Self-Liking, Self-Competence, and the Quest for Self-Verification

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Whereas past researchers have assumed that global feelings of self-worth guide people's feedback-seeking activities, the authors propose that people's more specific feelings of self-liking and self-competence are crucial in this domain. The authors found that only self-liking predicted perceived accuracy of and choice of feedback designed to bear on global, low self-esteem. In contrast, self-liking and self-competence each related uniquely to perceived accuracy of and choice of feedback that was designed specifically to target these self-views. Moreover, the data suggest that the relations between self-views and feedback preferences are mediated by people's perceptions of the accuracy of feedback. The authors discuss the implications of their findings for a growing understanding of the dual components of self-esteem and for refining the methodologies used in feedback-seeking and self-esteem research.

We know them well: the business executive who suffers from self-hatred despite a stunningly successful career and, conversely, the traditional homemaker who feels like a worthless failure despite the devotion of family members. Although both of these persons could be said to suffer from low self-esteem, their experiences are nevertheless profoundly different. In this article, we consider the implications that these two forms of low self-esteem have for the types of evaluations that people prefer and perceive as self-descriptive. We begin with a discussion of two distinct components of self-esteem.

The Dual Components of Global Self-Esteem

Traditionally, many authors have conceptualized global self-esteem as a unidimensional construct that represents an "overall positive-negative attitude toward the self" (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995, p. 322). As such, global self-esteem is commonly assessed with scales such as Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (SES), which is thought to capture people's generalized evaluations of the self. In contrast to this unidimensional conceptualization of global self-esteem, however, several theorists and researchers suggest a more dualistic approach to understanding global self-esteem. Specifically, some argue that global self-esteem consists primarily of two fundamental axes or components, namely, competence and socially defined worth (e.g., Diggory, 1966; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Harter, 1985, 1987, 1990; Tafarodi, 1998; White, 1963). Recently, Tafarodi and Swann (1995) labeled these distinct components *self-competence* (one's feelings of being competent, efficacious, and agentic) and *self-liking* (one's feelings of being loved, likable, and socially worthy). Although self-competence and self-liking tend to be highly correlated, they are thought to differ qualitatively: Self-competence is an evaluation of one's ability to successfully bring about desired outcomes, and self-liking is a judgment of self-worth based on an internalized sense of positive regard from others. Thus, Tafarodi (1998) suggests that self-competence and self-liking should be considered "interdependent but distinct attitudinal dimensions making up global self-esteem" (p. 1181).

The distinction between self-competence and self-liking seems to be a useful one. For example, research on

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reactions to failure feedback suggests that only one of the two self-esteem components predicts whether people will give up when their goals are frustrated. Specifically, Tafarodi and Vu (1997) discovered effort withdrawal following failure among persons low in self-liking but not among those low in self-competence. Also, unique cultural values and norms may lead to interesting cross-cultural differences in self-liking and self-competence: Tafarodi and Swann (1996) found that people from a collectivist culture (i.e., China) were high in self-liking relative to those from an individualistic culture (i.e., the United States), who were high in self-competence. Finally, Tafarodi (1998) recently presented evidence in support of the idea that persons with "paradoxical" self-esteem—low self-liking and high self-competence or high self-liking and low self-competence— exhibit cognitive biases in the processing of self-relevant social information relative to persons with congruent levels of self-liking and self-competence. Such research suggests that self-liking and self-competence are indeed distinct aspects of self-esteem and that distinguishing them can be useful and informative. We suggest that this distinction may be particularly useful in predicting what type of feedback people perceive as accurate and thus seek.

Perceptions of Accuracy and Feedback-Seeking

According to self-verification theory, people desire feedback that they perceive as accurate because such feedback reinforces the perception that the world is predictable and controllable (e.g., Lecky, 1945/1969; Secord & Backman, 1965; Swann, 1990, 1992). Conversely, feedback that does not match the self-views may be threatening on two levels. First, feedback that clashes with beliefs about the self may call one's self-knowledge into question, thus disrupting the epistemic need to know oneself. Second, disconfirming feedback may be a signal that others hold false expectations for themselves, which could threaten the pragmatic need for social interactions to flow smoothly (e.g., Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). A growing literature supports the idea that people who possess positive self-views tend to seek and prefer positive feedback about themselves, and people with negative self-views tend to seek and prefer negative feedback for the verification it provides (e.g., Pelham, 1991; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; for reviews, see Swann, 1990, 1992).

Still, although evidence for self-verification strivings is clear, researchers typically find that some participants do not appear to display such strivings. That is, just as some research participants who have negative self-views seem to prefer and seek positive feedback, some with positive self-views seem to prefer and seek negative feedback. In fact, approximately 20% to 36% of research participants appear to seek inconsistent feedback in some self-verification studies (e.g., Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992). A recent study by Giesler et al. (1996) illustrates this phenomenon. These researchers offered participants high and low in global self-esteem an opportunity to obtain either positive or negative personality feedback. Although most participants sought verifying feedback, 25% of participants with high global self-esteem sought negative feedback, and 36% of participants with low global self-esteem sought positive feedback. Thus, a sizable group of participants failed to display the expected self-verification preferences.

