

# Who Wants Out When the Going Gets Good? Psychological Investment and Preference for Self-Verifying College Roommates

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*The results of a field investigation indicate that people who are highly invested in their self-views (confidently held or personally important) are especially inclined to display a preference for verification of their self-views. Specifically, only those participants who were certain of their self-views or perceived them as important preferred roommates who confirmed their self-views. Such preferences were somewhat stronger when the self-views were relatively negative. This is the first demonstration of self-verification in a field setting in which relationship partners were randomly assigned to one another.*

The self-picture has all the strength of other perceptual attributes and in addition serves as the chart by which the individual navigates. If it is lost, he can make only impulsive runs in fair weather: The ship drifts helplessly whenever storms arise. (Murphy, 1947, p. 715)

Murphy's remarks make it easier to understand why people might fight like tigers to maintain stable self-views. After all, if stable self-views represent the "chart by which the individual navigates," they will serve as a fundamental means of knowing what to believe and how to behave. Without these reliable guides to thought and action, people will flounder when their self-views are seriously challenged. No wonder, then, that participants in laboratory investigations strive to confirm their self-views by seeking feedback that fits with their self-views (e.g., Hixon & Swann, 1993; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). Similarly, it makes sense that people should prefer relationship partners who see them as they see themselves (e.g., De La Ronde &

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Swann, 1998; Katz, Beach, & Anderson, 1996; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

Or does it? There are at least two reasons to question the generalizability of such demonstrations of a preference for self-verifying relationship partners. First, past research has focused exclusively on people's reactions to partners whom they have known for some time. Given that people tend to rationalize behaviors that they have freely chosen (e.g., Cooper & Fazio, 1984), it seems reasonable to suspect that people might react very differently if they are thrust into relationships without having a choice (Brehm, 1966). Second, past evidence of verification strivings in relationships has been limited to marital relationships; participants in other relationships (e.g., dating) showed no evidence of self-verification strivings (Swann et al., 1994). This raises the possibility that there may be something peculiar about marital relationships that gives rise to self-verification strivings.

If self-verification strivings do generalize to relationships between unmarried persons who have not selected one another, then an additional question of interest involves the influence of psychological investment on their responses. For example, because highly certain self-views are based on a relatively large amount of coherent information about the self (Pelham, 1991), people who are certain of their self-views should be more interested in maintaining them than are people who are uncertain of their self-views. Similarly, because important self-views are closely associated with people's goals and ambitions (Pelham, 1991), people who regard their self-views as important should be more interested in maintaining them than are people who regard their self-views as unimportant. In support of these ideas, people who are certain of their self-views are particularly apt to seek self-verifying evaluations (Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988) and are more likely to bring their relationship partners to see them as they see themselves (Pelham & Swann, 1994). Similarly, people are more likely to seek feedback pertaining to important as compared with unimportant self-views (Pelham, 1991).

Although past studies of importance and certainty suggest that both variables may influence self-verification strivings, several questions remain. First, because researchers have tended to focus on either certainty or importance, little is known about whether the two variables jointly influence behavior. Second, because most past research has focused on the effects of certainty or importance on the feedback seeking activities of participants in laboratory settings, we do not know how psychological investment will influence reactions to feedback from those with whom people are involved in ongoing relationships. Third, relatively little is known about whether the effects of certainty and importance apply to negative as well as positive self-views.

To address these issues, we asked if college students (arbitrarily dubbed "targets") would be more inclined to prefer roommates ("perceivers") who saw them as they saw themselves and if their investment in their self-views would moderate these preferences. Specifically, we examined the relation between (a) the certainty and importance of the self-views of targets and (b) perceivers' appraisals of targets on (c) targets' interest in remaining with the assigned perceiver. We anticipated that the more invested targets were in their self-views, the more they would express a desire to verify these self-views by preferring roommates who saw them as they saw themselves. In addition, based on evidence that negative as well as positive self-views are useful in predicting and controlling the world and in formulating goals (Swann, 1983; 1999), we expected that our predictions would hold for negative as well as positive self-views.

## Method

### Participants

Two hundred thirty six first-semester female students (118 pairs of same-sex roommates) at the University of Texas at Austin took part in this study for either \$10.00 or credit in introductory psychology. Participants had been arbitrarily assigned to each other as roommates. During the 12th week of the term, participants rated themselves, their roommates, and their plans and desires to remain living with their roommates during their second semester in college. We deleted data from nine participants, four who did not complete all of the measures and five who planned to leave the university the following semester. This left 227 participants in the final sample.<sup>1</sup>

### Questionnaires

Participants completed the short version of Pelham and Swann's (1989) Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ-S), which asked them to (a) rate themselves on five dimensions (intelligence, sociability, physical attractiveness, artistic ability, and athletic ability) and (b) indicate the certainty and importance of each of these ratings. In addition, participants rated their roommates on the same five SAQ-S dimensions.

