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Tracy Kwang and William B. Swann, Jr

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Do People Embrace Praise Even When They Feel Unworthy? A Review of Critical Tests of Self-Enhancement Versus Self-Verification

Tracy Kwang[1] and William B. Swann, Jr.[1]

Abstract

Some contemporary theorists contend that the desire for self-enhancement is prepotent and more powerful than rival motives such as self-verification. If so, then even people with negative self-views will embrace positive evaluations. The authors tested this proposition by conducting a meta-analytic review of the relevant literature. The data provided ample evidence of self-enhancement strivings but little evidence of its prepotency. Instead, the evidence suggested that both motives are influential but control different response classes. In addition, other motives may sometimes come into play. For example, when rejection risk is high, people seem to abandon self-verification strivings, apparently in an effort to gratify their desire for communion. However, when rejection risk is low, as is the case in many secure marital relationships, people prefer self-verifying evaluations. The authors conclude that future researchers should broaden the bandwidth of their explanatory frameworks to include motives other than self-enhancement.

Keywords

self-identity, motivation, goals, self-presentation, attribution, individual differences, interpersonal processes, self-verification, self-enhancement

People love to be admired and praised. Indeed, the notion that people prefer positive, "self-enhancing" evaluations is among the most prominent motivational assumptions in Western Psychology (e.g., Jones, 1973; Leary, 2007). Nevertheless, people's allegedly voracious appetite for adulation may be qualified by a competing desire for "self-verifying" evaluations—that is, evaluations that confirm their enduring self-views (e.g., Lecky, 1945; Swann, 1983). In this article, we use meta-analytic techniques to evaluate the relative strength of these competing motives for self-enhancement and self-verification. We begin with a discussion of the older of the two theories, self-enhancement.

Self-Enhancement Theory

The seeds of self-enhancement theory were sewn more than seven decades ago when Gordon Allport (1937) asserted that there exists a vital human need to view oneself positively. In this tradition, modern self-enhancement theorists assert that people desire to increase the positivity—or reduce the negativity—of their self-views (see Leary, 2007, for a review). The proposal that there exists a pervasive desire for positivity has inspired dozens of studies. At this juncture, people are thought to engage in a host of self-serving biases that presumably enable them to maintain positive conceptions of themselves. One of the most prevalent of such biases is the tendency to attribute positive outcomes to the self and negative outcomes to external circumstances (e.g., Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Fitch, 1970). Similarly, people routinely claim to be better off than the average person, by, for example, predicting better futures for themselves than for the average person (Taylor & Brown, 1988) and even asserting that they are less susceptible to bias than are others (Pronin, Gilovich & Ross, 2004). When people receive feedback, they selectively attend to information that preserves their self-esteem (Ditto & Lopez, 1993) and report feeling better after receiving positive as compared to negative feedback (e.g., Korman, 1968; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Finally, self-enhancement biases are not "all in the head," in that they are believed to motivate people to strategically present themselves in a flattering light (Baumeister, 1982).

In addition to inspiring dozens of empirical investigations, the notion that people are fundamentally motivated to acquire positive evaluations has developed into one of social

[1]University of Texas at Austin

Corresponding Author:
William B. Swann, Jr., University of Texas at Austin, Department of Psychology, Austin, TX 78712
Email: swann@mail.utexas.edu

psychology's most influential theoretical assumptions (e.g., Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999; Leary, 2007). In fact, despite some early literature reviews indicating that self-enhancement strivings influenced affective but not cognitive reactions (e.g., Shrauger, 1975), over the past few decades it has arguably become one of social psychology's most widely accepted theory. Today self-enhancement themes can be found in most of the field's most influential theories, including terror management (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), self-evaluation maintenance (Tesser, 1988), positive illusions (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Taylor & Brown, 1988), self-affirmation (Steele, 1988), and contingencies of self-worth (e.g., Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Although the assumption that people value and prefer positive evaluations is the core proposition underlying most variations of self-enhancement theory, some contemporary proponents of the theory have taken the argument further. Impressed by wide-ranging evidence of self-enhancing biases in human information processing and behavior, several authors have asserted that the desire for self-enhancement overrides the desire for accurate self-knowledge (Copleston, 1957; Jahoda, 1958; Rogers, 1951; for a review, see Colvin & Griffo, 2007). The authors of one landmark article, for example, defined self-enhancement as a tendency to entertain *unrealistically* positive self-evaluations that reflect a "general, enduring pattern of error" (Taylor & Brown, 1988, p. 194). Others have recently added that the self-enhancement motive is both prepotent and universal, a "cornerstone" of psychological activity (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008).

To be sure, some authors have dissented from the notion that self-enhancement strivings are completely unbridled (e.g., Baumeister, 1989), including even some of the original advocates of the notion that they are pervasive (e.g., Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). Yet for the most part researchers interested in self-enhancement have sought to collect additional support for the motive with little attention to countervailing motivational forces. This focus, in combination with recent claims for the prepotency of the self-enhancement motive, implies that there exists a fundamental imbalance in human priorities rather than a delicately balanced system of motivational checks and balances (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). In particular, it would appear that the desire for positivity is so powerful that it overrides competing accuracy-related motives such as self-verification (Swann, 1983) and self-assessment (Trope, 1983). To test this provocative claim, we conducted a meta-analysis of research designed to compare the relative strength of self-enhancement strivings with one of its historic competitors, self-verification.[1] To set the stage for this analysis, we briefly characterize this competing motive.

The Desire for Self-Verification

Self-verification theory (e.g., Swann, 1983) assumes that people have a powerful desire to confirm and stabilize their firmly held self-views. This desire for stable self-views can be understood by considering how and why people develop self-views in the first place. Theorists have long assumed that people form their self-views by observing how others treat them (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). As they acquire more and more evidence to support their self-views, people become increasingly certain of these views. Once firmly held, self-views enable people to make predictions about their worlds, guide behavior, and maintain a sense of continuity, place, and coherence. In this way, stable self-views not only serve the pragmatic function of guiding behavior but also serve the epistemic function of affirming people's sense that things are as they should be. Indeed, firmly held self-views develop into the centerpiece of their knowledge systems. As such, it is not surprising that by mid-childhood children begin to display a preference for evaluations that confirm and stabilize their self-views (e.g., Cassidy, Ziv, Mehta, & Feeney, 2003).

Self-verification theory's most provocative prediction is that people should prefer self-confirming evaluations even if the self-view in question is negative. For example, contrary to self-enhancement theory, self-verification theory predicts that those who see themselves as disorganized or unintelligent should prefer evidence that others also perceive them as such. Support for the theory has come from studies that have examined the relationship of people's enduring self-views to their choice of feedback and interaction partners, attention, overt behavior, recall, and relationship quality (for a review, see Swann, in press).

