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The Association Between Partner Enhancement and Self-Enhancement and Relationship Quality Outcomes

The purpose of this research was to understand in greater detail, using 2 samples (Study 1 N = 4,881 heterosexual couples; Study 2 N = 335 heterosexual couples who completed the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire), how partner or self-enhancement patterns differentially influence relationship outcomes. A multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted comparing 4 outcome measures for different couple types in which individuals rated the partner higher, the same, or lower than they rated themselves on affability. Couples in which both individuals perceived themselves as more affable than the partner experienced poorer results on the relationship outcome measures, whereas couples in which both individuals perceived the partner's personality as more affable than their own experienced more positive relationship outcomes. Additional analyses with structural equation models demonstrated the consistent influence of enhancement measures on relationship outcomes for cross-sectional and longitudinal samples.

Scholars have been studying the influence of different patterns in self- and partner ratings on relationship outcomes for a few decades now (e.g., Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001; Fowers, Lyons, & Montel, 1996; Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001; John & Robins, 1994; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996, 2003; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Although this research has clarified some issues, there are still many questions about the theoretical, methodological, and practical efficacy of various self- and partner rating patterns for understanding couple relationship outcomes.

A finding related to our research interests is that individuals are usually likely to view themselves more positively than they are perceived by others. This propensity to enhance one's own qualities, or self-illusion, holds true for an assortment of measures on a wide variety of behaviors, attributes, personality characteristics, intelligence and attractiveness, and specific recalled behaviors of a recent interaction (Bailey & Mettetal, 1977; Gosling, John, Craik, &

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Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1993; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Self-illusion appears to transfer over to intimate relationships in that most people believe their relationship is better than the relationships of strangers and the relationships of their friends (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). In addition, most people believe their relationship is much less likely to end in divorce than is realistic given the current rates of divorce (Buunk & van der Eijnder, 1997; Endo, Heine, & Lehman, 2000; Fowers et al., 1996). This self-illusion carries over to more than just views about the overall relationship. Some individuals rate their partner the same or better than themselves and better than others with whom they are not in a relationship (Fowers et al., 2001; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Miller & Bailey, 2002; Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002; Murray et al., 2003). A number of scholars suggest that such positive illusions are important for relationships in that they help partners to feel understood, experience a sense of similarity, overlook one another's faults and maximize each other's strengths, and motivate them to improve their individual behaviors and attitudes in order to be perceived as more favorable by the partner (Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray et al., 2002, 2003).

There are a variety of ways to compare ratings when both members of a dyad are asked to rate self and other. The existing research, however, demonstrates that it is the comparison between how people rate themselves and how the same people rate their partners that appears to be the most influential in predicting couple outcomes (Busby & Gardner, 2008; Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray et al., 2002, 2003).

In summary, individuals typically have a view of themselves that may be called self-illusion; they see themselves more positively than they see others. The one exception to this typical view is how individuals view their romantic partners. Individuals tend to view their romantic partner equal to or superior to how they perceive themselves. The within-person perceived difference between how people see themselves versus how they see their partners is the most influential type of self/partner comparison.

Given these findings, the overarching goal of the research reported here was to identify how self-ratings and partner ratings can be used to better understand couple and individual relationship quality outcomes. Our approach was to carry out two related but separate studies. In the first study we used a large, cross-sectional quota sample to create couple types based on how much participants enhanced their partners over themselves in terms of the personality characteristic we label affability. The rationale for using a large cross-sectional sample was that it allowed us to create the couple types that might be rare. In addition, this larger sample would allow us to test a model with more degrees of freedom and then verify it with a smaller sample (the second study to be reported here).

Our general research question was whether partner- or self-enhancing couple types have significantly different scores on relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, negative communication, and expectations for change, even when controlling for relationship length and the original affability variable. Furthermore, if the enhancement measures were created in a continuous manner rather than categorically, would these measures have a significant influence on relationship satisfaction over and above the influence of affability? The first question was addressed with a multivariate analysis of covariance and the second question with structural equation modeling.

The results of this first study led us to a related question about whether enhancement scores for male and female partners might be related to relationship stability over time. Thus, to address this research question, we carried out a second study, using a longitudinal design in which enhancement scores and affability scores were assessed at Time 1 and relationship stability at Time 2.