We summed the five items in each of these four measures (self-views, self-view certainty, self-view importance, and appraisal of roommates) to form composite measures of each construct (alphas = .66, .82, .59, and .68, respectively). This strategy of computing composite measures (as compared to examining scores on individual items, as in Pelham and Swann, 1994) is appropriate when the researcher's goal is to determine the impact of people's *general* assessment of themselves on particular dimensions such as certainty, importance, and so on. Also, although we suspect that such composite measures should be related to conceptually related dimensions (for example, our measure of self-certainty ought to be related to Baumgardner's, 1990, measure of self-certainty and Campbell's, 1990, measure of self-concept clarity), this is an empirical question.

After completing the self-concept measures, participants filled out measures of their plans and desire to remain in their relationships with roommates (these items were embedded among several filler items). The measure of plans required participants to select, from a list of seven options, the statement that best described their rooming plans for the following semester. The first five options ranged on a continuum from *I am sure that I will remain with my present roommate* to *I am certain that I will change roommates next semester*. The sixth option was *I will (or probably will) live alone next semester*, and the seventh option was *I will not be in school here next semester*. For the purpose of the analyses, the fifth and sixth options were both scored as a 5, and the five participants who chose option 7 were deleted from the sample (as mentioned earlier). Thus, scores on the plan's measure ranged from 1–5, with higher scores indicating greater readiness to change roommates. Immediately after completing the plans measure, participants reported their desire to change roommates on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*desire very much to stay with present roommate*) to 9 (*desire very much to change roommates*). The midpoint (5) was labeled *no preference*.

Because responses to the measure of *desire* to remain in the relationship were substantially correlated with responses to *plans* to remain ( $r = .51$ ), we summed them

to form a single index of participant's interest in changing roommates ( $\alpha = .68$ ). Scores on this interest index were then reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater interest in *staying* with one's roommate.

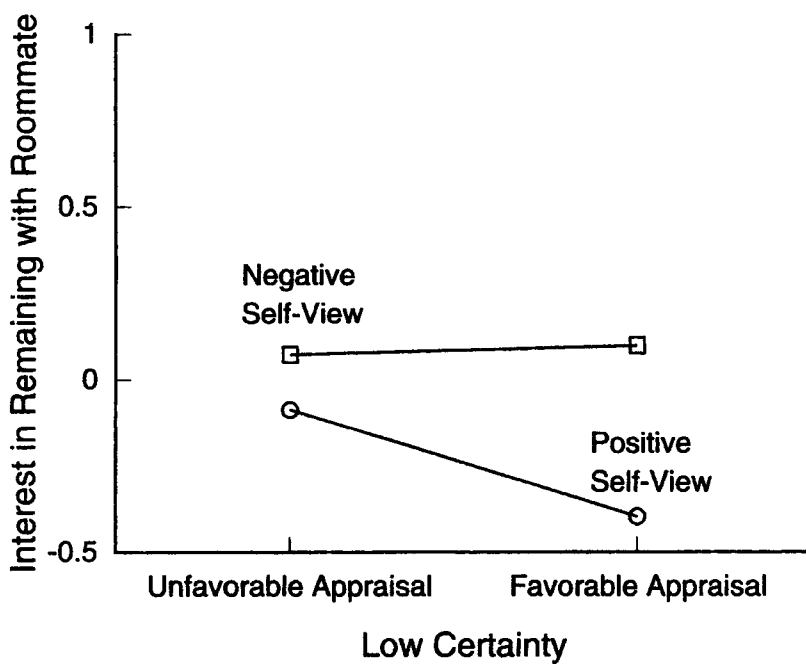
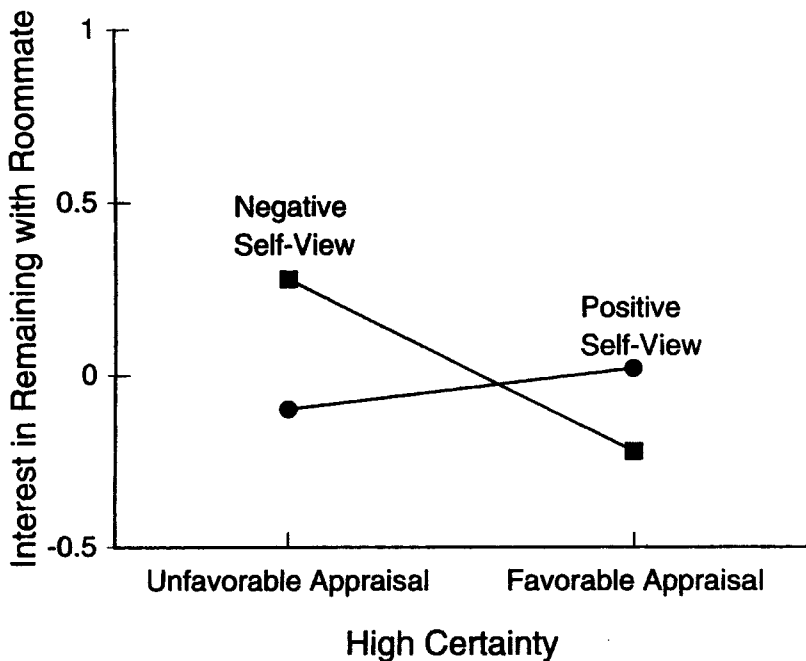
## Results and Discussion

