relation between these variables was not expected. To explore whether self-verification was related to any of the subscales of relationship quality, zero-order correlations between the three types of self-verification and the six facets of relationship quality were calculated for both males and females. Out of the resulting 72 correlations (not shown), only three were significant or marginally significant: female overall profile self-verification with the male relationship satisfaction facet ($r = .27$, $p < .05$), male overall profile self-verification with the female relationship satisfaction facet ($r = .22$, $p = .07$), and female difference score self-verification with the male relationship satisfaction facet ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). Given that only three relations at the facet level were significant, we conducted the APIM models using only the composite relationship quality scale.

One APIM model was run for each type of self-verification, which included actor self-verification, partner self-verification, and ratings of the actor's personality traits by both partners as predictors of actor relationship quality.⁶ None of the types of self-verification were significant predictors of relationship quality (see

Table 5). The only personality variable that consistently accounted for significant variance in relationship quality was the partner rating of the actor's agreeableness (overall profile self-verification model: $b = .27$, $p = .006$; distinctive profile self-verification model: $b = .24$, $p = .007$; difference score self-verification model: $b = .21$, $p = .03$). Partner ratings of actor's neuroticism accounted for marginally significant variance in the distinctive profile self-verification model ($b = .16$, $p = .07$).

2.4.4. Relations between favorable evaluations of partner and relationship quality

Although it was hypothesized that self-verification would not be correlated with relationship quality in dating couples, one of the additional hypotheses for Study 2 was that favorable evaluations of one's partner would be positively correlated with relationship quality. This was investigated with a direct, contextualized measure of favorable evaluation of one's partner, Frei and Shaver's (2002) Respect for Partner scale, which assesses how positively a person sees his or her partner. Table 6 displays the correlations between men and women's ratings of favorable evaluations of one another and their global relationship quality. As expected, couples with more favorable evaluations of one another – higher ratings of a partner's worthiness of respect – reported higher relationship quality ($r = .47$, $p < .001$ for males and $r = .68$, $p < .001$ for females). Additionally, having more favorable evaluations of one's partner was also related to the other partner's relationship quality, albeit not as strongly ($r = .41$, $p < .001$ for males' quality and $r = .32$, $p < .01$ for females' quality).

2.4.5. Relations between Self-verification and favorable evaluations of partner

There was not a hypothesis regarding the relation between self-verification and favorable evaluations of one's partner (i.e., respect), but an interesting pattern of results was found. When the partners tended to agree more about one of the partner's personalities (i.e., higher overall profile self-verification), they also had more favorable evaluations of that partner. For example, if a couple tended to agree more highly about what the male's personality was like (i.e., male overall profile self-verification), the female was likely to have more favorable evaluations of him ($r = .35$, $p = .003$). This effect also held true for females: if a couple tended to agree more highly about the female's personality (i.e., female self-verification), the male was likely to have more favorable evaluations of her ($r = .36$, $p = .002$). However, agreement about one partner's personality was unrelated to that partner's favorable evaluations of the other partner ($r = .01$, $p = .97$ for males and $r = .09$, $p = .47$ for females). We found this effect only for the overall profile measure of self-verification; none of the other measures of self-verification was positively correlated with favorable evaluations. This finding speaks to the argument that overall profile correlation measures of agreement may be increased due to variance related to profile normativeness (Furr, 2008). Furr suggests that people are likely to describe people similarly because people are actually generally somewhat similar, and the overall profile measure does not account for this like the distinctive profile measure does. This could also reflect a positivity bias in overall profile correlations: part of the reason why agreement is high is because people judge others positively, which would also affect how favorably they evaluate partners.

2.5. Discussion

Both hypotheses were supported. First, both actor and partner self-verification were unrelated to relationship quality among dating couples. This suggests that the lack of significant positive relations between self-verification and relationship quality found in

⁶ The model fit was better when ratings of the actor's personality were included in the models for (overall profile self-verification ($\chi^2(6) = 15.20$, $p = .02$) and for distinctive profile self-verification ($\chi^2(6) = 15.30$, $p = .02$). The model fit was not significantly better for difference score self-verification ($\chi^2(6) = 9.50$, $p = .14$).

Table 4

Means and standard deviations for self-verification and relationship quality for dating couples in Study 2.