Our research extends previous research in three ways. First, we suggest that couple enhancement types can be created that are theoretically and empirically sound. These couple types can help us better understand relationship quality outcomes. Most researchers who study self- and partner ratings for both members of the dyad have looked at the patterns of differences and similarities in ratings as related to relationship outcomes. Our focus on couple types rather than individual differences is rare in the research literature and may provide important information about couples beyond what is typically discussed when individual patterns in self- and partner ratings are investigated. Second, we include the original variable (affability) used to create the self-/partner enhancement types to test the idea that self-/partner difference scores like ours account for variance above and beyond the

original personality measure itself. Third, we explore how enhancement influences relationships over time.

STUDY 1: COUPLE ENHANCEMENT TYPES AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

On the basis of findings from existing research studies, we suggest that individuals who experience serious relationship problems often see their partner as more dysfunctional and problematic than they see themselves (Sillars, Robert, Leonard, & Dunn, 2000). These individuals may be prone to lower relationship satisfaction, even at the earliest stages of their relationship and before they are seriously distressed. Thus, it is likely that when a person enhances the self over the partner, this creates significant vulnerabilities to common relationship difficulties because partners may be more prone to slide into partner blame rather than working together as a team. This may be particularly true if both members enhance the self over the partner. Furthermore, it seems logical to suggest that the opposite is also likely true. That is, if both members of the couple enhance the partner over the self, they will have higher relationship quality than other couple types.

Social constructionist theories support our suppositions by holding that people actively construct their views of self and other to help them reach their goals of feeling understood, secure, and satisfied (Murray & Holmes, 1993; Murray et al., 2003; Taylor 1989). This theory emphasizes the relevance of the perceived level of similarity or difference within an individual. Although an external reality exists outside of the mind of an individual, the important reality is that which is socially constructed in the minds of individuals and how this constructed reality influences social interactions. More specifically, seeing the partner as the same or better than the self helps individuals attribute more benign motives to partners (Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Fletcher & Fincham, 1991).

A challenge with the social constructionist theory and the attribution research is that it could just as easily be argued that the quality of the relationship leads to the adoption of less positive views of the partner and the associated negative attributions. Although it is likely that relationship quality and perceptions of partners are interrelated and consistently influence one another, longitudinal research has consistently demonstrated a directional influence beginning with negative attributions or views of the partner that lead to poorer communication, which in turn leads to decreased marital quality (Davey, Fincham, Beach, & Brody, 2001; Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000). Therefore, in this study we follow the same sequence in our models starting with within-person perceptions that lead to other relationship problems.

To examine the effect of self versus partner enhancement on overall relationship outcome, we used two relationship outcome measures in this study: relationship satisfaction and relationship stability. Furthermore, we also examined negative communication and desire for change as outcome measures to test whether enhancement types might change the overall relationship because individuals might be more prone to blame their partner and because they may feel more strongly that their partner needs to change.

Alternative Explanations for Self and Partner Enhancement Findings

Several authors who have used self- and partner ratings discuss the potentially influential variable of relationship length (Burke & Harrod, 2005; Katz & Beach, 2000; Swan, Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Although the mechanisms for how relationship length might influence perceptions and relationship outcomes are not always clear, relationship length should at least be used as a control variable in studies on couple relationships (Burke & Harrod, 2005; Holman and Associates, 2001; Larson & Holman, 1994; Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Therefore, we include relationship length as a control variable in our study.

A second potentially confounding variable in research with couples using self- and partner ratings comes from research in which the challenges of using difference scores between partners is discussed (Edwards, 1994; Griffin, Murray, & Richards, 1999; Murray et al., 1996). These authors have indicated that using difference scores in some instances may not provide any additional information beyond that which is provided by the original scale scores. In other words, these researchers suggest that the statistically significant results that some authors find for difference scores many be spurious findings that simply reflect the influence of the original scales from which the difference scores were calculated. One solution that is suggested is to

include the original scales as control variables (Edwards; Griffin et al.).

Method

Sample and Procedures

The sample used for Study 1 was a quota sample (Cozby, 2007) drawn from the entire population of participants, approximately 45,000, who completed the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE: Busby et al., 2001) between 2000 and 2006. Individuals completed RELATE online after being exposed to the instrument through a variety settings. Some participants were requested to take the instrument as part of an undergraduate family studies or sociology class, others completed it as part of a workshop for premarital couples, and some individuals completed the instrument after finding it on the Internet.