### *Targets' Interest in Remaining with Perceivers as a Function of Certainty of Target Self-Views, Target Self-Views, and Perceivers' Evaluations*

We employed three complementary analytic strategies. First, we conducted multiple regressions. We then generated predicted scores from the original analysis to provide a descriptive account of our findings. Finally we conducted a series of simple slopes tests (see Aiken & West, 1991).<sup>2</sup>

Because we wanted to treat each participant as both the "target" (the roommate who was being evaluated) and "perceiver" (the roommate who was doing the evaluating) in the analyses, we assessed the appropriateness of treating the responses of pairs of roommates as independent observations (Kenny & Judd, 1986). Specifically, we asked if the responses of roommates were correlated on either the predictor variables (e.g., were target self-views related to perceiver self-views?, was the certainty of target self-views related to the certainty of perceiver self-views?, were targets' evaluations of perceivers related to perceivers' evaluations of targets?) or the criterion variable (was target interest in the relationship related to perceiver interest in the relationship?). The responses of targets and perceivers to the predictor variables were unrelated, range =  $-.13$  to  $+.10$ , but their responses on the criterion variable *were* correlated. Not surprisingly, insofar as targets wanted to continue (or terminate) the relationship, perceivers did as well,  $r = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ . To correct for interdependency on the criterion variable, when examining the determinants of the target's interest in the relationship we added the *perceiver's* interest in the relationship as a predictor in the regression equation.

In our first wave of simultaneous multiple regressions, then, the criterion variable was the target's interest in remaining in the relationship and the predictor variables were: (a) perceiver's interest in the relationship; (b) target's self-views; (c) target's certainty of their self-views; (d) perceiver's evaluation of the target; (e-g) all possible two-way interactions between variables "b"-"d"; and (h) the three-way interaction between variables "b"-"d". The predicted triple interaction emerged between target certainty, targets' self-views, and perceivers' evaluations,  $t(218) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .034$ . Further analyses traced the triple interaction to a tendency for self-views to interact with perceivers' evaluations among targets who were high in certainty,  $t(218) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .026$ , but not among targets who were low in certainty,  $t(218) = -0.96$ ,  $p = .339$ .<sup>3</sup> As can be seen in Figure 1, the interaction among targets high in certainty was due to a tendency for targets with negative self-views (i.e., who scored 1 *SD* below the mean) to be more interested in remaining in the relationship to the extent that their partners evaluated them unfavorably,  $t(218) = -2.05$ ,  $p = .042$ , and for those with positive self-views (i.e., who scored 1 *SD* above the mean) to display no such preference,  $t(218) = 0.68$ ,  $p = .499$ . Among targets who were low in self-certainty, the favorability of perceivers' appraisals was unrelated to their interest in the relationship—whether they possessed negative or positive self-views, respectively,  $t(218) = 0.12$ ,  $-1.27$ , respective  $ps = .902$ ,  $.207$ . The results thus support our hypothesis that people who are highly certain of their self-views are