What accounts for such apparent failures of self-verification? We propose that a key problem is that researchers have ignored the possibility that self-esteem has two distinct components. For example, Giesler et al. (1996) examined the feedback choices of persons high and low in self-esteem by classifying participants on the basis of global self-esteem and offering them personality feedback that was designed to implicate their global feelings of self-worth. If there exist two distinct components of self-esteem, however, then using a measure of global self-esteem to predict feedback-seeking may be imprecise. That is, using global self-esteem rather than separate measures of self-liking and self-competence to predict feedback-seeking may be like using body size rather than separate indices of height and weight to predict relative proficiency at basketball versus sumo wrestling. A more nuanced understanding of self-esteem would suggest that people who are low in self-liking might regard feedback indicating that they are *unlikable* as accurate, whereas people who are low in self-competence might regard feedback indicating that they are *incompetent* as accurate. Thus, we propose that people's specific self-views guide their perceptions of the accuracy of self-relevant feedback, and perceptions of the accuracy of feedback, in turn, guide people's feedback choices.

To test these ideas, we examined the relations between self-views, perceived accuracy of feedback, and feedback choices in two studies. In Study 1, we explored whether global self-esteem feedback primarily implicated self-liking or self-competence. Specifically, we asked whether self-liking or self-competence would best predict people's perceptions of the accuracy of global self-esteem feedback as well as their feedback-seeking behaviors. We also tested the idea that perceptions of feedback accuracy would mediate the relations between self-liking, self-competence, and feedback choice. In Study 2, we created separate self-liking and self-competence feedback and assessed the associations of people's self-liking and self-competence scores with their perceptions of the accuracy of, and their interest

in, each type of feedback. As in Study 1, we also explored the mediational role of perceived accuracy of feedback in the relation between self-views and feedback choice.

STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was twofold. First, we examined the feedback developed by Giesler et al. (1996) to determine whether it differentially implicated self-liking and self-competence. Although Giesler et al.'s feedback was designed to reflect global self-esteem, we propose that people relied primarily on their feelings of self-liking *or* self-competence when assessing the accuracy of this feedback. To test this idea, we offered participants high and low in global self-esteem the same positive and negative personality evaluations used by Giesler et al. We predicted that people's feelings of self-liking and self-competence would relate differentially to their perceptions of the accuracy of these global personality evaluations. Nevertheless, because the global self-esteem feedback created by Giesler et al. referred to aspects of the self that could reflect both self-liking (e.g., "He/she . . . is probably uncomfortable around others") and self-competence (e.g., "He/she appears to have good self-confidence"), we did not make specific predictions regarding which component of self-esteem would better predict reactions to the feedback.

Second, we tested a mediational model of the relations among self-views, perceptions of feedback accuracy, and feedback choice. We propose that perceptions of feedback accuracy mediate the relations between people's self-views and their feedback choices; thus, we expected to find that when perceptions of feedback accuracy were entered into a model predicting feedback choice from self-liking and self-competence, the relations between self-views and feedback choice would be eliminated.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

All participants completed the SES (Rosenberg, 1965) during a pretesting session at the beginning of the semester. Following Giesler et al. (1996), we preselected participants on the basis of global self-esteem; only those who scored in the top and bottom quartiles on the SES were eligible for participation. A second eligibility requirement was that participants complete Tafarodi and Swann's (1995) Self-Liking and Competence Scale (SLC) during the pretesting session. This measure consists of two 10-item subscales designed to assess people's feelings of self-liking and self-competence; all items are rated on 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Coefficient alphas for this measure in the current sample were .95 for the Self-Liking subscale and .90 for the Self-Competence subscale; scores on the two subscales were significantly correlated, $r(72) = .75$, $p < .001$. A total of 26 male and 53 female undergraduate psychology students who met both eligibility requirements participated in exchange for experimental credit. Five participants expressed suspicion regarding the experimental procedure, and their responses were dropped from all analyses. Thus, the final sample consisted of 23 males and 51 females.

Participants arrived at the lab individually and completed a packet of filler questionnaires.[1] The experimenter then explained that the Psychology Department was in the process of testing some of the upper-level graduate students in the clinical psychology program to determine whether they had acquired the skills necessary to earn their Ph.D.s. One such skill was described as the ability to write a personality profile based on a person's responses to some questionnaires. Participants learned that two clinical psychology graduate students were in a nearby room writing profiles for them that were ostensibly based on their responses to the questionnaires they completed during the experimental session and earlier in the semester. The experimenter explained that participants would read over the personality profiles and evaluate them for accuracy and insightfulness.

Several minutes passed, during which the graduate students were supposedly writing the profiles. After this, the experimenter returned to the lab room and informed participants that there was not going to be enough time to read over both of the profiles during the experimental session. Therefore, the graduate students were preparing shorter, summarized personality evaluations that would reflect the tone of the full-length profiles so that participants could choose which profile they wanted to read in the time remaining. The experimenter then presented participants with the same two evaluations used by Giesler et al. (1996). Both evaluations were three sentences in length. The negative evaluation stated that the participant seemed unhappy with his or her life, appeared to lack self-confidence, and was probably uncomfortable around others. The positive evaluation stated that the participant seemed well adjusted and happy, appeared to have good self-confidence, and probably got along well with others.[2]

After reviewing the two evaluations, participants indicated which full-length profile they would prefer to read. Next, participants made judgments of the accuracy and favorability of each of the evaluations on 11-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 11 (*very much*). Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

TABLE 1: Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Global Self-Esteem, Self-Liking, Self-Competence, and Perceived Accuracy of the Evaluations Within High and Low Global Self-Esteem Groups

	Low Self-Esteem Group (N = 38)		*High Self-Esteem Group (N = 36)*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self-esteem	26.26	2.20	37.89	1.39
Self-liking	19.61	7.50	35.36	3.59
Self-competence	28.00	5.90	36.64	2.88
Perceived accuracy of the negative evaluation	6.53	2.82	2.47	2.20
Perceived accuracy of the positive evaluation	6.39	2.40	9.42	2.02
Accuracy difference score	–.13	4.39	6.94	4.09