Because of an overrepresentation of Caucasian participants, a quota sample of 4,881 heterosexual couples (9,762 individuals) with racial characteristics similar to U.S. national norms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007) was selected from the overall RELATE data set. This quota sampling technique is a commonly used method to improve haphazard samples (Cozby, 2007) and has been used with earlier versions of this data set in previously published articles (Busby, Gardner, & Taniguchi, 2005; Gardner, Busby, & Brimhall, 2007). It is accomplished by selecting out all the members of the smallest underrepresented group, in this case the African American group, and then selecting out random subsamples of the other groups so that the percentages of all the racial groups are closer to national norms. The resulting final sample was 69% Caucasian, 11% African American, 12% Latino, 3% Asian, 3% mixed/biracial, 1% American Indian, and 1% were ''other.'' In terms of education, 20% of respondents had completed some college but were not currently enrolled, 35% were currently enrolled in college, 39% had received a bachelor's degree or higher, and 6% completed a high school education or less. The mean age of the respondents was 28 with a *SD* of 8.5. With regard to relationship status, 6% were in a casual dating relationship, 39% reported being in a serious or steady dating relationship, 32% reported being engaged, and 23% were married. The measure of relationship length indicated that 34% of the couples had been in their relationship for 12 months or less, 30% for 1—2 years, 19% for 3—5 years, and 17% for 6 or more years.

Measures

The data used for these analyses were collected via the RELATE questionnaire (Busby et al., 2001). The RELATE questionnaire consists of 271 items designed to assess the relationship between romantically linked partners, be they dating, engaged, or married. Previous research has documented the reliability and validity of the RELATE questionnaire (see Busby et al., 2001, for a discussion of the instrument's psychometric properties).

Affability. To develop couple types, we used measures of the Big Five personality constructs (Biesanz & West, 2000; Costa & McCrae, 1988; Luo & Klohnen, 2005) contained in RELATE (Draper & Holman, 2005). For this study we wanted a general measure of positive personality traits. For this reason, we elected to combine the agreeable and openness scales as a measure of positive personality. We labeled this measure ''affability.'' Combining the agreeable and openness scales is appropriate as they have been shown to be strongly correlated (in this sample the correlations between these scales were between .48 and .63) and predictive of couple outcomes (Busby & Loyer-Carlson, 2003; Draper & Holman). In addition, the Cronbach's alphas for the affability scales of self and partner for men and women were between .75 and .86.

The seven items making up the affability personality measure were one-word descriptions such as kind, considerate, and flexible. Respondents were asked to rate how often the items described themselves and their partners using a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from *never* to *very often*. This resulted in a self- and partner rating for both the man and woman. These self- and partner ratings were used in two different ways in this study. The first way they were used was to create a control variable representing the total affability perceived in the relationship by the woman and the total affability perceived in the relationship by the man. These scores were created in accordance with previous research using self- and partner ratings by adding the woman's rating of her own affability to her view of her partner's affability (Busby & Gardner, 2008). Similarly, the total affability score for the man was calculated by adding his

rating of his own affability to his rating of his partner's affability.

Enhancement measures and couple types. The second way the affability measures of self and partner were used was to create enhancement measures. The enhancement measures for men and women were computed by subtracting the individual rating of the self from the individual rating of the partner on the affability scale. These were computed in this manner as a result of past research findings indicating that the difference between the individual rating of the self and the individual rating of the partner was the most influential difference in predicting relationship outcomes as predicted by social constructionist theory (Busby & Gardner, 2008; Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray et al., 2002, 2003). The measures of enhancement computed in this manner resulted in a scale in which a high score was a positive number that equaled the degree to which the participant enhanced the partner above the self, whereas a low score was a negative value that indicated the degree to which the participant enhanced the self above the partner.