**FIGURE 1** Interest in remaining with roommate as a function of certainty, self-views, and roommate's appraisal.

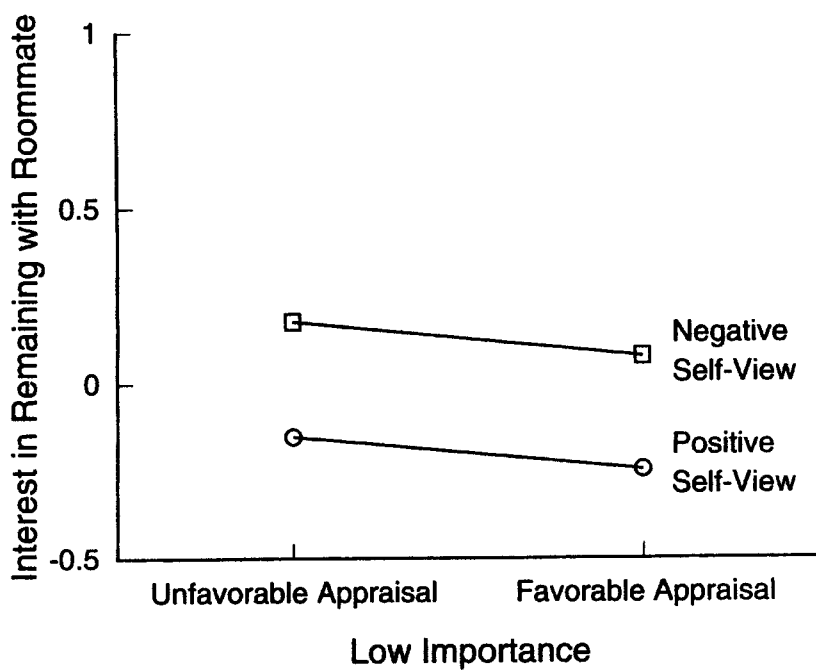
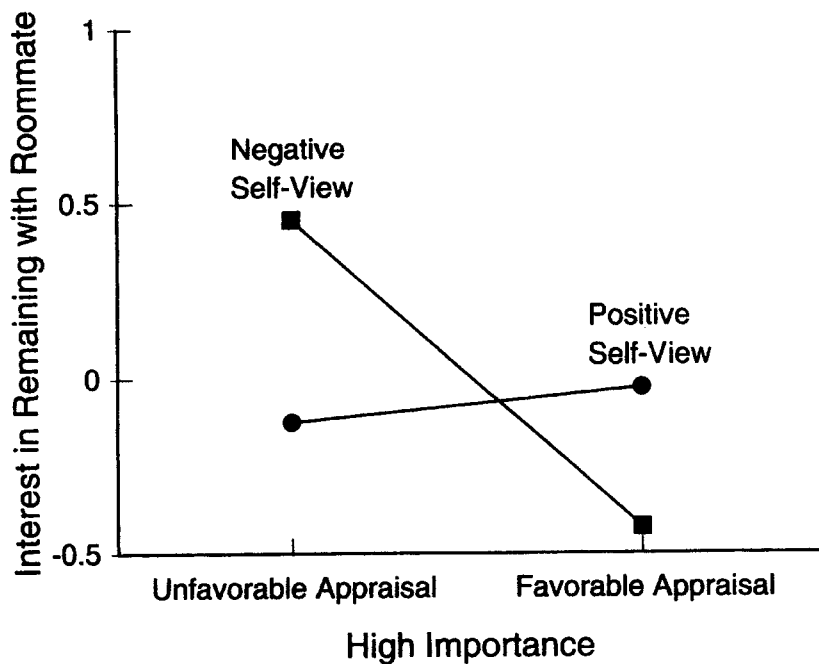
more inclined to prefer verifying evaluations from their partners than are those who are not certain of their self-views.

Why did this initial analysis indicate that targets with highly certain positive self-views displayed no significant pattern? First note that their roommates generally viewed targets in highly favorable terms. Specifically, the sample mean for roommates' ratings of the targets (like targets' own self-ratings) corresponded to a percentile score of about 60 on the SAQ. This mean rating was about one standard deviation above the scale midpoint (which corresponded to the 50th percentile). Thus, both targets and their roommates showed an "above average" effect in their ratings of the target. This meant that the discrepant evaluations received by people with *negative* self-views were opposite in valence to their self-conceived status as "slightly below average." In contrast, almost all of the discrepant evaluations received by participants with *positive* self-views were consistent with their self-views—in the sense that these appraisals were still on the positive side of the scale. Therefore, perhaps the self-views of targets with positive self-views were not so positive that they regarded slightly negative evaluations as discrepant. Indirect support for this possibility comes from the fact that when we used more extreme criteria to classify targets as having positive self-views and as being high in self-certainty (i.e., 2 instead of 1 *SD* above the mean) there was a significant tendency for targets to embrace perceivers more insofar as perceivers appraised them positively,  $t(218) = 2.02, p = .044$ .