RESULTS

Replication of Giesler et al.(1997): Profile choice as a function of self-esteem classification. We first examined whether global self-esteem classification related to choice of the positive versus the negative personality profile. Of high self-esteem participants, only 31% (11 out of 36) opted to view the negative profile, whereas 63% (24 out of 38) of low self-esteem individuals chose the negative profile, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 7.88$, $p < .01$. Thus, the majority of participants chose to view the profile that matched the valence of their global self-esteem. Still, global self-esteem classification did not predict feedback choice perfectly—in fact, when people were classified on the basis of global self-esteem, approximately 30% to 35% of participants did not appear to self-verify.

Predicting perceived accuracy of the evaluations from self-competence and self-liking. Despite the fact that the feedback used by Giesler et al. (1996) was designed to reflect global self-esteem, we proposed that it did not equally implicate the two components of self-esteem. That is, we expected self-liking and self-competence to relate differentially to perceptions of the accuracy of the global self-esteem feedback. To examine this prediction, we created a single-item index of perceived accuracy of the two evaluations by subtracting ratings of the accuracy of the negative evaluation from ratings of the accuracy of the positive evaluation. We then conducted a simultaneous, multiple regression analysis predicting the accuracy difference score jointly from self-liking and self-competence (means and standard deviations for self-liking, self-competence, perceived accuracy of the evaluations, and the accuracy difference score appear in Table 1). Results revealed that self-liking was related to a tendency to perceive the positive evaluation as more accurate than the negative one, $\beta = .61$, $p < .01$, but self-competence was unrelated to perceived accuracy of the evaluations, $\beta = .19$, $p = .11$. Although the difference between these beta weights was not significant, $F(1, 71) = 1.36$, $p = .25$, additional regression analyses revealed that self-liking was a better predictor of perceived accuracy of the negative evaluation than was self-competence, $F(1, 71) = 2.99$, $p = .088$, and self-liking and self-competence equally predicted perceived accuracy of the positive evaluation, $F(1, 71) < 1$.

Perceived accuracy of the feedback as a mediator of the relation between self-views and feedback choice. We suggest that people's self-views guide their perceptions of the accuracy of personality feedback and that perceived accuracy of feedback, in turn, guides feedback choice. That is, we propose that the relation between self-views and feedback choice is mediated by perceived accuracy of the feedback. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), we tested this mediational argument in four steps. First, in the preceding section, we established that self-views predicted perceptions of the accuracy of feedback; that is, self-liking (with self-competence controlled for) was a significant predictor of perceived accuracy of the evaluations.

Second, we established that self-views predict feedback choice. To do this, we conducted a logistic regression analysis that predicted choice of the negative or positive profile from self-liking and self-competence. For this analysis, choice of the negative profile was coded as 1, and choice of the positive profile was coded as 2. Results confirmed that self-liking was positively related to profile choice, $\beta = .43$, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 4.11$, $p < .05$, odds ratio (OR) = .92; that is, people who scored higher on self-liking tended to choose the positive profile. Self-competence was unrelated to choice of profiles, $\beta = .04$, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) < 1$, OR = .99, although the beta weights associated with self-liking and self-competence did not differ significantly, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) < 1$.

Third, we established that perceived accuracy of the evaluations predicted profile choice. Results of a logistic regression analysis revealed that profile choice was significantly predicted by our accuracy difference score item, $\beta = .95$, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 19.84$, $p < .01$, OR = .73. That is, the tendency to perceive the positive evaluation as more accurate than the negative was related to choice of the positive profile.

Fourth, we showed that when perceptions of feedback accuracy were entered into a model predicting profile choice from self-views, the relation between self-liking and profile choice was eliminated. Results of a logistic regression analysis revealed that profile choice was predicted from accuracy difference scores, $\beta = 1.77$, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 12.70$, $p < .01$, OR = .56, but not from self-liking, $\beta = .59$, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 2.73$, $p = .12$, OR = 1.11, or from self-

competence, β = .26, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 1.08$, $p = .30$, OR = 1.08. Moreover, accuracy was a significantly better predictor of profile choice than both self-liking, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 9.74$, $p < .01$, and self-competence, $\chi^2(1, N = 74) = 11.11$, $p < .01$. Thus, we found evidence that perceptions of feedback accuracy fully mediated the relation between self-views and feedback choice.

DISCUSSION

The results of Study 1 make several important points. First, self-liking and self-competence were not equally implicated by the negative, global self-esteem feedback used by Giesler et al. (1996) and in the current study. Our results suggest that the negative feedback captured people's feelings of self-liking but did not reflect their feelings of self-competence; thus, people's feelings of self-liking appeared to be guiding their perceptions of the accuracy of the negative feedback. Interestingly, however, self-liking and self-competence were both related to perceptions of the accuracy of the positive feedback. This asymmetry between our findings for the positive and negative feedback suggests that only the positive global self-esteem feedback created by Giesler et al. was successful in capturing people's global feelings of self-esteem (their self-liking *and* self-competence). The negative feedback, in contrast, was imprecise in that it pertained to only one component of global self-esteem.