	Female mean (SD)	Male mean (SD)	Correlation between partners	t-test for gender differences
Overall profile SV	.52 (.22)	.49 (.22)	.17	.83
Distinctive profile SV	.28 (.25)	.15 (.25)	.30*	3.45**
Difference score SV	−.95 (.28)	−1.03 (.26)	.34**	2.25**
Relationship quality	6.09 (.76)	6.00 (.70)	.44**	1.04

Note: SV = self-verification. Self-verification scores are listed by the target (e.g., the leftmost cell in Row 1 includes the average correlation between females' self-ratings and males' partner ratings). N = 70.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

Table 5

Regression coefficients for relationship quality predicted from self-verification and personality for dating couples in Study 2.

	Overall profile SV	Distinctive profile SV	Difference score SV
Intercept	4.47**	4.88**	5.62**
Actor SV	−.28	−.29	−.21
Partner SV	.17	−.09	.15
Sex	.00	.00	−.05
Actor E	.06	.03	−.05
Actor A	.12	.08	.03
Actor N	−.04	−.04	−.04
Partner E	−.12	−.14	.04
Partner A	.27**	.24**	.21*
Partner N	.13	.16*	−.14

Note: SV = self-verification, E = extraversion, A = agreeableness, N = neuroticism. N = 70.

* p < .10.

** p < .05.

*** p < .01.

Study 1 are due to more than just low power. However, it remains to be explained why self-verification was more likely to predict relationship quality in Study 1 than in Study 2. One possibility is that the absence of content related to Conscientiousness and Openness in Study 2 may have weakened the relation between self-verification and relationship quality. This possibility was tested by running the analyses in the Study 1 data with only the extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism items (the traits assessed in Study 2). The Study 1 results for dating couples changed very little for all types of self-verification, suggesting the difference in the results was not due to different content. The only differences found were that actor overall profile self-verification and partner difference score self-verification went from being negative but non-significant predictors of relationship quality to being significant negative predictors. Another possibility is that the relationship quality measures tapped into somewhat different constructs. The measures used in Study 1 include mostly content related to relationship satisfaction, whereas the measure used in Study 2 is broader. The relationship satisfaction subscale results of Study 2 seem to replicate the findings of Study 1 that partner overall profile self-verification was positively related to relationship quality in dating couples. Further research will demonstrate whether this is further replicated or not.

The second hypothesis was also supported. Holding more favorable evaluations of one's partner was related to higher relationship quality for both partners. Part of this relation likely has to do with

shared method variance, and even a certain amount of conceptual redundancy between the measures, but it does support past findings with dating couples according to self-verification theory.

3. General discussion

In the current studies, some support was found for the main hypothesis that self-verification of broad personality traits is related to romantic relationship quality, and that this relation is stronger among married couples than among dating or cohabiting couples. The relationship quality of married couples was positively predicted by partner overall profile self-verification, actor and partner distinctive profile self-verification, and actor difference score self-verification. The current findings on married couples support Swann et al.'s (1994) findings and extend them to self-verification of broad personality traits. The picture was somewhat less clear among dating couples, but suggests that self-verification was less important for relationship quality, as it was only positively predicted by partner overall profile self-verification and actor difference score self-verification in Study 1, was not predicted by any type of self-verification in Study 2, and was negatively predicted by partner difference score self-verification in Study 1. The lack of a positive relation among cohabiting couples is quite clear in that relationship quality was only negatively predicted by partner difference score self-verification. Additionally, relationship quality in dating couples was related to more favorable evaluations, which further supports the argument of Swann et al. that dating couples may rate their relationship quality as higher when their positivity strivings are met, rather than their accuracy strivings.

Furthermore, the current research demonstrated that self-verification predicts relationship quality beyond the actor's personality traits as rated by the self and partner, especially among married couples. This issue is important to examine because personality is already known to predict a significant amount of variance in relationship quality (Assad, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007; Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, & Campbell, 2007; Gonzaga et al., 2007; Shiota & Levenson, 2007), and demonstrating that self-verification predicts quality beyond the personalities of the partners suggests that self-verification plays an important role in relationships.

3.1. Limitations

One limitation of the current research was the relatively small sample size for the dating and cohabiting couples in Study 1. This

Table 6

Correlations of favorable evaluations of partners with self-verification and relationship quality in Study 2.

	Female Rel. Quality rating	Male Rel. Quality rating	Female overall profile SV	Male overall profile SV
Male favorable evaluations of partner	.32**	.47**	.36**	.01
Female favorable evaluations of partner	.68**	.41**	.09	.35**

Note: Rel. Quality = Relationship Quality. Favorable evaluations were assessed with Frei and Shaver (2002) Respect for Partner scale. N = 70.