#### *Interest in Remaining with Roommates as a Function of Importance of Self-Views, Self-Views, and Partners' Evaluations*

We assumed that certainty would be moderately related to importance, and it was,  $r(225) = .43, Ms = 27.3$  and  $28.3$ , respectively. Given that the overlap between Certainty and importance was far from complete, we performed a second wave of regression analyses in which we substituted importance for certainty.

The criterion variable was the target's interest in remaining in the relationship, and the predictor variables were: (a) perceiver's interest in the relationship; (b) target's self-views; (c) importance of targets' self-views, (d) perceiver's evaluation of the target; (e–g) all possible two-way interactions between variables "b"–"d", and (h) the three-way interaction between variables "b"–"d". As can be seen in Figure 2, the predicted triple interaction emerged between targets' self-views, importance, and perceivers' evaluations,  $t(218) = 2.29, p = .023$ . Further analyses traced the triple interaction to a tendency for self-views to interact with perceivers' evaluations among targets whose self-views were high in importance,  $t(218) = 2.56, p = .011$ , but not among targets whose self-views were low in importance,  $t(218) = 0.02, p = .986$ . As shown in Figure 2, the interaction among targets whose self-views were high in importance was due to a tendency for targets with negative self-views to be more interested in remaining in the relationship to the extent that perceivers evaluated them unfavorably,  $t(218) = -2.53, p = .012$ , and for those with positive self-views to display no such preference,  $t(218) = 0.55, p = .581$ . In contrast, among targets whose self-views were low in importance, the favorability of perceivers' appraisals was unrelated to their interest in the relationship whether their self-views were negative,  $t(218) = -0.58, p = .561$ , or positive,  $t(218) = -0.33, p = .744$ .<sup>4</sup> The results thus support our hypothesis that people are more apt to prefer evaluations that confirm their important as compared with unimportant self-views.



**FIGURE 2** Interest in remaining with roommate as a function of importance, self-views and roommate's appraisal.

Although the initial analysis revealed that targets whose positive self-views were high in Importance displayed no significant preferences, when we used more extreme cuts to classify targets as having positive and important self-views (i.e., 2 instead of 1 *SD* above the mean), the tendency for targets to embrace perceivers more insofar as perceivers appraised them positively approached significance,  $t(218) = 1.91, p = .057$ .

### *Did Certainty and Importance Jointly Influence Self-Verification?*

Although our primary analyses suggest that the certainty and importance of people's self-views moderated self-verification independently, these analyses do not guarantee that the contributions of certainty and importance are entirely independent of one another. This point is a non-trivial one because it makes plausible some alternative explanations of our primary findings. For instance, advocates of the power of positively strivings might speculate that targets sought verification for negative and confidently held self-views only when they did not accord much importance to these self-views. To address this possibility, we conducted an additional simultaneous multiple regression in which we tested for a four-way interaction among our four primary predictors. This analysis was similar to our primary analyses for certainty and importance except that it included—in addition to a four-way interaction term—all of the possible 2-way and 3-way interactions among our primary predictors. Although the results of this analysis must obviously be treated with some caution because of both its complexity and our moderate sample size, these results lent little support to the alternative hypothesis. Specifically, the four-way interaction merely approached significance,  $t(211) = 1.77, p > .10$ . This marginal interaction seemed to reflect the fact that the 2-way self-view  $\times$  roommate appraisal interaction (reflecting a self-verification effect) was strongest when participants' self-views were *both* confidently highly and personally important,  $t(211) = 2.46, p = .015$ . For participants who considered their self-views unimportant, were uncertain of their self-views, or were low in both forms of investment, the self-view  $\times$  appraisal interaction was nonsignificant, all  $ps > .60$ .

Finally, another strategy for testing the relation of the certainty and importance effects was to partial out the effects of each variable while testing for the other. When we did this, each previously significant 3-way interaction became nonsignificant: Just as the  $p$  values for the 3-way interaction involving certainty increased to .203 when we controlled for Importance, the  $p$  value for the 3-way interaction involving importance grew to .226 when we controlled for certainty. These data suggest that the two variables are sufficiently intertwined that it may be more meaningful to talk about the effects of "psychological investment" rather than distinct effects of Importance and Certainty.