Second, we found that perceptions of feedback accuracy fully mediated the relation between people's self-views and their choice of feedback. That is, people's feelings of self-liking (but not self-competence) related to both their perceptions of the accuracy of the feedback and their choice of the positive versus negative feedback; but when perceptions of feedback accuracy were entered into a model predicting feedback choice from self-liking and self-competence, only perceived accuracy was associated with feedback choice. Thus, as self-verification theory predicts, it appears that self-views guide feedback-seeking behaviors by way of people's perceptions of feedback accuracy. The crucial element in predicting people's feedback choices is their perception of how closely the feedback matches their beliefs about the self.

Finally, our findings make a methodological point: If the feedback used in self-verification research implicates self-views other than the ones used as the basis for classifying participants, perplexing pockets of apparent nonverifiers may emerge. Researchers such as Giesler et al. (1997) may have found that some participants did not seem to verify because they failed to tailor the feedback to participants' self-views as closely as possible, thus reducing the perceived accuracy of such feedback.

STUDY 2

Although the results of Study 1 suggest that the negative feedback used by Giesler et al. (1996) reflected self-liking rather than self-competence, perceived accuracy of the positive evaluation was significantly related to both self-liking and self-competence. Thus, the two evaluations appeared to implicate different combinations of self-views. Our theorizing suggests, however, that feedback must be tailored specifically to match the self-views, or else relations between self-views, perceived accuracy of feedback, and feedback choices may be weakened. Therefore, in Study 2, we designed positive and negative personality feedback that clearly implicated either self-liking or self-competence. We expected that self-liking (but not self-competence) would relate to perceived accuracy of and choice of the self-liking feedback and that self-competence (but not self-liking) would relate to perceived accuracy of and choice of the self-competence feedback. Furthermore, as in Study 1, we expected that people's perceptions of feedback accuracy would mediate the relations between self-views and choice of feedback. That is, we expected that perceptions of feedback accuracy would account for the associations between self-liking and self-competence and choice of self-liking and self-competence feedback, respectively.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Forty-nine male and 153 female undergraduate psychology students participated in groups of 5 to 35 in exchange for experimental credit. An experimenter began by explaining that he was in the process of devising some new personality assessment measures and requested that participants respond to a series of survey measures that included the SLC, a filler questionnaire, and two brief personality evaluations that pertained to either self-liking or self-competence.

To minimize carryover between the two subscales of the SLC, we administered the Self-Liking and self-Competence items on different sheets of paper, separated by 12 filler items. Participants rated all items on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Coefficient alphas in the current sample were .94 for the self-liking subscale and .86 for the self-competence subscale; scores on the two subscales were significantly correlated, $r(200) = .62$, $p < .001$.

Participants received either a questionnaire packet containing one positive and one negative self-liking evaluation or a packet containing one positive and one negative self-competence evaluation (see the appendix for complete versions of the four evaluations). After

reading each evaluation, participants rated how accurate it would be if it had been written about them and how interested they would be in reading a longer personality profile based on that evaluation. Responses to these items were made on 11-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not at all accurate/interested*) to 11 (*very accurate/interested*).

Questionnaire packets were presented in 1 of 16 possible orders—we varied the order in which participants completed the two subscales of the SLC as well as the order in which they rated the positive and negative evaluations. In addition, some participants completed the SLC scales before rating the evaluations, whereas others rated the evaluations first. Because order did not qualify our conclusions, we refrain from discussing it below. The means and standard deviations for participants' self-liking and self-competence scores, as well as their ratings of the positive and negative evaluations (split by type of evaluation received—self-liking versus self-competence), are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Liking, Self-Competence, and Perceived Accuracy and Interest Ratings for People Who Rated the Self-Liking and Self-Competence Evaluations

	Self-Liking Evaluations (N = 103)		*Self-Competence Evaluations (N = 99)*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self-liking	52.38	13.61	54.03	11.65
Self-competence	58.21	8.13	58.43	7.57
Negative evaluation				
Perceived accuracy	4.57	3.07	4.51	2.85
Interest	6.88	3.64	6.70	3.42
Positive evaluation				
Perceived accuracy	7.47	2.52	8.28	2.01
Interest	8.66	2.64	8.66	2.34
Accuracy difference score	2.89	5.22	3.77	4.36

RESULTS

Relations between self-liking, self-competence, and perceived accuracy of the evaluations. We expected that self-liking (but not self-competence) would relate to perceptions of the accuracy of self-liking feedback and that self-competence (but not self-liking) would relate to perceptions of the accuracy of self-competence feedback. To explore these hypotheses, we conducted simultaneous, multiple regression analyses, predicting a single-item index of accuracy (perceived accuracy of the positive evaluation minus perceived accuracy of the negative evaluation) jointly from self-liking and self-competence. First, among people who rated the accuracy of the two self-liking evaluations, we found that self-liking was significantly related to perceptions of accuracy of the evaluations ($\beta = .87$, $p < .01$) but self-competence was not ($\beta = .01$, $p = .91$). The difference between these beta weights was significant, $F(1, 100) = 35.26$, $p < .01$. Next, among people who rated the accuracy of the two self-competence evaluations, we found that both self-competence ($\beta = .56$, $p < .01$) and self-liking ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$) were related to perceived accuracy of the evaluations.[3] Nevertheless, a comparison of these beta weights revealed that self-competence was a significantly better predictor of perceived accuracy of the self-competence evaluations than was self-liking, $F(1, 96) = 8.62$, $p < .01$. In sum, support for our predictions emerged in that (a) self-liking (with self-competence controlled for) related to people's perceptions of the accuracy of feedback designed to implicate self-liking and (b) self-competence related more strongly to perceived accuracy of self-competence feedback than did self-liking.