Yet the inherently social nature of the self-verification process points to the existence of at least one critically important boundary condition of the effect. That is, if people are to receive a steady supply of self-verifying feedback, they must maintain the "vehicles" for the delivery of such feedback—their ongoing relationships. Simply put, no relationship, no self-verification. This means that when people want the relationship to survive, feedback may be eschewed not only when it threatens the desire for self-verification, but also when it threatens the future of the relationship. Hence, overly positive evaluators will be avoided because they might eventually be disappointed and leave; overly negative evaluators will be avoided because their negativity calls the very existence of the relationship into question. Wariness of negative evaluators may be magnified insofar as the relationship is provisional or uncommitted, for terminating such relationships is far easier than ending relationships that involve significant long-term commitment. The general principle, then, is that people will seek self-verification only insofar as doing so does not put them at risk of being abandoned, for abandonment would frustrate their communion motive (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Wiggins & Broughton, 1985) and sever their supply of self-verification (see also Hardin & Higgins's, 1996, discussion of people's

unwillingness to embrace epistemic truth if it undermines the relationship aspect of shared realities).

This reasoning suggests that as long as self-verifying negative feedback does not portend rejection and relationship termination, people with negative self-views will prefer negative evaluations. Similarly, people with positive self-views will display a corresponding preference for positive evaluations. In contrast, self-enhancement theory predicts that all people will prefer positive evaluations, regardless of the positivity of their self-views. At this juncture, these competing predictions have been tested in a large number of studies (for an early review, see Shrauger, 1975). Despite this, some of the most prominent reviewers of the literature (e.g., Baumeister, 1998; Leary, 2007) have referenced a single article by Sedikides (1993) as offering definitive evidence for the prepotency of the self-enhancement motive. To burden a single article with the resolution of such a complex controversy is hazardous in itself, but the choice of this particular article is especially problematic. Witness that the author himself acknowledged that five of his six studies are irrelevant to self-verification theory because he failed to measure chronic self-views and "an adequate testing of [the self-verification] perspective would require that subjects' preexisting (both positive and negative) self-conceptions be at stake during the self-evaluation process" (p. 329). In the only study that did include a measure of self-views, the self-enhancement effect (r = .50) was no larger than the self-verification effect (r = .46), rendering the study absolutely inconclusive with respect to the prepotency of self-enhancement.

Of course, even if the Sedikides (1993) article *did* inform the debate between advocates of self-enhancement and self-verification theory, there is a larger point here: In light of the existence of numerous relevant studies, the most appropriate means of testing the relative merits of self-enhancement versus self-verification approaches is to review all available studies that meet the design criteria specified by the two theories. In the next section, we report such a meta-analysis. Evidence that self-enhancement strivings are significantly stronger than self-verification strivings will buttress recent claims that self-enhancement is the prepotent social psychological motive (e.g., Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). Evidence that self-verification strivings are equal to, or stronger than, self-enhancement strivings will point to the existence of a more balanced and variegated motive system.

Critical Tests of Self-Enhancement Versus Self-Verification

Both self-enhancement and self-verification theories make similar predictions for people with positive self-views. That is, both theories predict that people with positive self-views will embrace positive evaluations because, for such individuals, positive evaluations are both self-enhancing and self-verifying. The two theories make competing predictions for people with negative self-views, however. Self-enhancement theory predicts that people with negative self-views will prefer positive over negative evaluations. Statistically, self-enhancement will be reflected by a main effect of the evaluation factor in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) or regression. The effect size of the main effect will be reported regardless of whether there was an interaction effect. In contrast, self-verification theory assumes that the *match* between the evaluation and the self-view is crucial (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). For this reason, people with positive self-views should prefer positive over negative evaluations and people with negative self-views should prefer negative over positive evaluations. Statistically, this will be reflected in an interaction between self-view and evaluation in an ANOVA or regression.[2]

The most straightforward form of support for self-verification theory would be for people with positive self-views to prefer positive evaluations and people with negative self-views to prefer negative evaluations. Nevertheless, because self-verification theory holds that it is the *match* between the self-view and evaluation that is crucial, a given evaluation could be non-matching even though it has the same valence as the self-view. Support for this possibility comes from a study in which people with positive self-views were less intimate with their spouses not only when the spouses' appraisals were negative but also when their appraisals were *extremely positive* (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). For this reason, from the perspective of self-verification theory, the crucial issue is whether there is an interaction between self-views and evaluations, such that the preference for positivity (or aversion to negativity) is stronger among people with positive as compared to negative self-views.

Search Procedure and Inclusion Criteria. We searched the references sections of published review articles on self-enhancement and self-verification (e.g., Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Shrauger, 1975; Swann, 1990) for critical tests of the two self-motives. In addition, we searched for relevant articles using Academic Search Premier, Medline, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Sociological Collection using keywords such as *self-verification*, *self-enhancement*, *self-esteem*, *feedback*, *attribution*, *cognitions*, *reactions*, *behavior*, *emotion*, and *affect*. Finally, we e-mailed appropriate listservs and contacted prominent researchers to request relevant articles that we might have been missed.

The first author read the abstracts of all of the articles. If the abstract was at all promising, she read the article itself to determine if the authors provided the information required to compute effect sizes for self-enhancement and self-verification. This led to the deletion of two types of studies (specific citations are provided below). Some articles were deleted because the authors discussed self-verification but failed to measure participants' self-views—a requirement for computing self-verification effects. Other studies were deleted

because the authors did not provide sufficient information to calculate effect sizes for self-enhancement and self-verification in their result sections and our efforts to obtain this information were fruitless.

All of the studies that provided the information required to compute effect sizes were listed in our tables and included in an initial meta-analysis. Results were standardized to Pearson's *r* effect size and corrected for sampling error, according to the meta-analysis methods of Hunter and Schmidt (1990) and Hunter, Schmidt, and Jackson (1982) and as outlined by Lyons (2003) as well as Rosenthal and Rosnow (2008).

After conducting the initial meta-analysis, we excluded some studies from the final meta-analysis because characteristics of the design or methodology compromised their capacity to provide a fair test of the two theories. For example, some researchers included only participants with negative self-views, rendering the design incomparable to those in which researchers recruited participants with both positive and negative self-views. Other researchers manipulated feedback that was disjunctive with the self-view, a feature that made it impossible to say whether the feedback was verifying or non-verifying. For instance, some researchers assessed the relationship between global self-esteem and a specific self-view (e.g., athletic ability). In such instances, the global and specific self-views are mismatched, thus violating the specificity matching principle. Without a clear match between the self-view and feedback, self-verification theory does not make clear predictions (see Swann et al.'s, 2007, discussion of the specificity matching principle). Still other researchers manipulated or measured variables that were not comparable to those examined in studies included in the meta-analysis. For example, one investigator manipulated mood state rather than giving participants positive versus negative feedback; others measured the extent to which participants believed feedback would foster self-improvement or predict future success. Finally, two additional studies were excluded from the final meta-analysis because of statistical irregularities. Specifically, the researchers partialed out the effects of participants' performance expectations while assessing the effects of their self-views, a procedure that almost surely diminishes the contribution of self-views to the outcome.

To ensure that we were comparing apples to apples, we organized our meta-analyses into sections based on the dependent measures used by the researchers. To determine straightaway if we replicated the results of the most expansive previous review of this literature (Shrauger, 1975), we began with cognitive and affective responses to feedback. We followed with three new categories of dependent variables, namely, behavioral reactions, feedback seeking, and relationship quality.