In short, participants seem to have shown the greatest interest in verifying appraisals when their self-views were both confidently held or personally important. This finding buttresses the two primary analyses by suggesting that when either of these forms of psychological investment was low, participants showed little interest in self-verification.

## **General Discussion**

The results of our field investigation suggest that even when people have been arbitrarily assigned to a relationship partner, they react to the extent to which that partner validates their self-views. Moreover, the more invested these college



roommates were in their self-views, the more likely they were to strive to verify those self-views. In particular, the more certain or important college students' self-views were to them, the more apt they were to embrace roommates who confirmed these self-views and eschew roommates who disconfirmed these self-views. Students who rated their self-views low in either certainty or importance displayed no such tendency.

Curiously, the preference for congruent roommates was most pronounced among targets who were highly invested in relatively *negative* self-views. In fact, the self-verification strivings of targets who had positive self-views emerged only when we examined targets whose self-views were extremely positive. This finding is particularly surprising given that several investigators have reported that the tendency for married people with positive self-views to prefer self-verifying spouses was just as strong among married people with positive as compared to negative self-views (e.g., De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Katz et al., 1996; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Schafer et al., 1996; Swann et al., 1994). Although we cannot be sure why students with positive self-views in our study were unusually tolerant of relatively negative appraisals from their roommates, it may be useful to remember, as we noted above, that most of the negative appraisals were not extremely negative. Also, because normative expectations vary across different types of relationships, mildly negative evaluations may be much less troubling when they come from roommates as compared to spouses. Finally, people may be more tolerant of negative evaluations when they come from relationship partners whom they have not freely chosen. From this vantage point, it is important to note that, in contrast to previous investigations of marriage partners, the roommates in our research were randomly assigned to their partners. Whatever the reason for this finding, the self-verification effect *did* emerge when we examined people with extremely positive self-views (and, of course, for people with negative self-views).

The suggestion that negative appraisals may mean different things in different relationships may raise concerns about the correct interpretation of some aspects of our findings. In particular, advocates of positivity strivings may be loathe to acknowledge that our participants wanted verification for negative self-views. Readers of earlier drafts of this paper, for example, have suggested that the self-views of our participants were either "not truly negative" or "part of a positive self-view, as, for example, the nerd who prides himself on being a poor athlete." We have three responses to such critiques. First, many of our participants had self-views that were negative in an absolute as well as relative sense and previous research has shown that total scores on the SAQ are substantially correlated with Rosenberg's (1965) measure of self-esteem ( $r = .50$ ; Pelham & Swann, 1989). We think it is preposterous to argue that people who rate themselves below the absolute mean of a scale involving attributes as important as intelligence, sociability, and physical attractiveness do not see themselves negatively. Second, the fact that one is able to rationalize a negative self-view (e.g., the high-self-esteem nerd who prides himself on being a poor athlete) does not mean that one can deny that most people regard it as a negative quality, nor will it mean that one will regard verifying feedback on that dimension as positive. Third, critics who adopt the stance of second guessing the self-reports of participants place themselves on a slippery slope wherein *no* researcher can take the self-reports of participants at face value. For example, it is, at least, if not more, easy to second guess the responses of participants that ostensibly support positivity strivings: how can we be sure that the self-views of people who rate themselves positively are "truly positive" or that "positive self-views are not part of a

negative self-view, as in the low self-esteem nerd who repudiates his intellectual gifts (and the positive views of his intelligence) because they serve to fuel the mean-spirited attacks of peers from whom he craves acceptance." If we are to question the self-reports of participants, much, if not most, of the results of research on the self becomes suspect.

Whatever the cause of the asymmetry between positive and negative appraisals may be, the major contributions of this paper are twofold. First, our findings show that self-verification effects occur in relationships that are not freely chosen. Second, our data indicate that two independent forms of investment—certainty and importance—contribute to people's interest in remaining in roommate relationships. In what follows, we consider each of these variables in turn.

### *Certainty of Self-Views*

We predicted, and found, that the more certain people were of their self-views, the more inclined they were to prefer roommates who saw them as they saw themselves. Our findings buttress earlier evidence that variations in certainty are associated with how vociferously people defend their self-views (e.g., Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann et al., 1988), how much they like hypothetical evaluators (Reid, 1983; Schneider & Jones, 1968), how they present themselves to others (Ungar, 1980), and how likely their relationship partners are to see them as they see themselves (Pelham & Swann, 1994).