Perceived accuracy of the feedback as a mediator of the relation between self-views and feedback choice. As in Study 1, we examined whether perceived accuracy of the evaluations mediated the relation between self-views and choice of feedback. First, in the preceding section, we established that self-liking and self-competence related to perceived accuracy of self-liking and self-competence feedback, respectively.

Second, we established that self-liking and self-competence predicted people's choice of positive versus negative feedback. To do this, we created a proxy for profile choice by classifying people into three groups according to their interest ratings for the two profiles: Greater interest in the negative than in the positive profile was coded as 1, equal interest in both profiles was coded as 2, and greater interest in the positive than in the negative profile was coded as 3.[4] We then conducted two logistic regression analyses, predicting profile choice jointly from self-liking and self-competence. Among people who rated the self-liking feedback, self-liking scores were significantly related to profile choice, $\beta = .48$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 11.71$, $p < .01$, OR = .94; that is, increases in self-liking were associated with a tendency to choose the positive profile. Self-competence, however, was unrelated to choice of the self-liking profiles, $\beta = .02$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) < 1$, OR = 1.00, although the difference between these beta weights only approached significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 1.97$, $p = .16$. This pattern was reversed among people who rated the self-competence feedback: Self-liking was unrelated to choice of the profiles, $\beta = .06$, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) < 1$, OR = .99, and higher self-competence scores were associated with a greater tendency to choose the positive profile, $\beta = .27$, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 3.44$, $p = .06$, OR = .94. The difference between these beta weights was

not significant, however, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 1.14$, $p = .29$. Overall, it appears that people's choice of the self-liking and self-competence profiles was uniquely related to their feelings of self-liking and self-competence, respectively.

Third, we conducted logistic regression analyses to establish that perceptions of feedback accuracy predicted feedback choice. Indeed, our difference score measure of accuracy significantly predicted choice of feedback among people who received the self-liking feedback, $\beta = .72$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 30.16$, $p < .01$, OR = .78, as well as among people who received the self-competence feedback, $\beta = .42$, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 13.08$, $p < .01$, OR = .84.

Fourth, we showed that when perceived accuracy of the evaluations was entered into a model predicting feedback choice from self-liking and self-competence, the relations between self-views and feedback choice were eliminated. Among people who received the self-liking evaluations, results of a logistic regression analysis revealed that only our accuracy difference score item related significantly to choice of profiles, $\beta = 1.08$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 17.60$, $p < .01$, OR = .69. Neither self-liking, $\beta = .41$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 2.65$, $p = .10$, OR = 1.06, nor self-competence, $\beta = .03$, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) < 1$, OR = .99, related to choice of feedback when perceived accuracy was in the model. Moreover, a comparison of the beta weights showed that perceived accuracy of the evaluations was significantly more strongly related to feedback choice than was self-liking, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 13.20$, $p < .01$, and self-competence, $\chi^2(1, N = 103) = 15.16$, $p < .01$. Similarly, among people who received the self-competence evaluations, results of a logistic regression analysis revealed that only perceived accuracy of the feedback predicted feedback choice, $\beta = 43$, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 6.32$, $p < .01$, OR = .84. Self-liking and self-competence were unrelated to choice of the self-competence profiles when perceived accuracy was entered into the model, both βs < 1, χ^2s$(1, N = 99) < 1$, ORs = 1.01 and .99, respectively. Finally, perceived accuracy of the evaluations was more strongly related to profile choice than was self-liking, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 5.24$, $p < .05$, and the difference between the beta weights associated with perceived accuracy and self-competence approached significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 3.01$, $p < .08$.

In sum, our data suggest that perceptions of feedback accuracy mediated the relations between self-views and feedback choice. Specifically, perceived accuracy of self-liking feedback mediated the relation between people's feelings of self-liking and their choice of feedback, and perceived accuracy of self-competence feedback mediated the relation between people's feelings of self-competence and their choice of feedback.

Hypothetical Versus Real Feedback

One potential limitation of the current findings deserves mention. As noted, the personality assessments that participants read were hypothetical rather than "real" in that participants rated how accurate each assessment would be *if it had been written about them*. Critics of this approach might argue that when people respond to hypothetical feedback, they rely on their implicit theories about how they should perceive the feedback rather than giving their genuine responses. We addressed this concern in two ways.

First, as part of a different (and unrelated) pilot study, we asked people to rate the accuracy of the same positive and negative self-liking and self-competence personality assessments that we used in Study 2. This time, however, we told participants that the assessments were based on their responses to some questionnaires completed earlier in the semester. Furthermore, as part of our debriefing procedure, we assigned each participant a suspicion score that ranged from 1 (*not at all suspicious*) to 5 (*extremely suspicious*) to reflect the extent to which he or she believed that the feedback we offered was real. These suspicion scores allowed us to distinguish people who reacted to the feedback as if it were real (those who scored 1) from those who did not accept the feedback as real (those who scored 2-5). We assumed that people who questioned the reality of the feedback reacted to it as if it were hypothetical.