** p < .01.

limitation was addressed in Study 2 for dating couples. However, additional data were not collected for cohabiting couples. Further replication of the current findings will be useful, especially in samples of married and cohabiting samples. Such replication is especially important for establishing whether the differences among different types of couples in Study 1 are meaningful or simply due to random fluctuations.

A second limitation of the current research was that the majority of our participants were younger than 30, and thus in the developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), which may have implications for self-verification. First, it is known that emerging adults' personality traits are changing more significantly during this developmental period than other periods in adulthood (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Thus, achieving self-verification may be more difficult at this age, since each of the couple member's trait levels are likely to be changing. We found a relatively high level of self-verification in our studies, which makes this less likely. Second, evidence suggests that emerging adults are more variable in their daily lives than older adults, on at least the traits of Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Noftle & Fleeson, 2010). Thus, self-verification may be less important to relationship satisfaction, since young adults may be less certain of who they are, and might have less of a need for romantic others to verify their personalities. Third, emerging adulthood is a time of general instability or transience: in residence, in career pursuits, and in relationship status. It is possible that for more stable older adults – whether dating, cohabiting, or married – self-verification may play a stronger role in relationship quality. If people have more consistent personalities, those personalities will be easier to judge and the person will be easier to predict in general. Thus, self-verification of personality may be even more strongly related to relationship quality in older adults.

3.2. Future research

Given that the current findings are replicated in future studies, research should begin to look into moderators and mediators of the link between self-verification and relationship quality. Moderators of the relation between self-verification and relationship quality in addition to the type of relationship should be examined, with the goal of determining further factors that explain the differences among couple types. Possible moderators could include expectations for the length of the relationship and aspects of commitment, constraint, and intimacy. For example, if commitment is a moderator, then people with high levels of commitment may have a stronger relation between self-verification and relationship quality, whereas people with low levels of commitment may have a weaker relation between self-verification and relationship quality. This would explain the difference among couple types if married couples were also found to have higher levels of commitment than dating or cohabiting couples. It would also be interesting to examine the mediators of this relationship. What is it about self-verification that leads to higher quality among married couples?⁷ Are accurate expectations really the important variable, and are these expectations predicted by self-verification?

Neff and Karney (2005) developed a hierarchical model of judgments in marital relationships, which has demonstrated that favorable evaluations of one's spouse at the global level (e.g., partner esteem) but accuracy at a more specific level (e.g., partner's abilities, personality) are positively related to marital quality. It seems reasonable to expect that spousal agreement about even narrower traits might be just as strongly related to marital quality. Although

the current approach demonstrates that integrating the study of broad personality traits into self-verification research is useful, future studies may profitably use narrower traits that are still within the Big Five structure: contextualized personality traits (Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, & Perunovic, 2007; Wood & Roberts, 2006) and trait facets or subcomponents (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Saucier & Ostendorf, 1999). Recent findings suggest that contextualized personality traits predict relationship quality over and above global personality traits (Slatcher & Vazire, 2009). Perhaps self-verification of contextualized personality traits would predict relationship quality even more strongly than in the current approach.

Finally, future research could examine the application of these findings to couples therapy. Perhaps one reason couples in intimate and committed relationships are unsatisfied is that they are not verifying their partner's self-image. The therapist could guide the couple in discussing how each person views himself or herself and help the couple to minimize discrepant views of each other. This change in perceptions would likely also change expectations the partners have of each other to be more appropriate, which should increase relationship quality.

3.3. Conclusion

The current research further demonstrates that self-verification is an important predictor of relationship quality, and tentatively suggests that this is especially true among married couples. Furthermore, this is shown for self-verification of broad personality traits, which have more theoretical and empirical relevance to relationship quality than other self-attributes previously studied. Conversely, it appears to be more important for dating couples to have more favorable views of one another's personalities and relationship characteristics.

In 1958, Phil Spector wrote and recorded his first song (with the Teddy Bears), "To Know Him is to Love Him", which earned him his first #1 hit. The title of the song (and its message) was inspired by his mother's heartfelt inscription on his father's tombstone. Is having accurate knowledge of a romantic partner necessary for a loving, committed, relationship? The results of the current two studies suggest that it may be.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported in part by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (MH-20006) to Erik E. Noftle. This manuscript is partly based on data for which different analyses were reported in the doctoral dissertation of Erin C. McGlade.

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⁷ Assuming the causal arrow goes in this direction.

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