Cognitive Processes. These processes refer to the extent to which people perceive the feedback they receive to be accurate, diagnostic, attributable to themselves, and delivered by a competent evaluator. Operationally, self-enhancement was defined as a tendency for participants to devote more attention to positive evaluations and perceive them to be more accurate, diagnostic, and so on than negative evaluations. Self-enhancement was also defined as the tendency to attribute positive events or outcomes to personal, stable, and global qualities, whereas negative events or outcomes are attributed to situational, unstable, and specific qualities. In contrast, self-verification was defined by the tendency for participants with positive self-views to devote more attention and impute more accuracy to positive feedback and evaluators whereas people with negative self-views displayed the opposite pattern. Self-verification was also defined by the tendency for those with positive self-views to attribute positive events as internal, stable, and global and negative events as external, instable, and specific, whereas those with negative self-views displayed the opposite pattern.

Twenty-six studies were not included in the tables because there were insufficient data to calculate *r* (e.g., Bell & Arthur, 2008; Crary, 1966; Sedikides & Green, 2004). This left forty-five studies in Table 1. Seven studies did not meet our further inclusion criteria. Anseel and Lievens (2006) measured utility of feedback for improving the self rather than the accuracy or diagnosticity of the feedback with respect to the actual self. Similarly, McFarlin and Blascovich (1981) violated the specificity matching principle in that the measure of self-view was social skill and the outcome measure was performance on a spatial task. Also, Bellavia and Murray (2003) manipulated the mood state of the participants rather than giving them valenced feedback. Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, and Ross (2005) was eliminated because participants were not given negative feedback. In two studies (Moreland & Sweeney, 1984; Shrauger & Osberg, 1980), the authors partialed out the effects of performance expectations from self-views. Because self-views presumably exert their influence by shaping expectations, covarying out expectations may neutralize the effects of self-views, a possibility that was supported by the fact that expectations significantly influenced responses. Finally, we eliminated Study 2 of Rudich and Vallacher (1999) because the authors confounded negative feedback with rejection, which disqualifies it as a test of self-verification because rejection cuts off one's supply of self-verification. When the foregoing studies were eliminated, thirty-eight studies remained.[3] We further categorized the studies by specific dependent variables: accuracy (i.e., how accurate or valid is the feedback), attention (i.e., how much time is spent scrutinizing the feedback), attribution (i.e., are successes or failures because of internal or external causes), over-claiming bias (i.e., claiming more positive evaluations than objective measures suggest), predictive ability (i.e., does the feedback inform future results), and recall accuracy (i.e., remembering the results as being more positive or negative than they were).

Self-enhancement and cognitive processes. As shown in Table 1, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect in the entire sample was $r = .19$. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for accuracy

Table 1. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Cognitive Processes

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
Anseel and Lievens 2006[a†]	389	Accuracy	.16	–.08
Bosson and Swann 1999 (Study 1)[b]	74	Accuracy	.30	.33
Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise 2006[c]	103	Accuracy	.00	.28
De La Ronde and Swann, 1998[c]	61	Accuracy	.43	.35
Giesler, Josephs, and Swann, 1996[cd]	73	Accuracy	.23	.76
Moreland and Sweeney, 1984[e†]	166	Accuracy	.31	–.06
Quinlivan and Leary 2005	81	Accuracy	.26	.30
Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992 (Study 1)[c]	75	Accuracy	.26	.41
Rudich and Vallacher 1999 (Study 1)	47	Accuracy	.32	.22
Rudich and Vallacher 1999 (Study 2)[†]	50	Accuracy	.34	.42
Shrauger and Kelly 1988 (Study 1)[bcf]	31	Accuracy	.14	.43
Shrauger and Kelly 1988 (Study 2)[bc]	39	Accuracy	.56	.37
Shrauger and Lund 1975[c]	48	Accuracy	.40	.33
Shrauger and Rosenberg 1970	36	Accuracy	.29	.48
Stake 1982 (Study 1)	236	Accuracy	.44	.11
Swann, Griffin, Predmore, and Gaines 1987[c]	98	Accuracy	.30	.28
Swann and Read 1981a (Study 3)	74	Accuracy	.00	.84
Woo and Mix 1997[c]	72	Accuracy	.59	.10
Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, and Ross 2005 (Study 2)[cg†]	79	Accuracy	.11	.20
Swann and Read 1981b (Study 1)	64	Attention	.00	.28
Bellavia and Murray 2003[†]	81	Attribution	.35	.35
Brown, Cai, Oakes, and Deng 2009 (Study 1)[d]	91	Attribution	.32	.12
Burke 1978	90	Attribution	.17	.29
Campbell, Chew, and Scratchley 1991 (Study 1)	67	Attribution	.36	.26
Chandler, Lee, and Pengilly 1997	254	Attribution	.29	.45
Feather 1969	167	Attribution	.00	.00
Feather and Simon 1971[h]	85	Attribution	.19	.28
Feather and Simon 1973[h]	265	Attribution	.10	.11
Fielstein et al. 1985	201	Attribution	.00	.30
Fitch 1970	135	Attribution	.25	.22
Gilmor and Minton 1974[h]	80	Attribution	.22	.75
Girodo, Dotzenroth, and Stein 1981	78	Attribution	.01	.35
Jussim, Yen, and Aiello 1995	172	Attribution	.07	.31
McMahan 1973[h]	336	Attribution	.24	.19
Piers 1977	297	Attribution	.00	.30
Raps, Peterson, Reinhard, Abramson, and Seligman 1982	106	Attribution	.17	.24
Rizley 1978 (Study 1)	38	Attribution	.27	.23
Rizley 1978 (Study 2)	38	Attribution	.20	.26
Shrauger and Osberg 1980[†]	60	Attribution	.27	.00
Stroebe, Eagly, and Stroebe 1977	56	Attribution	.00	.42
Tennen, Herzberger, and Nelson 1987 (Study 1)	55	Attribution	.17	.48
Tennen et al. 1987 (Study 2)	23	Attribution	.34	.70
Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, and Robins 2004	128	Over-claiming bias	–.11	.50
McFarlin and Blascovich 1981[†]	64	Predictive ability	.00	.41
Story 1998 (Study 1)	22	Recall	.45	.50
Total	4,863	Sample-weighted mean *r*	.19	.25
Total of studies that do not partial out expectation	3,974	Sample-weighted mean *r*	.18	.30

[a]The necessary standardized data were not published in the article, but Anseel kindly provided them.
[b]*F* statistics were calculated from cell means and standard deviations according to the formulas outlined in Cohen (2002).
[c]The dependent variable in the actual study was labeled differently in the original article. However, on closer examination, the question items did not differ from items measuring accuracy.
[d]Analyzed American sample only.
[e]We averaged the effect sizes for accuracy and attribution. The accuracy effect size for self-enhancement is *r* = .22 and for self-verification is *r* = –.09. The attribution effect size for self-enhancement is *r* = .39 and for self-verification is *r* = –.03. We separated these effect sizes when we analyzed the specific dependent variables.
[f]We did not include effect sizes for recall because almost all participants correctly recognized all the feedback they received.
[g]The necessary data were not published in the article, but Wood kindly provided them.
[h]Measured confidence as self-view.
[†]Study does not fit inclusion criteria.

was r = .27, attention was r = .00, attribution was r = .15, over-claiming bias was r = –.11, predictive ability was r = .00, and recall accuracy was r = .45.

When we eliminated the studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect was r = .18. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for accuracy was r = .31, attention was r = .00, attribution was r = .14, over-claiming bias was r = –.11, and recall was r = .45.