We performed a median split on people's self-liking and self-competence scores, which were obtained during a mass testing session at the beginning of the semester; this allowed us to conduct a 2 between- (self-views: high self-liking, low self-liking) × 2 between- (suspicion: suspicious, not suspicious) × 2 within- (assessment type: positive, negative) repeated-measures ANOVA on perceived accuracy of the self-liking assessments. (For these analyses, all cells had *N*s of 15 or more. Suspicion scores correlated .005 with self-liking and .14 with self-competence in this sample; neither correlation approaches significance.) The two-way interaction of self-views with assessment type was significant, $F(1, 77) = 32.68$, $p < .001$, but the three-way interaction of self-views, assessment type, and suspicion did not reach significance, $F(1, 77) < 1$. Thus, regardless of the extent to which the assessments were perceived as real versus hypothetical, respondents high in self-liking rated the positive self-liking assessment as more accurate than did people low in self-liking (*M*s = 8.83 and 6.95, respectively), $F(1, 79) = 20.20$, $p < .001$, and they rated the negative self-liking assessment as less accurate than did respondents low in self-liking (*M*s = 2.73 and 5.08, respectively), $F(1, 79) = 25.62$, $p < .001$.

Similar effects were obtained when we computed a 2 between- (self-views: high self-competence, low self-

competence) × 2 between- (suspicion: suspicious, not suspicious) × 2 within- (assessment type: positive, negative) repeated-measures ANOVA on perceived accuracy of the self-competence assessments. The two-way interaction of assessment type by self-views was significant, $F(1, 77) = 20.51$, $p < .001$, whereas the three-way interaction term did not reach significance, $F(1, 77) < 1$. Thus, people high in self-competence perceived the positive self-competence assessment as more accurate than did people low in self-competence (*M*s = 9.05 and 6.93, respectively), $F(1, 79) = 23.68$, $p < .001$, and they perceived the negative self-competence assessment as less accurate than did people low in self-competence (*M*s = 3.80 and 5.55, respectively), $F(1, 79) = 8.60$, $p < .01$. Moreover, this pattern was not moderated by people's perceptions of how real the feedback was.

Next, we compared perceptions of feedback accuracy across the two studies in which people received self-liking and self-competence feedback that was hypothetical (Study 2) or ostensibly real (our pilot study). For these analyses, we again divided people into high and low groups on the basis of self-liking and self-competence scores that we obtained during the mass testing session.[5] For people who rated the accuracy of the self-liking assessments, we performed a 2 between- (self-views: high self-liking, low self-liking) × 2 between- (feedback type: hypothetical, real) × 2 within- (assessment type: positive, negative) repeated-measures ANOVA on perceived feedback accuracy. As expected, the two-way interaction of self-views and assessment type was significant, $F(1, 97) = 47.42$, $p < .001$, whereas the three-way interaction of self-views, assessment type, and feedback type was not, $F(1, 97) = 1.44$, $p = .23$. Thus, regardless of whether the feedback was presented as hypothetical or real, people high in self-liking rated the positive self-liking assessment as more accurate than did people low in self-liking (*M*s = 9.07 and 6.98, respectively), $F(1, 99) = 35.61$, $p < .001$, and they rated the negative self-liking assessment as less accurate than did respondents low in self-liking (*M*s = 2.57 and 5.51, respectively), $F(1, 99) = 44.24$, $p < .001$.

Finally, a similar pattern was obtained when we computed a 2 between- (self-views: high self-competence, low self-competence) × 2 between- (feedback type: hypothetical, real) × 2 within- (assessment type: positive, negative) repeated-measures ANOVA on perceived accuracy of the self-competence assessments. The two-way interaction of self-views and assessment type was significant, $F(1, 81) = 25.43$, $p < .001$, but the three-way interaction of self-views, assessment type, and feedback type was not, $F(1, 81) < 1$. Thus, regardless of whether the assessments were presented as hypothetical or real, people high in self-competence perceived the positive self-competence assessment as more accurate than did people low in self-competence (*M*s = 9.20 and 7.03, respectively), $F(1, 83) = 26.81$, $p < .001$, and they perceived the negative self-competence assessment as less accurate than did people low in self-competence (*M*s = 3.51 and 5.80, respectively), $F(1, 83) = 15.06$, $p < .001$.

In sum, we found that people responded similarly to the self-liking and self-competence feedback whether they accepted it as real or were suspicious of its veracity and whether they received explicit instructions describing the feedback as hypothetical or real. It does not seem, then, that the hypothetical nature of the feedback that we employed in Study 2 resulted in biased perceptions of its accuracy.

DISCUSSION

The results of Study 2 make three points. First, it appears that people's feelings of self-liking and self-competence, although highly intercorrelated, independently relate to their self-verification strategies when the feedback in question invokes one or the other component of self-esteem. That is, feelings of self-liking relate to perceived accuracy of self-liking feedback and feelings of self-competence relate to perceived accuracy of self-competence feedback. Moreover, people's choice of feedback in this study was differentially related to their feelings of self-liking and self-competence: Only self-liking predicted choice of the self-liking feedback and only self-competence predicted choice of the self-competence feedback. Importantly, this pattern of findings presumably emerged because we designed our feedback to pinpoint people's feelings of self-liking or self-competence. Such clear-cut relations between people's self-views, their perceptions of feedback accuracy, and their choice of feedback may not be found if care is not taken to maximize the fit between feedback and self-views.