Presumably, people are particularly motivated to stabilize highly certain self-views because such self-views are exceptionally useful in their efforts to predict and control their worlds. The role that self-views play in serving this function can best be appreciated by observing what happens when people's firmly-held beliefs are disrupted. For example, several decades ago a white man named John Howard Griffin underwent medical treatments to turn his skin brown so that he could better understand what it was like to be the target of racism. When he gazed into the mirror after undergoing the procedure he was startled and profoundly shaken:

The completeness of this transformation appalled me . . . I felt the beginnings of great loneliness, not because I was a Negro but because the man I had been, the self I knew, was hidden in the flesh of another. If I returned home to my wife and children they would not know me. They would open the door and stare blankly at me. My children would want to know who is the large, bald Negro. If I walked up to my friends, I knew I would see no flicker of recognition in their eyes. . . I had tampered with the mystery of existence and I had lost the sense of my own being. (Griffin, 1977, p. 12)

Although acute, Griffin's trauma was surely offset by the knowledge that the changes in his appearance were temporary. Recent research suggests that people who suffer from *enduring* feelings of uncertainty are less fortunate. Chronic deficits in certainty have been linked to several distinct psychological difficulties, including low self-esteem (e.g., Baumgardner, 1990; Campbell, 1990), narcissism (John & Robbins, 1994), and "self-handicapping" (a tendency to create obstacles to one's own success in an attempt to provide an excuse for possible failures; see Jones & Berglas, 1978; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). Such findings suggest that self-*uncertainty* is a distinctive and very real problem that merits more attention than it has previously received.

Evidence of the difficulties associated with a *lack* of certainty also clarify why people strive to avoid it by seeking verification for their negative self-views. Apparently, people who are depressed and who have low self-esteem embrace negative feedback (e.g., Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992) because the fate of *not knowing* is what they fear the most. They respond to threats to their existing self-views by seeking confirming feedback.

To some, the fact that the desire for congruency increased with increments in certainty may seem surprising because, in principle, very high levels of certainty could have made incongruent feedback seem less threatening to targets (see Sorrentino and Short's, 1986, discussion of uncertainty orientation). From this alternate viewpoint, high levels of certainty could have made people sufficiently indifferent to feedback that they felt no need to gravitate toward partners who seemed poised to provide it. The fact that our data offered no support for this rival hypothesis (in fact, people who were high in certainty were *more* apt to seek confirming partners) suggests that even if high certainty makes incongruent feedback seem less threatening, it does not make people more willing to subject themselves to it. For example, although the Nobel laureate may be sufficiently certain of her abilities that she is not threatened by criticism, she may still prefer to surround herself with people who praise her. This suggests that the preference for congruent partners is not merely a defensive strategy through which people who are unconfident of their virtues and flaws avoid threatening evaluations; rather, it is a preference displayed even by those who are quite confident of their self-views.

### *Importance of Self-Views*

Our findings revealed that the importance of self-views acted in much the same way as did the certainty of self-views. That is, just as people gravitated toward roommates who confirmed their confidently held self-views, people also gravitated toward roommates who confirmed their highly important self-views. Our data thus confirm and extend previous evidence that certainty and importance are two independent forms of psychological investment that moderate the consequences of self-views. One particularly striking aspect of the present findings was that people worked especially hard to verify self-views that were high in importance even when those self-views were negative. This finding counters the potential criticism that people strive to verify only those negative self-views that are trivial or unimportant. Although it seems clear that one way to cope with negative self-views is to consider them unimportant (Pelham & Swann, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988, Tesser, 1986), it does *not* appear that people only verify negative self-views when these self-views are unimportant.

### *Relation of Certainty and Importance*

Although certainty and importance behaved similarly and their effects were intertwined in our research, we believe that the two variables are conceptually distinct. Consider that certainty is theoretically associated with the amount and coherence of the information people have available about their self-views (Pelham, 1991). Because the desire to preserve beliefs should increase as one amasses greater evidence for them, increments in certainty tend to arouse conservative concerns involving

self-preservation. Thus, increments in certainty should always intensify self-verification strivings. In contrast, importance is theoretically connected to people's goals and motivations. As such, importance may act as an energizer—magnifying whatever tendency is most pronounced in a given situation (i.e., the “dominant responder,” cf. Hull, 1943; Zajonc, 1965).