Self-verification and cognitive processes. The average effect size for the self-verification effect in our preliminary sample was r = .25. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for accuracy was r = .20, attention was r = .28, attribution was r = .27, over-claiming bias was r = .50, predictive ability was r = .41, and recall accuracy was r = .50.

When we eliminated the studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-verification effect was r = .30. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for accuracy was r = .33, attention was r = .28, attribution was r = .27, over-claiming bias was r = .50, and recall was r = .50.

In sum, there were significant enhancement and verification effects on cognitive processes. To determine the relative strength of the self-enhancement versus self-verification effects, we found the mean difference between the effect sizes (M = –.067, SD = .27) based on a random effects model and calculated the confidence interval for the weighted mean differences. Overall, self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects, $t(4884) = -17.42$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.0735, –.0587, rs = .30 versus .18, respectively. When broken down by specific dependent variables, self-enhancement effects were greater than self-verification effects for accuracy, $t(1831) = 8.945$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = .0498, .0778, whereas self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects for attribution, $t(1774) = -33.89$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.1206, –.1074. There were not enough studies to test mean differences for the other dependent variables. Therefore, consistent with Shrauger (1975), overall, the self-verification effects were stronger than the self-enhancement effects for studies of cognitive processes.

Affective Responses. These responses refer to emotional and affective responses to feedback, such as hostility, anxiety, dysphoria, liking, and positive and negative mood. Operationally, self-enhancement was defined as the tendency for participants to display or report more positive affect in response to positive as compared to negative feedback. Self-verification was defined as the tendency for people with positive self-views to experience more positive or less negative affect when their partners view them positively and people with negative self-views to experience more positive or less negative affect when their partners view them negatively.

Not included in the tables were 4 studies because of insufficient data to calculate r (e.g., Stets & Asencio, 2008; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992), leaving 28 studies listed in Table 2. Of the studies included in the tables, Study 4 of Sprecher and Hatfield (1982) was not excluded from the final meta-analysis because the inclusion of four feedback conditions (totally favorable, ambiguous favorable, rejecting, and totally negative) rendered it incomparable to the other studies in our sample. We also eliminated Studies 1 and 2 of Wood et al. (2005) because participants received positive but not negative feedback. This left the 25 studies in the final sample pool. We further categorized the studies by specific dependent variables: affect (i.e., both positive and negative emotional reactions), attraction (i.e., how attracted are you to the evaluator), negative affect only, positive affect only, satisfaction (i.e., how satisfied are you with the feedback), and task liking (i.e., how enjoyable did you find the task).

Self-enhancement and affective responses. The average effect size for the self-enhancement effect in our preliminary sample was r = .26. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for general affect was r = .31, attraction was r = .26, negative affect only was r = .12, positive affect only was r = .39, satisfaction was r = .62, and task liking was r = .16.

When we eliminated the studies that did not fit further inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect was r = .29. The average effect size for attraction rose to r = .34. The average effect sizes for all other dependent variables stayed the same.

Self-verification and affective responses. Inspection of Table 2 reveals that the average effect size for the self-verification effect in our preliminary sample was r = .13. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for general affect was r = .05, attraction was r = .28, negative affect only was r = .10, positive affect only was r = –.03, satisfaction was r = .03, and task liking was r = .09.

When we eliminated the studies that did not fit further inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-verification effect was r = .13. The average effect size for attraction rose to r = .35 and negative affect dropped only to r = .09. The average effect sizes for all other dependent variables stayed the same.

In sum, although there were some self-verification effects for measures of affect, the self-enhancement effects seemed considerably stronger. To determine the relative strength of the self-enhancement versus self-verification effects, we found the mean difference between the effect sizes for enhancement and verification effects (M = .152, SD = .25) based on a random effects model and calculated the confidence interval for the weighted mean differences. Overall, self-enhancement effects were greater than self-verification effects, $t(4111) = 39.12$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = .1443, .1595, rs = .29 versus .13, respectively. When broken down by specific dependent variables, self-enhancement effects were greater than self-verification effects for general affect, $t(931) = 30.98$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = .2481, .2817; negative affect, $t(1557) = 19.59$,

Table 2. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Affective Reactions

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
Gibbons and McCoy 1991[a]	111	Affect	.28	.00
Jussim, Yen, and Aiello 1995	172	Affect	.33	.05
Moreland and Sweeney 1984[b]	166	Affect	.63	–.06
Quinlivan and Leary 2005	81	Affect	.28	.00
Shrauger and Lund 1975	48	Affect	.00	.00
Stets 2005	282	Affect	.14	.17
Woo and Mix 1997	72	Affect	.54	.00
Katz and Beach 2000 (Study 1)	143	Attraction	.44	.39
Katz and Beach 2000 (Study 2)	198	Attraction	.60	.87
Morling and Epstein 1997 (Study 1)	245	Attraction	.34	.36
Sprecher and Hatfield 1982 (Study 1)	37	Attraction	.56	.02
Sprecher and Hatfield 1982 (Study 2)	182	Attraction	.17	.13
Sprecher and Hatfield 1982 (Study 3)	200	Attraction	.12	.08
Sprecher and Hatfield 1982 (Study 4)[†]	332	Attraction	.02	.04
Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992 (Study 1)	75	Negative affect only	.35	.00
Burke and Harrod 2005	286	Negative affect only	.02	.06
Cast and Burke 2002	401	Negative affect only	.05	.07
Ralph and Mineka 1998	160	Negative affect only	.03	.19
Shrauger and Sorman 1977[c]	53	Negative affect only	.54	.37
Swann, Griffin, Predmore and Gaines 1987	98	Negative affect only	.38	.00
Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, and Ross 2005 (Study 1)[d†]	67	Negative affect only	.20	.18
Wood et al. 2005 (Study 2)[d†]	79	Negative affect only	.06	.11
Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise 2006	103	Positive affect only	.23	–.10
Stake 1982 (Study 1)	236	Positive affect only	.46	.00
Anseel and Lievens 2006	389	Satisfaction	.58	.07
Korman 1968 (Study 1)	71	Task liking	.30	.16
Korman 1968 (Study 2)	129	Task liking	.19	.18
Korman 1968 (Study 3)	174	Task liking	.08	.00
Total	4,590	Sample weighted mean *r*	.26	.13
Total of studies that fit inclusion criteria	4,112	Sample weighted mean *r*	.29	.13

[a]We averaged the effect sizes for Studies 1 and 2 because the data came from the same participant sample.
[b]We averaged the effect sizes for affect and satisfaction. The affect effect size for self-enhancement is $r = .57$ and for self-verification is $r = –.06$. The satisfaction effect size for self-enhancement is $r = .69$ and for self-verification is $r = –.06$. We separated these effect sizes when we analyzed the specific dependent variables.
[c]The dependent variables measured by Shrauger and Sorman are anxiety and satisfaction. We did not average the effect sizes across these two variables because they are very different constructs. Instead, we chose to report effect sizes for anxiety only because it is the more common variable measured in other studies and labeled it as "negative affect only." The satisfaction effect size for self-enhancement is $r = .75$ and for self-verification is $r = .00$. We separated these effect sizes when we analyzed the specific dependent variables.
[†]Study does not fit inclusion criteria.