Second, as in Study 1, we found that people's perceptions of the accuracy of the evaluations mediated the association between their self-views and their choice of feedback. For people who received evaluations that pertained to self-liking, their feelings of self-liking guided their perceptions of the accuracy of this feedback, which guided their choice of positive or negative feedback. A similar pattern was observed among people who received evaluations that pertained to self-competence: Their feelings of self-competence predicted their perceptions of the feedback's accuracy, which predicted feedback choice. Importantly, when perceptions of feedback accuracy were taken into account, associations between the self-views and feedback choice disappeared, suggesting that perceptions of feedback accuracy are the mechanism through which beliefs about the self dictate people's feedback preferences.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings presented here illustrate the usefulness of acknowledging the dual components of global self-esteem in research on the self in general and feedback-seeking in particular. The results of Study 1 revealed that people's feelings of self-liking, but not self-competence, were related to their assessments of the accuracy of negative, global self-esteem feedback. Likewise, only self-liking predicted people's choice of feedback. This suggests that feedback designed to implicate people's global, overarching feelings of self-worth may miss the mark; instead, such broadly targeted feedback may implicate relatively specific aspects of self-esteem, thus reducing the precision of the match between feedback and self-views. In Study 2, we showed that when feedback is tailored specifically to fit with the self-views under investigation, clear relations between self-views, perceptions of feedback accuracy, and interest in feedback emerge. People's feelings of self-liking (but not self-competence) were related to their perceptions of the accuracy of self-liking feedback as well as their choice of such feedback. Similarly, people's feelings of self-competence were more strongly related to their perceptions of the accuracy of self-competence feedback than were their feelings of self-liking, and only self-competence predicted choice of self-competence feedback.

Importantly, efforts to increase the fit between feedback and self-views might shed light on past self-verification research findings. For example, if the self-views that are used to classify research participants are too broad, and the feedback offered to participants too imprecise, then researchers may mistakenly conclude that participants are not self-verifying. In Study 1, we offered positive and negative personality feedback to participants who were classified on the basis of their global self-esteem and found that a sizable group of people did not appear to self-verify. When we looked at the relations among self-views, perceptions of feedback accuracy, and feedback-seeking behaviors, however, we found that the association of self-views and feedback choice was mediated by people's perceptions of the accuracy of personality feedback. This suggests that people prefer feedback that they perceive as self-confirming, regardless of the valence of their self-views. Classifying people on the basis of broadly defined self-views may therefore obscure the fact that it is perceived accuracy of feedback, and not global self-view classification per se, that drives feedback choice.

Our findings suggest, however, that information about people's self-views can be used to successfully predict self-verification behaviors provided that the self-views under investigation are clearly implicated by the feedback used in research. Thus, as previously noted, we propose that the match between the self-views under examination and the content of the feedback offered to participants should be attended to, and the fit between self-views and feedback maximized. Of course, this suggestion seems obvious if the self-views in question are clearly distinct from one another. For example, few would argue that people look to their soufflé-making self-views to assess the accuracy of feedback about their poker-playing prowess. What seems less obvious, perhaps, is that two highly related sets of beliefs that are believed to underlie self-esteem, such as self-liking and self-competence, may be accessed separately when judgments are being made about feedback accuracy.

Importantly, by illustrating that self-liking and self-competence relate separately to perceptions of feedback accuracy and interest in feedback, our findings provide evidence that these sets of self-views are indeed distinct aspects of self-esteem. One question our findings fail to address, however, is whether one of the two components is more central to global self-esteem than the other. On the surface, self-liking may appear to be more closely related to global self-esteem than is self-competence; indeed, Tafarodi's (1998) definition of self-liking as "the valuation of personhood: one's worth as a social entity with reference to internalized standards of good and bad" (p. 1181) suggests that this construct is indeed very similar to global self-esteem. Furthermore, the results of our pilot test indicate that correlations between self-liking and global self-esteem are often stronger than are correlations between self-competence and global self-esteem. Thus, it may be that self-liking is particularly central to global self-esteem.

This conclusion, however, may be a hasty one. As Tafarodi (1994) points out, self-liking and self-competence are mutually interdependent constructs. Throughout development, feelings of social worth and personal efficacy indirectly influence each other (e.g., Bandura, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1985, 1987, 1990), and consequently, it may be inaccurate to conclude that either dimension of self-esteem is primary or more central than the other. Instead, the two axes of global self-esteem may best be thought of as dynamically related—knowledge that one is competent may feed into one's feelings of social acceptance, and feelings of social worth may feed into one's achievement-related efforts. Moreover, people's feelings of self-liking and self-competence may emerge roughly simultaneously in the developmental process. Early relationships with caregivers are thought to provide much of the foundation for people's perceptions of themselves as worthy of affection; at the same time, they provide the foundation for people's perceptions of themselves as self-reliant and capable (e.g., Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1988; Guidano & Liotti, 1983; also see Sroufe, Carlson, & Shulman, 1993).

The notion that self-liking takes precedence over self-competence in the construction of global self-esteem, then, is questionable.

Furthermore, the tendency for self-competence—relative to self-liking—to correlate more weakly with global self-esteem may be an artifact of the self-competence measure that we have used. Although Tafarodi and Swann's (1995) SLC scale demonstrates good reliability, validity, and internal consistency, it is conceivable that another measure of self-competence would relate more closely to global self-esteem. In sum, both self-liking and self-competence appear to be developmentally important and fundamental aspects of global self-esteem, although highly interrelated, are theoretically and empirically distinct.

Results of the current report thus contribute to the growing literature on the dual nature of self-esteem (e.g., Barber, 1990; Barber & Thomas, 1986; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971, 1972; Openshaw, Thomas, & Rollins, 1981, 1984). As noted earlier, several researchers are beginning to focus on the self-liking/self-competence distinction in self-esteem research (e.g., Tafarodi & Swann, 1996; Tafarodi & Vu, 1997). We propose that additional areas of the self literature could benefit from a recognition of the dual nature of global self-esteem. For example, research on self-esteem and behavioral "plasticity" (Brockner, 1984) suggests that persons with low self-esteem, relative to those with high self-esteem, appear more influenced by self-relevant social cues (e.g., Campbell, Chew, & Scratchley, 1991; Campbell & Fairey, 1985; also see Brockner, 1984, for a review). If self-liking and self-competence are indeed distinct, then these two sets of self-views might predict people's reactions to external feedback in different ways. That is, persons low in self-liking but high in self-competence might appear plastic when confronted with cues about their social worth; conversely, those high in self-liking but low in self-competence might display pronounced susceptibility to task-related feedback.