This reasoning, in conjunction with Swann et al.'s, (1994) evidence that the dominant motive in enduring relationships is self-verification and the dominant motive in short term relationships is the desire for positivity, suggests that certainty and importance may have distinct consequences in long term committed relationships (such as those between roommates or marriage partners) versus short term, highly evaluative relationships (such as those between dating partners). If certainty always fosters self-verification strivings, then increments in certainty should foster increments in self-verification in enduring *or* short-term relationships. In contrast, if importance serves to magnify the dominant response, then increments in importance should increase self-verification strivings in enduring relationships (as it did in the current research) and increase positivity strivings in short term relationships. This hypothesis awaits future research.

### *A Methodological Caveat*

In our research, we summed across the five certainty and importance items (a nomeothetic approach) rather than identifying individuals who viewed particular self-views as high or low in importance or certainty (an idiographic approach). We followed this procedure for two reasons. First, we assumed that when it comes to the desire to end a relationship, it takes a composite of many beliefs to really matter. Stated differently, we did not believe that congruence on a single item would be enough to determine the fate of an entire relationship. Second, when we (Pelham & Swann, 1989) developed the SAQ, our goal was to identify those five traits that our college students participants would regard as high in both importance and certainty. Hence, by design, the SAQ attributes are all quite high in importance and certainty which means that it is inappropriate to consider any items as being “low” in importance or certainty. Of course, we recognize that there may occasionally be incidents in which the verification of a single self-view is critical to the relationship. For example, if the wife of an academic decided he was dull witted there would certainly be trouble in the relationship. In our sample of college students who rated one another on the SAQ, however, we suspect that such forms of incongruence rarely emerged. Furthermore, in those rare instances in which single-dimension discrepancies of sufficient magnitude to threaten a relationship do emerge, we believe that they would be difficult to corroborate statistically.

Having said this, our use of a nomeothetic approach to measuring investment leaves open the possibility that there is something unique about participants who score high in importance or certainty that has nothing to do with importance or certainty per se. We should point out, however, that previous researchers have reported results that argue against this possibility. For example, Pelham and Swann (1994) showed that certainty measured idiographically behaves in much the same way as certainty behaved in our research. Similarly, Pelham (1991) showed that importance measured idiographically behaves in much the same way as importance behaved in our research. This past research thus diminishes the plausibility of the concerns about the construct validity of our measures of certainty and importance.

## Conclusions

In this report we provide evidence that psychological investment in self-views moderates the extent to which people seek support for those self-views. This evidence at once qualifies and amplifies Murphy's conviction that stable self-views serve as "the chart by which the individual navigates" through life. Our findings qualify his statement by suggesting that only firmly held or important self-views serve this directive function. Our findings amplify Murphy's remarks, however, by suggesting that people are so invested in maintaining self-views in which they are invested that they take active steps to create around themselves social worlds that verify and confirm their views of themselves. Furthermore, this occurs even if people's self-views are relatively negative and even if they have been thrust into the relationship by forces beyond their control.

## Notes

1. Additional data from these participants addressing different issues can be found in Pelham (1991), and Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, and Pelham (1992).
2. In addition to the established methodological and statistical advantages of simple slopes tests, they allowed us to conduct precise tests of specific hypotheses that would otherwise be very difficult to test. This approach proved to be especially useful in our research because it allowed us to estimate the relation between perceiver appraisals and target interest in maintaining the relationship for targets with extremely favorable self-views without requiring an enormous sample size. Although it is true that predicted scores do not provide information about means, this is not problematic because predicted scores are the precise conceptual equivalent of means in a multiple regression analysis, and they are statistically superior to the means that would be generated by conducting median splits. For instance, in comparison with such means, predicted scores do a superior job of accounting for intercorrelations between different predictors. For a further discussion of the logic of using simple slopes tests to decompose higher order interactions, see Aiken and West (1991).
3. Regressions computed without correcting for interdependency yielded much the same results. For example, the triple interaction was significant,  $t(220) = 2.17, p < .032$ , and the two-way interaction between target self-views and roommates' evaluations was significant among participants who were high in Certainty,  $t(219) = 2.29, p < .024$ , but not among participants who were low in Self-Certainty,  $t(219) = -1.44, p > .150$ .
4. As was the case for certainty, regressions computed without correcting for interdependency yielded much the same results. For example, the triple interaction was nearly significant,  $t(219) = 1.92, p = .056$ , and the two-way interaction between target self-views and roommates' evaluations approached significance among participants whose self-views were high in importance,  $t(219) = 1.78, p = .077$ , but not among participants whose self-views were low in importance,  $t(219) = -0.47, p = .639$ .

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