$CI_{.95}$ = .0967, .1182, and task liking, $t(373) = 27.62$, $CI_{.95}$ = .0625, .0720. Self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects for attraction, $t(1336) = –4.43$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.0244, –.0094. Therefore, consistent with Shrauger (1975), overall, the effect sizes for self-enhancement tended to exceed those for self-verification for studies of affective responses.

Interpersonal Behaviors. This category refers to behaviors or speech designed to bring interaction partners to see oneself in a self-enhancing or self-verifying manner. Operationally, self-enhancement strivings would be evidenced by a tendency for participants to embrace positive feedback but eschew negative feedback. Self-verification effects would be reflected in a tendency for participants' positive self-views to embrace positive feedback but to shun negative feedback; participants with negative self-views display the opposite pattern.

We eliminated four studies because of insufficient data for calculating *r* (e.g., Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000; Swann & Read, 1981b; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & McNulty, 1992), leaving six studies, listed in Table 3. Tessler and Schwartz (1972) manipulated locus of control instead of positive or negative feedback, so we eliminated this study from our final analysis. Finally, four studies (Baumeister & Tice, 1985; McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984; Studies 1 and 2 of Shrauger & Sorman, 1977) measured persistence as the outcome variable. Persistence is an ambiguous outcome as it can be explained by an increase in intrinsic motivation (i.e., enjoying feedback and reveling in it) or it can be

Table 3. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Interpersonal Behaviors

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
Baumeister and Tice 1985 (Study 1)†	61	Persistence	.00	.41
McFarlin, Baumeister, and Blascovich 1984 (Study 1)†	93	Persistence	.00	.00
Shrauger and Sorman 1977 (Study 1)†	53	Persistence	.00	.36
Shrauger and Sorman 1977 (Study 2)[a]†	84	Persistence	.42	.10
Tessler and Schwartz 1972†	48	Help seeking	.39	.00
Swann and Hill 1982	24	Feedback resistance	.00	.47
Total	363	Sample weighted mean *r*	.15	.18
Total of studies that fit inclusion criteria	24	Sample weighted mean *r*	.00	.47

[a]We averaged the effect sizes for global and specific self-views. The global self-view effect size for self-enhancement was $r = .41$, and for self-verification was $r = .20$. The specific self-view effect size for self-enhancement was $r = .42$ and for self-verification was $r = .00$.

evidence of motivation to disprove the feedback. Because it is unclear what task persistence signifies, we dropped all the studies that measure task persistence from the final analysis. This left only one study in the final sample pool. The study measured feedback resistance (i.e., amount to which the participant verbally questioned or refuted feedback).

Self-enhancement and interpersonal behaviors. As displayed in Table 3, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect for our preliminary sample was $r = .15$. Broken down by specific behaviors, the average effect size for persistence was $r = .12$, help-seeking was $r = .39$, and feedback resistance was $r = .00$.

Table 3 also indicates that only one study was included in the final analysis. The effect size for the self-enhancement effect was $r = .00$.

Self-verification and interpersonal behaviors. In our preliminary sample, the average effect size for the self-verification effect was $r = .18$. Broken down by specific behaviors, the average effect size for persistence was $r = .18$, help-seeking was $r = .00$, and feedback resistance was $r = .47$.

Table 3 also indicates that only one study was included in the final analysis. The effect size for the self-verification effect was $r = .47$.

In sum, inspection of Table 3 reveals that the only study that was included in the final analysis supported self-verification ($r = .47$). Nevertheless, a single study does not provide a sound basis for drawing conclusions regarding the interpersonal behavior category.

Feedback Seeking. Feedback seeking refers to a tendency to choose evaluations, or evaluators, who are inclined to offer particular types of feedback. The conceptual predictor variables were self-enhancement and self-verification. Operationally, self-enhancement was defined as a main effect for feedback valence. Self-verification was defined as either the interaction between feedback valence and self-views or the (statistically equivalent) main effect of the congruence of the feedback (with congruence referring to the degree of match between the feedback valence and self-views). In either instance, significant self-verification effects reflected a tendency for participants with positive self-views to be more inclined to prefer positive feedback (evaluators) than people with negative self-views.

Omitted from Table 4 are 10 studies (e.g., Neiss, Sedikides, Shahinfar, & Kupersmidt, 2006; Sedikides, 1993, Experiments 1-3, 5-6) because the researchers did not measure self-views, leaving 22 studies. Studies 1 and 2 of Chen, Chen, and Shaw (2004) were then excluded because they measured only negative self-views (i.e., socially unskilled). Study 2 of Rudich and Vallacher (1999) was deleted because they confounded negative evaluation with rejection. This left 19 studies in the final sample pool. We further categorized the studies by specific dependent variables: evaluator choice (i.e., which evaluator do you want to have future interactions with), evaluator preference (i.e., how much do you wish to interact with the evaluator), feedback choice (i.e., which feedback do you wish to see), and feedback preference (i.e., how much do you prefer to read each feedback).

Self-enhancement and feedback seeking. Table 4 reveals that the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect in our preliminary sample was $r = .19$. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for evaluator choice was $r = .17$, evaluator preference was $r = .00$, feedback choice was $r = .11$, and feedback preference was $r = .41$.

When we eliminated studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect was $r = .22$, as can be seen in Table 4. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for evaluator choice was at $r = .13$, feedback choice was $r = .18$, and feedback preference stayed at $r = .41$.

Self-verification and feedback seeking. The average effect size for the self-verification effect in our preliminary sample was $r = .25$. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for evaluator choice was $r = .10$, evaluator preference was $r = .38$, feedback choice was $r = .32$, and feedback preference was $r = .27$.

When we eliminated studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-verification effect

Table 4. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Feedback Seeking

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992 (Study 2)	78	Evaluator choice	.38	.50
Rudich, Sedikides, and Gregg 2007 (Study 1)	148	Evaluator choice	.00	.00
Rudich and Vallacher 1999 (Study 1)	47	Evaluator choice	.06	.36
Rudich and Vallacher 1999 (Study 2)†	50	Evaluator choice	.60	–.62
Swann and Pelham 2002	227	Evaluator choice	.14	.13
Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler 1992 (Study 1)	81	Evaluator choice	.14	.13
Chen, Chen, and Shaw 2004 (Study 1)†	107	Evaluator preference	.00	.35
Chen et al. 2004 (Study 2)†	211	Evaluator preference	.00	.40
Bosson and Swann 1999 (Study 1)	74	Feedback choice	.05	.33
Giesler, Josephs, and Swann 1996[a]	73	Feedback choice	–.21	.36
Sedikides 1993 (Study 4)	120	Feedback choice	.50	.46
Swann and Read, 1981a (Study 1)[b]	79	Feedback choice	.00	.24
Swann and Read, 1981a (Study 2)	120	Feedback choice	.00	.20
Swann, Wenzlaff, and Tafarodi 1992 (Study 1)	25	Feedback choice	.17	.36
Joiner 1995	100	Feedback preference	.48	.29
Kraus and Chen 2009[c]	104	Feedback preference	.32	.23
Petit and Joiner 2001	101	Feedback preference	.45	.31
Silvera and Neilands 2004	89	Feedback preference	.36	.22
Silvera and Seger 2004	76	Feedback preference	.90	.18
Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, and Gilbert 1990 (Study 3)	51	Feedback preference	.00	.30
Swann, Pelham, and Krull 1989 (Study 1)	21	Feedback preference	.00	.45
Swann, Pelham, and Krull 1989 (Study 2)[d]	10	Feedback preference	.00	.45
Total	1,992	Sample weighted mean *r*	.19	.25
Total of studies that fit inclusion criteria	1,624	Sample weighted mean *r*	.22	.25