To create the couple types, we started with the enhancement measures for women and men. The means for the enhancement scores were $-.04$ ($SD = .59$) for women and $-.08$ ($SD = .57$) for men. As our primary interest was in exploring unique patterns for couples when using self-ratings and ratings of the partners, we used these standard deviations to create couple types based on whether the individual man or woman rated their partner substantially higher, the same, or substantially lower than they rated themselves. This was accomplished by subtracting or adding 0.5 of a standard deviation to an enhancement score of 0 and using these scores as cutoffs for the couple types. For example, for the female enhancement score, the $SD = .59$. One half of this $SD = .295$. Therefore, women who had an enhancement score of .295 or above were put in the partner higher (partner-enhancing) couple type, whereas those who had a negative enhancement score of $-.295$ or below were put in the self higher (self-enhancing) type. To maintain a meaningful distance between the enhancing categories and the categories where partners rated each other the same, only those who had an enhancement score of exactly 0 were retained in the sample, eliminating 1,565 couples (these

couples who were eliminated were reinserted into the study for the analysis of enhancement as a continuous measure presented later in the article). Essentially this resulted in there being at least a 0.5 SD between each category. Although losing a significant number of participants was not ideal, it was deemed an acceptable loss for this first analysis as the primary purpose was to explore the differences between couples where there was self-enhancement, no enhancement, or partner enhancement. It was simply not logical to assume that because one couple scored .295 they would be considered partner-enhancing, whereas another couple that scored .290 would be considered a no-enhancement couple. To investigate the effects of removing these couples from the analysis, however, we conducted the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) presented in the Results section with all the couples in the sample. The patterns for the means were the same as those listed in Tables 2 and 3, below, in that the partner-enhancing couples scored the highest on satisfaction, stability, negative communication, and expectations for change, whereas the self-enhancement couples scored the lowest with the other couples in the middle. In addition, the same variables were significant in the MANCOVA with both samples.

As the literature did not indicate whether we would expect male or female enhancement to have differential effects on relationship outcomes, initially we combined the three types of male enhancement with the three types of female enhancement to create nine couple types. As it was doubtful, however, that all nine categories of couples would have a meaningful association with couple outcomes and because of the complexity of dealing with nine distinct couples types, we conducted a preliminary analysis to explore the differences between these nine groups. Using the cross-sectional quota sample, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with relationship satisfaction for men and women as the dependent variable and the nine couples types as the independent variable. We only found five couple types that were significantly different on relationship satisfaction, and gender was not relevant (e.g., couple styles where men were self-enhancing with a partner who was not were not significantly different than couples where women were self-enhancing and the partner was not). Three of the types were

what we called congruent types where both partners rated themselves in the same category. The other two types were in a mixed category where the partners did not rate themselves in the same category. When both individuals in the couple rated their partners higher than they rated themselves we categorized them as *partner-enhancing couples* ($n = 768$). When both members of the dyad rated themselves the same, neither self- nor partner enhancing, we categorized them as *same couples* ($n = 89$). When both individuals rated themselves higher than their partner, we categorized them as *self-enhancing couples* ($n = 355$). When one member of the dyad, regardless of gender, rated himself or herself higher than the other and the partner rated himself or herself the same or lower we categorized them as *mixed self-enhancing couples* ($n = 1,648$). When one person rated the partner higher, regardless of gender, and the other person rated themselves as the same we categorized them as *mixed partner-enhancing couples* ($n = 456$). These five couple types were used in the more complex MANCOVA analysis with the additional outcome and control variables.

Outcome variables. We chose four outcome variables—relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, negative communication, and expectations for change. To evaluate the influence of couple types on the overall relationship, we used satisfaction and stability measures, and examine whether couple types affected specific qualities of the relationship such as whether individuals were prone to blame the partner and expect the partner to change, we used negative communication and expectations for change measures.

The first outcome measure, Relationship Satisfaction, was a seven-item scale asking respondents how satisfied they were with the overall relationship in seven different areas from physical intimacy to the quality of the communication. These questions were answered on a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from *very dissatisfied* to *very satisfied*. Higher scores indicated greater relationship satisfaction.

The second outcome measure, Relationship Stability, assessed participants' propensity to end their relationship. It was measured by three questions evaluating how often the participants thought the relationship was in trouble, how often they had talked about ending the relationship, and how often they had broken up or separated. Higher scores indicated a greater propensity for couples to stay together.

The third outcome measure was Negative Communication. This seven-item scale was measured by combining the criticism and contempt scales from RELATE addressing how often participants criticized partners and experienced contemptuous feelings toward them.

The final outcome measure was Expectations for Change. This scale included two items evaluating how much participants wanted their partners to change. The internal consistency reliability coefficients for the Affability, Relationship Satisfaction, and Relationship Stability, Negative Communication, and Expectation scales were all above .70 for women and men.