Literature on self-esteem stability also might benefit from a focus on the self-liking/self-competence distinction. The primary goal of research in this area has been to identify the ways in which self-esteem level (high vs. low) and self-esteem stability (stable vs. unstable) combine to influence psychological functioning (see Kernis, 1993, for a review). Accordingly, research has revealed self-esteem stability differences in people's reactions to both competence-related feedback (e.g., Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989) and social feedback (e.g., Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993). Although this focus on the stability of self-views has clarified the relations between global self-esteem level and reactions to various types of feedback, we believe that such research lends itself to further refinement via a focus on the two components of global self-esteem. Because people's reactions to competence-related and social feedback may be guided by their feelings of self-competence and self-liking, respectively, we suggest that studying the level and stability of people's self-competence and self-liking separately will allow a more precise understanding of their reactions to these different types of feedback.

CONCLUSION

Our evidence that the success of self-verification research may hinge on a good fit between self-views and the content of the feedback may inspire feelings of déjà vu for many readers. For example, in response to the problem of low attitude-behavior correlations that once beleaguered research on attitudes, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) suggested that defining and measuring attitudes and behaviors at the same level of specificity or generality would maximize attitude-behavior correlations. Similarly, in response to claims that measures of global traits failed to offer strong predictions about individual behaviors (e.g., Mischel, 1968), Epstein (1979) demonstrated that global traits successfully predicted global behaviors (i.e., behaviors that were aggregated across settings). Our suggestions regarding maximizing the fit between self-views and feedback thus provide another example of the importance of examining theoretically related variables at similar levels of specificity or generality: Self-verification behaviors are guided by perceptions of feedback accuracy, and these perceptions, in turn, are guided by the particular self-views that are implicated by the feedback. From this perspective, what appear to be failures of self-verification may, in reality, be failures on the part of observers to understand how self-verifiers perceive their worlds.

APPENDIX
The Positive and Negative Self-Liking and Self-Competence Evaluations

Positive Self-Liking Evaluation

It seems that this person feels pretty good about himself or herself—he or she probably feels deserving of the affection of others. Overall, this seems to be someone who has a deep sense of being a worthwhile person, doesn't have a lot of hang-ups, and is very comfortable with himself or herself.

Negative Self-Liking Evaluation

It seems to me that maybe this person has some difficulty with liking himself or herself—perhaps he or she tends to

have a negative attitude toward himself or herself at times. If I had to guess, I would say that this person has a tendency to experience doubt about his or her self-worth.

Positive Self-Competence Evaluation

It seems that this individual thinks of himself or herself as a competent person. He or she seems to feel confident about the things that he or she sets out to do. He or she seems to feel good about his or her talents and has a well-developed sense of being able to perform well at a number of things.

Negative Self-Competence Evaluation

I get the feeling that this person has some concerns about his or her level of capability—for example, I sense that this person sometimes experiences doubt about his or her ability to succeed at things. He or she probably lacks confidence in his or her ability to deal well with challenges.

NOTES

1. We assessed participants' standing on self-concept clarity (e.g., Campbell et al., 1996) and self-esteem stability (e.g., Kernis, 1993) to test these variables' relations with perceptions of feedback accuracy. We do not report any findings associated with these variables, however, because neither one was strongly or consistently related to our main dependent measures and we were unable to adhere strictly to Kernis's (1993) recommended methodology for assessing self-esteem stability.

2. By offering people multiple doses of conflicting personality feedback, we followed a widely used procedure in self-verification research (e.g., Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). Similar self-verification findings are obtained, however, in studies in which people receive a single dose of self-relevant feedback (e.g., Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992).

3. We also used the LISREL 8 software program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996) to create structural equation models in which people's self-liking and self-competence scores were used to predict perceptions of the accuracy of the positive and negative evaluations. Results of these analyses provided stronger support for our predictions than that provided by the regression analyses in that (a) self-liking (but not self-competence) was related to perceived accuracy of the two self-liking evaluations and (b) self-competence (but not self-liking) was related to perceived accuracy of the two self-competence evaluations.

4. Among people who received the self-liking evaluations, 24.3% were classified as choosing the negative profile, 24.3% were classified as choosing neither profile, and 51.5% were classified as choosing the positive profile. Among people who received the self-competence evaluations, 18% were classified as choosing the negative profile, 23% were classified as choosing neither profile, and 59% were classified as choosing the positive profile.

5. Participants in Study 2 and our pilot study were sampled during different semesters, but mean Self-Liking and Competence Scale (SLC) scores tend to remain remarkably similar across different samples of University of Texas students. For example, the overall mean self-liking score did not differ across the two semesters, Ms = 38.29 and 38.29, SDs = 8.31 and 8.20, $F(1, 2910) < 1$, and nor did the overall mean self-competence score, Ms = 42.20 and 42.31, SDs = 6.63 and 6.87, $F(1, 2910) < 1$. Also, because we only used people for whom we had pretest self-liking and self-competence scores in these analyses, and not everyone who participated in Study 2 completed the SLC during the pretesting session, the degrees of freedom for these analyses do not reflect all Study 2 participants.

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