[a]Because the feedback choice response between low self-esteem group and depressed group did not achieve statistical significance ($z = 1.5$, $p < .07$), we collapsed the two groups.
[b]We reported the average effect size for both emotionality and assertiveness. The effect sizes for emotionality were $r = .00$ for enhancement and $r = .23$ for verification. The effect sizes for assertiveness were $r = .00$ for enhancement and $r = .26$ for verification.
[c]We averaged the effects sizes across both the significant other and the acquaintance groups. Insufficient data were available for the low-certainty condition group so only the results for the high-certainty condition were reported.
[d]The necessary data were not provided in the published study but were provided by Swann.
†Study does not fit inclusion criteria.

stayed at $r = .25$. Broken down by specific dependent variables, the average effect size for evaluator choice was $r = .17$, feedback choice stayed at $r = .32$, and feedback preference stayed at $r = .27$.

In sum, there were significant enhancement and verification effects on feedback seeking. To determine the relative strength of the self-enhancement versus self-verification effects, we found the mean difference between the effect sizes ($M = –.028$, $SD = .25$) based on a random effects model and calculated the confidence interval for the weighted means differences. Overall, self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects, $t(1623) = –4.46$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = –.0401, –.0156$, $rs = .25$ versus .22, respectively. When broken down by specific dependent variables, self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects for evaluator choice, $t(580) = –9.42$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = –.0424, –.0278$, and feedback choice, $t(490) = –25.20$, $CI_{.95} = –.2311, –.1976$, whereas self-enhancement effects were greater than self-verification effects for feedback preference, $t(551) = 11.76$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = .1214, .1701$. Therefore, the tendency for self-verification to override self-enhancement overall was driven by the relative strength of self-verification on indices of actual choice; self-enhancement strivings were stronger when preference ratings were examined.

The results of our analysis of feedback seeking have implications for the following section on relationship quality. In particular, although Rudich and Vallacher's (1999) second study was eliminated from the final meta-analysis because they confounded negative evaluations with rejection, their findings are nevertheless revealing and important. As shown in Table 4, when participants perceived that the negative evaluator was apt to reject them, their self-verification strivings were completely overridden by their desire for self-enhancement. This evidence that people with negative self-views are unusually wary of rejection is also supported by evidence that low self-esteem persons are hesitant to enter novel social situations unless acceptance is virtually guaranteed (Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007, Study 4; Anthony, Wood, & Holmes, 2007). Moreover, when their feelings are hurt, people with

low self-esteem respond to hurt feelings with avoidance (e.g., Murray, 2005) and limit their risk of rejection by romantic partners by emotionally distancing themselves from their partner (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002).

Together, the foregoing findings suggest that when we examine the impact of enhancement and verification on relationship quality, it will be important to distinguish the extent to which the threat of rejection is low versus high. Most important, the tendency for people with negative self-views to seek self-verification should manifest itself when the risk of rejection is low but not when the risk of rejection is high. This insight guided our approach to the meta-analysis of studies of relationship quality.

Relationship Quality. Relationship quality refers to feelings about the relationship such as intimacy, satisfaction, and thoughts about, or actual rates of, separation and divorce. Operationally, self-enhancement was defined as a tendency for relationship quality to be higher insofar as the partner evaluation was positive. Self-verification effects reflected a tendency for participants to report superior relationship quality when the partner saw participants as they saw themselves. Specifically, self-verification occurred insofar as people with positive self-views reported better relationship quality when their partner viewed them positively, and people with negative self-views reported better relationship quality when their partner viewed them negatively.

Four studies were not included in the tables because of insufficient data to calculate *r* (i.e., Burke & Stets, 1999; Carnelley, Ruscher, & Shaw, 1999; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996). Of the studies that were included in the tables and initial meta-analysis, three studies were eliminated from the final meta-analysis because they did not fit into our inclusion criteria. Katz, Beach, and Anderson (1996) measured *perceived* verification rather than actual verification; this introduces the possibility that their responses were influenced by projection biases or theories regarding socially appropriate responding. Katz, Arias, and Beach (2000) appear to have violated the specificity matching principle (e.g., Swann et al., 2007), which is important because one would not expect self-verification effects if there was a mismatch between the self-view and evaluative feedback. Specifically, Katz and colleagues matched participants' global self-esteem with partners' psychological and physical abuse, a problem because having low self-esteem does not mean that one expects or desires to be physically abused. Finally, Cast and Burke (2002) measured verifying role identities, which is how much spouses agreed on meanings and expectations on spousal roles rather than actual self-views. Because this operationalization of self-views was not consistent with how self-views were measured in the other studies, we dropped this study from the final analysis.

All of the remaining studies were included in the final meta-analysis. In line with the foregoing discussion of evidence that people with negative self-views are adverse to rejection (e.g., Anthony et al., 2007; Anthony et al., 2007; Murray, 2005; Murray et al., 2002; Rudich & Vallacher, 1999), we divided the studies into two categories, one high and one low in rejection risk. Studies of dating relationships were placed in the high-rejection-risk category because such relationships are essentially extended qualifying exams in which commitment is generally lacking. For this reason, negative evaluations often serve as an ominous sign that rejection may be imminent. Although rejection risk is generally much lower in marital relationships (Swann et al., 1994), the stability of such relationships can be threatened if one person decides that the partner is unsuitable. In particular, if spouses verify negative qualities that are high in relationship relevance (e.g., affectionate, thoughtful, warm), they convey that their partner is unsatisfactory and thus rejectable ("You are unaffectionate, thoughtless, cold, etc."). We accordingly placed marital studies that focused on qualities that were high in relationship relevance (i.e., the interpersonal qualities scale developed by Murray et al., 1996) in a separate, "high-rejection-risk" category; all other marital studies were placed in the low-rejection-risk category.

Finally, studies that measured global traits such as global worth and competency were placed in the high-rejection-risk category. If one does not believe one's partner is positive on a global level (i.e., unworthy), the evaluation is overly negative and calls into question why the partner even wants to be in relationship with the target. In contrast, evaluations about specific traits (i.e., intelligence or athletic ability) have less impact on the rejectability of the partner. For example, low ratings on intelligence could be offset by high ratings on attractiveness (see also Neff & Karney, 2002).

As can be seen in Tables 5 and 6, the foregoing procedure left 10 studies in the high-rejection-risk category and 5 studies in the low-rejection-risk category in the final sample pool.[4] We further categorized the studies by specific dependent variables: commitment (i.e., how committed are you to your partner), intimacy (i.e., how intimate is your relationship), satisfaction (i.e., how satisfied are you with your relationship), and separation or divorce (i.e., did the couple stay together or separate or divorce).