RESULTS

The correlations, means, and standard deviations on all of the variables included in this study are listed in Table 1. Noteworthy patterns in this correlation table were that all correlations were significant ($p < .001$) and that of all the relationship outcome measures, Satisfaction had the strongest correlation with the Affability and Enhancement measures. Also, the correlations between Affability and Enhancement measures were modest, between .20 and .26, indicating that these two variables were capturing unique concepts for couples.

Analyzing Couple Types

A MANCOVA was selected as the first analytic approach as it was particularly well suited for exploring the relationship between categorical independent variables and multiple dependent variables that were likely to be correlated (George & Mallery, 2006). In addition, the MANCOVA procedure allowed us to control for the influence of covariates that were likely to be related to the dependent variables.

To answer our first research question in Study 1, we compared the five couple types on Female and Male Relationship Satisfaction, Stability, Negative Communication, and Expectations for Change using a MANCOVA. The independent variable was Couple Enhancement types. The covariates were Relationship Length and the Male and Female Affability Measures.

Table 1. *Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Scales Used in This Study From the Cross-Sectional Sample*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Satisfaction	–	.53	−.46	−.53	.57	.38	−.31
2. Stability	.53	–	−.45	−.44	.35	.23	−.22
3. Negative Communication	−.48	−.44	–	.47	−.46	−.18	.26
4. Expectations for Change	−.56	−.46	.49	–	−.45	−.28	.26
5. Affability	.58	.38	−.48	−.46	–	.20	−.29
6. Enhancement	.40	.28	−.16	−.29	.26	–	−.13
7. Relationship Length	−.30	−.24	.29	.26	−.29	−.18	–
Mean (Women)	3.91	4.08	2.36	2.35	8.30	−.04	3.80
SD (Women)	0.77	0.82	0.68	0.92	0.81	0.59	1.70
Mean (Men)	3.92	4.07	2.28	2.57	8.19	−.08	3.80
SD (Men)	0.72	0.81	0.63	0.96	0.82	0.57	1.70

Correlations for men are above the diagonal and for the women are below the diagonal. All correlations were significant at $p < .001$.

The results from the MANCOVA indicated that the Couple Enhancement types had significant effects on both Male and Female Satisfaction, Stability, Negative Communication, and Expectations for Change while holding Relationship Length and the overall levels of Affability for Men and Women constant. The multivariate F test for the Enhancement groups was Wilks's $\Lambda = .65$, $F(32, 12127) = 46.64$, $p < .001$. All of the covariates were significantly related to the outcome measures at $p < .001$.

Because the multivariate test of the Enhancement groups was significant, it was appropriate to consider the univariate results. The univariate F test associated with the Enhancement types was significant for the dependent variable Female Satisfaction, $F(4, 3295) = 258.91$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Male Satisfaction, $F(4, 3295) = 250.91$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Female Stability, $F(4, 3295) = 110.07$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Male Stability, $F(4, 3295) = 107.54$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Female Negative Communication, $F(4, 3295) = 110.54$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Male Negative Communication, $F(4, 3295) = 107.20$, $p < .001$; for the dependent variable Female Expectations for Change, $F(4, 3295) = 113.33$, $p < .001$; and for the dependent variable Male Expectations for Change, $F(4, 3295) = 140.01$, $p < .001$. The effect sizes for the Couple Enhancement categories for each dependent measure were calculated using the partial eta squared statistic (the percent of variance explained). The partial eta squared statistics for Female and Male Satisfaction were .24 and .23,

for Female and Male Stability were .12 and .11, for Female and Male Negative Communication were .13 and .12, and for Female and Male Expectations for Change were .12 and .15, respectively.

With significant multivariate and univariate F tests, it was appropriate to explore the specific differences between each couple type on relationship outcomes through step-down F tests, using the Bonferroni method to control for multiple comparisons. The estimated means and standard deviations, while holding the control variables constant, for the Couple Enhancement types are presented in Tables 2 and 3 for women and men. The means in these tables indicated that for every outcome measure the self-enhancing couples were significantly different from all other couples. In general, the mixed self-enhancing couples were also significantly different from all other couples. There was less distinction, however, between the couple types in which one or both individuals were partner enhancing and in which partners rated each other the same. Another general pattern in Tables 2 and 3 was that outcomes progressively improved as the couple types moved from self-enhancing to partner enhancing, hinting that the relationship between enhancement and the outcome measures was linear.