Finally, note that two studies by Neff and Karney (2005) measured both global and specific self-views. In keeping with the reasoning outlined above, findings derived from measures of global self-views belong in the high-rejection-risk category and are displayed in Table 5; findings derived from specific self-views belong in the low-rejection-risk category and are displayed in Table 6.

Self-enhancement and relationship quality in high-rejection-risk studies. As shown in Table 5, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect in our preliminary sample was $r = .32$. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the average effect size for dating commitment was $r = .55$, dating

Table 5. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Relationship Quality in High-Rejection-Risk Studies

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
Katz and Beach 2000 (Study 2)	198	Dating commitment	.55	.88
Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise 2006	103	Dating intimacy	.33	.20
Katz, Arias, and Beach 2000[a†]	82	Dating intimacy	.37	.11
Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon 1994	179	Dating intimacy	.19	.00
Murray, Holmes, and Griffin 1996	196	Dating satisfaction	.25	–.19
Murray, Holmes, and Griffin 2000	121	Dating satisfaction	.49	–.01
Murray et al. 1996	178	Marital satisfaction	.34	.02
Murray et al. 2000	105	Marital satisfaction	.60	–.01
Sacco and Phares 2001[b]	198	Marital satisfaction	.30	–.15
Neff and Karney 2005 (Study 1)[c]	82	Divorce	.08	.03
Neff and Karney 2005 (Study 2)[c]	169	Divorce	.03	–.06
Total	1,611	Sample weighted mean *r*	.32	.08
Total of studies that fit inclusion criteria	1,529	Sample weighted mean *r*	.31	.08

[a]We averaged the effect sizes for both intimacy and stability outcomes across Time 1 and Time 2.
[b]We averaged the effect sizes for global self-views of depression and self-esteem because of similar patterns in results.
[c]Effect sizes for global self-views only.
[†]Study does not fit inclusion criteria.

Table 6. Accumulated Effect Sizes, Corrected for Sampling Error for Relationship Quality in Low-Rejection-Risk Studies

Study	*N*	Dependent variable	Enhancement effect size	Verification effect size
De La Ronde and Swann 1998	160	Marital intimacy	.08	.24
Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon 1994	165	Marital intimacy	.00	.30
Katz, Beach, and Anderson 1996[†]	265	Marital satisfaction	.65	.17
Cast and Burke 2002[a†]	460	Separation or divorce	.05	.12
Burke and Harrod 2005[a]	286	Separation or divorce	.05	.12
Neff and Karney 2005 (Study 1)[b]	82	Divorce	.07	.14
Neff and Karney 2005 (Study 2)[b]	169	Divorce	.04	.17
Total	1,587	Sample weighted mean *r*	.15	.17
Total of studies that fit inclusion criteria	862	Sample weighted mean *r*	.05	.19

[a]The necessary χ^2 statistic was not reported in the article but was kindly provided to us by Burke.
[b]Effect sizes for specific self-views only.
[†]Study does not fit inclusion criteria.

intimacy was $r = .27$, dating satisfaction was $r = .34$, marital satisfaction was $r = 38$, and divorce was $r = .05$.

When we eliminated studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect was $r = .31$. The effect size for dating intimacy dropped to $r = .24$. All other effect sizes stayed the same.

Self-verification and relationship quality in high-rejection-risk studies. The average effect size for the self-verification effect for our preliminary sample was $r = .08$. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the average effect size for dating commitment was $r = .88$, dating intimacy was $r = .08$, dating satisfaction was $r = –.12$, marital satisfaction was $r = –.06$, and divorce was $r = –.03$.

When we eliminated studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-verification effect stayed at $r = .08$, as can be seen in Table 5. The effect size for dating intimacy dropped to $r = .07$. All other effect sizes stayed the same.

To determine the relative strength of the self-enhancement versus self-verification effects in the high-rejection-risk studies, we found the mean difference between the effect sizes ($M = .234$, $SD = .27$) based on a random effects model and calculated the confidence interval for the weighted means differences. Overall, self-enhancement effects were greater than self-enhancement effects, $t(1528) = 33.69$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = .2206, .2479$, $rs = .31$ versus .08, respectively. When broken down by specific dependent variables, self-enhancement effects were greater than self-verification effects for dating intimacy, $t(281) = 97.53$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = .1647, .1715$; dating satisfaction, $t(316) = 282.31$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = .4597, .4661$; marital satisfaction, $t(480) = 88.60$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95} = .4271, .4465$; and divorce, $t(250) = 64.84$, $p < .001$,

$CI_{.95}$ = .0746, .0793. In short, when rejection risk was high, self-enhancement strivings prevailed over self-verification strivings.

Self-enhancement and relationship quality in low-rejection-risk studies. As shown in Table 6, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect in our preliminary sample was r = .15. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the average effect size for marital intimacy was r = .04, marital satisfaction was r = .65, and separation or divorce was r = .05.

When we eliminated studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-enhancement effect was r = .05. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the effect size for marital intimacy was r = .04, and separation or divorce was r = .05.

Self-verification and relationship quality in low-rejection-risk studies. As shown in Table 6, the average effect size for the self-verification effect for our preliminary sample was r = .17. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the average effect size for marital intimacy was r = .27, marital satisfaction was r = .17, and separation or divorce was r = .13.

When we eliminated studies that did not fit the inclusion criteria, the average effect size for the self-verification effect was r = .19. Broken down by specific relationship quality, the average effect size for marital intimacy stayed at r = .27, and separation or divorce was r = .14.

To determine the relative strength of the self-enhancement versus self-verification effects in the low-rejection-risk studies, we found the mean difference between the effect sizes (M = –.143, SD = .08) based on a random effects model and calculated the confidence interval for the weighted means differences. Overall, self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects $t(861) = -49.69$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.1481, –.1369, rs = .19 versus .05, respectively. When broken down by specific dependent variables, self-verification effects were greater than self-enhancement effects for marital intimacy, $t(324) = -59.43$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.2387, –.2234, and separation or divorce, $t(536) = -73.85$, $p < .001$, $CI_{.95}$ = –.0912, –.0865. In summary, just as the effect sizes for self-enhancement tended to be higher in the high-rejection-risk studies, the effect sizes for self-verification tended to be higher in the low-rejection-risk studies.

General Discussion

The results of our meta-analysis confirm earlier evidence that self-enhancement strivings influence affective responses but self-verification strivings shape cognitive reactions (e.g., Shrauger, 1975; Swann et al., 1987). In addition, our findings extend earlier reviews by showing that self-verification strivings were significantly stronger predictors of feedback seeking and—as long as rejection risk was low—relationship quality. In studies of relationship quality in which rejection risk was high (i.e., when a negative appraisal might signal disinterest in maintaining the relationships), self-enhancement strivings trumped self-verification. On the balance, the evidence suggests that both motives are potent but that they express themselves differently depending on the response class under scrutiny as well as the relevance of other motivational forces. The communion motive seemed particularly important, as it seems likely that people abandoned their self-verification strivings when rejection risk was high in an effort to gratify their desire for communion.[5]

If one looks beyond a simple tally of wins and losses, it appears that somewhat different processes may have mediated responses to different dependent measures. In part, this may reflect the fact that studies associated with some response classes were conducted in the laboratory whereas studies associated with other response classes were conducted in naturally occurring settings. Research on feedback seeking versus relationship quality is a case in point. Recall that in studies of feedback seeking, the size of the self-verification effects equaled or exceeded self-enhancement effects, but in studies of relationship quality, self-verification effects prevailed in studies in which rejection risk was low but self-enhancement prevailed in studies in which rejection risk was high. It may be that, in both types of studies, rejection avoidance was a crucial mediating mechanism but that it manifested itself differently because of unique properties of the laboratory versus field settings. In the laboratory settings in which most studies of feedback seeking were conducted, the interaction partner was often a stranger in whom the participant had very little investment. The overriding goal of participants in such experiments was likely to complete the study with a minimum of effort or duress. Participants were therefore unconcerned with being rejected unless the experimenter specifically alerted them to this possibility, as did Rudich and Vallacher (1999, Study 2). Seeking verifying, negative feedback in the typical feedback seeking study, then, is something of a mixed bag: Although it is valued because it seems accurate, it is unpleasant to receive (Swann et al., 1987; Wood et al., 2005). It is thus not surprising that there was evidence for both self-verification and self-enhancement strivings on the measures of feedback seeking, although the overall pattern favored self-verification.

In contrast, in ongoing relationships, evaluations from the partner can serve as a bellwether of the relationship. In dating relationships and other designs in which rejection risk is high, negative evaluations represent a clear signal that all is not well. Such evaluations are therefore unwelcome, even if they contain a kernel of truth. In contrast, things are different in marital relationships and other designs in which rejection risk is low because of high levels of commitment. Here, negative evaluations are not necessarily worrisome, as long as they do not focus on qualities that are crucial to the survival of the relationship, such as being loving or caring. By the same token, overly positive evaluations can be troubling, as they signal that the partner may expect more than the target of the

evaluations feels capable of delivering. In addition to low levels of rejection risk, in marital relationships, negative evaluations can be welcome as they signal mutual understanding of limitations and confirm an expectation that spouses should know one another. Consistent with this reasoning, Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise (2006) found that as relationship length increased, couples came to desire self-verifying feedback over self-enhancing feedback, even when self-views were negative. Of course, additional moderators may be at play (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2002), and we urge future researchers to continue the search for such variables.

Conclusion

At the very least, the findings from the meta-analysis reported here refute the contention that the desire for self-enhancement routinely overrides the desire for self-verification (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). More interestingly, the robustness of self-verification strivings in our results throws into question the proper interpretation of dozens of studies that are widely assumed to represent evidence for self-enhancement theory: studies that were not included in our meta-analyses because the investigators failed to include measures of self-views. The failure of researchers to measure self-views in such putative studies of self-enhancement introduces a glaring interpretative ambiguity. That is, because most people in most societies have positive self-views (Diener & Diener, 1995), in unselected samples roughly 70% will possess positive self-views. This means that evidence of "self-enhancement" in such samples may reflect self-verification strivings of the majority of people who happen to have positive self-views (see also Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, & Robins, 2004; Kwan, John, Robins, & Kuang, 2008). Stated differently, the dozens of "self-enhancement" studies in which researchers failed to incorporate measures of self-views may not support the theory after all. Among many others, this includes studies that some (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007; Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hanklin, 2004; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005) have taken as support for the cross-cultural generality of the self-enhancement motive.

Of course, advocates of self-enhancement theory could respond to our evidence that neither self-verification nor self-enhancement strivings dominated the responses of participants by singling out the one arena in which self-enhancement strivings were clearly strongest: affective responses. Furthermore, they might add, people's *feelings* are the most telling indicator of what they *really* want. We question this argument on two grounds. First of all, we see no compelling reason to believe that affective responses are any more diagnostic of what people want than any of the other responses we examined. Second, although the affective responses certainly did conform to the predictions of self-enhancement theory, we believe that other motives could also explain these responses. At a general level, we suspect that people feel good about positive evaluations because, for most people most of the time, positive evaluations are associated with positive outcomes. As such, it is not so much that people with negative self-views are smitten with the positive evaluations per se, it is that they associate such evaluations with increased feelings of agency (e.g., getting a good job, pay raise, or respect) or communion (e.g., social acceptance, a friend or relationship partner). As such, people's affective responses to feedback could be driven by people's need for *agency* (competence and autonomy; Ryff, 1989) or *communion* (belongingness and interpersonal connectedness; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Heine et al., 2006; Wiggins & Broughton, 1985). More work is needed to test this hypothesis.

But if self-enhancement theory is not the master motive, then what is? Clearly, it is not self-verification, as our findings suggested that self-verification strivings were poor predictors of affective reactions and relationship quality when rejection risk was high. Could communion be the master motive? Here again, we think not. For example, although the desire for communion almost surely places some constraints on the manner in which people pursue their self-verification strivings, we suspect that the opposite is sometimes the case. Consider, for example, evidence that people divorce partners who see them too positively or too negatively (e.g., Burke & Harrod, 2005; Cast & Burke, 2002; Neff & Karney, 2005). Insofar as such evidence reflects a tendency for self-verification strivings to override people's desire for communion, it would appear that the self-verification motive does not *always* subserve a superordinate communion motive.

The upshot is this: Human social behavior is far too complex and nuanced to be readily explained by any single motive or even a hierarchy in which a single motive is the "master" of the others. As such, it would behoove workers to suspend their competitive quest to establish that their chosen motive is "biggest." In the place of this quest, we suggest that researchers acknowledge the existence of multiple motives and strive to develop a deeper understanding of the delicate interplay between them.

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Notes

1. In principle, we could also have compared the predictive power of self-enhancement to another major competitor, self-assessment (Trope, 1983). Examination of the extant research literature, however, revealed that there were far more studies on self-verification than self-assessment, leading us to focus on self-verification.
2. Although a case can be made for ignoring main effects when they are qualified by a significant interaction, our theoretical interest in the relative strength of self-enhancement and self-verification strivings overrode such considerations.
3. We did not include Study 2 of Story (1998) because the findings were so conflicting that any summary statistic would have been misleading. Three dependent variables in the study fell under the category of cognitive processes: recall, attention, and accuracy. The verification effect sizes for those variables were r = .33, r = –.34, and r = .24, respectively; the enhancement effect sizes were r = .11, r = .00, and r = .68, respectively. As such, summary statistics would have masked these discrepancies.
4. In Footnote 15 Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (2000) report that they found evidence of self-enhancement but not self-verification in their married participants when the Self-Attributes Questionnaire was used as the index of self-views and appraisals. Nevertheless, Murray (2005) subsequently acknowledged that a substantial number of the "married" participants were actually cohabitating. This is important because (a) there is compelling evidence that cohabiting couples resemble dating couples rather than married couples (e.g., Manning & Smock, 2005), (b) dating couple do not display self-verification strivings (e.g., Swann et al., 1994), and (c) when cohabitating couples were eliminated from Murray et al.'s sample, a self-verification effect (p < .07) emerged among male participants (Murray, 2005). The ambiguity in the population of married couples is further reason to not include the married sample of Murray et al. in the meta-analysis.
5. We should note that this effect obtained for "behavioral" measures such as intimacy and divorce but not marital satisfaction. Caution should be exercised in interpreting this finding, however, as in this category there was only one study in which marital satisfaction was reported.

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