Analyzing Enhancement as a Continuous Measure

To more appropriately explore the linear relationship between enhancement and couple outcomes and thereby answer our second research

Table 2. *Estimated Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) for the Couple Enhancement Types on Female Satisfaction, Stability, Negative Communication, and Expectation for Change While Controlling for Covariates*

Couple Enhancement Types	Satisfaction	Stability	Negative Communication	Expectations for Change
1. Partner-Enhancing	4.30[a] (0.56)	4.39[b] (0.65)	2.06[a] (0.60)	1.94[a] (0.76)
2. Same	4.09[e] (0.52)	4.28[b] (0.61)	2.30[c] (0.64)	2.23[e] (0.76)
3. Self-Enhancing	3.02[a] (0.88)	3.43[a] (0.86)	2.78[a] (0.66)	3.02[a] (0.99)
4. Mixed Self-Enhancing	3.79[a] (0.75)	3.95[a] (0.84)	2.45[d] (0.68)	2.47[a] (0.90)
5. Mixed Partner-Enhancing	4.21[e] (0.57)	4.32[b] (0.72)	2.18[e] (0.65)	2.11[e] (0.77)

[a]Significantly different than all other groups at $p < .01$.
[b]Significantly different than Groups 3 and 4 at $p < .01$.
[c]Significantly different than Groups 1 and 3 at $p < .01$.
[d]Significantly different than Groups 1, 3, and 5 at $p < .01$.
[e]Significantly different than Groups 1, 3, and 4 at $p < .01$.

Table 3. *Estimated Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) for the Couple Enhancement Types on Male Satisfaction, Stability, Negative Communication, and Expectation for Change While Controlling for Covariates*

Couple Enhancement Types	Satisfaction	Stability	Negative Communcation	Expectations for Change
1. Partner-Enhancing	4.29[d] (.55)	4.37[b] (.69)	2.02[a] (.59)	2.14[d] (.80)
2. Same	4.05[a] (.63)	4.36[b] (.68)	2.27[c] (.76)	2.55[c] (.92)
3. Self-Enhancing	3.12[a] (.84)	3.45[a] (.89)	3.02[a] (.62)	3.37[a] (.95)
4. Mixed Self-Enhancing	3.79[a] (.71)	3.94[a] (.83)	2.47[c] (.60)	2.72[c] (.97)
5. Mixed Partner-Enhancing	4.23[b] (.51)	4.34[b] (.70)	2.11[a] (.62)	2.22[d] (.88)

[a]Significantly different than all other groups at $p < .01$.
[b]Significantly different than Groups 3 and 4 at $p < .01$.
[c]Significantly different than Groups 1, 3, and 5 at $p < .01$.
[d]Significantly different than the Groups 2, 3, and 4 at $p < .01$.

question, we analyzed enhancement scores as continuous variables rather than couple types. With continuous enhancement scores we constructed a structural equation model (SEM) in which the interrelationship between both partners' affability and enhancement scores were included in the analyses. In addition, the SEM allowed us to more appropriately manage the nonindependence of the couple data as described by Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) by correlating error terms between partners. In the interest of space, we elected to only evaluate relationship satisfaction as an outcome variable, as the previous analyses indicated the patterns were similar for all the outcome variables. Results for the analyses of the other dependent variables are available upon request to the first author.

Figure 1 contains the SEM results that were obtained from the cross-sectional sample. Although error terms were included for each of the variables listed in the figure, they were not drawn into the SEMs in this study to simplify the figure. In Figure 1 all the pathways between variables were included in the model; hence

there were no degrees of freedom to calculate model fit statistics. Therefore, after calculating the initial results, we noticed that the coefficient for the path between Female Affability to Female Satisfaction was almost identical to the coefficient for the path between Male Affability to Male Satisfaction. Therefore, we constrained these two variables to be equal, thereby gaining one degree of freedom. The results in Figure 1 include this equality constraint.

We report several fit measures to assist in the evaluation of how well our hypothesized model replicates the sample data. We follow the recommendations of Hoyle and Panter (1995) to report both absolute fit indices and incremental fit indices. They recommend using the chi-square statistic as a general index and reporting two types of incremental fit indices. Accordingly, we report the Tucker and Lewis index (TLI; Hoyle & Panter). The TLI yields values ranging from 0 to 1.00 with values close to or above .95 considered to be indicative of good fit (Byrne, 2001). The second incremental fit index we report is the comparative fit index (CFI; Hoyle & Panter)
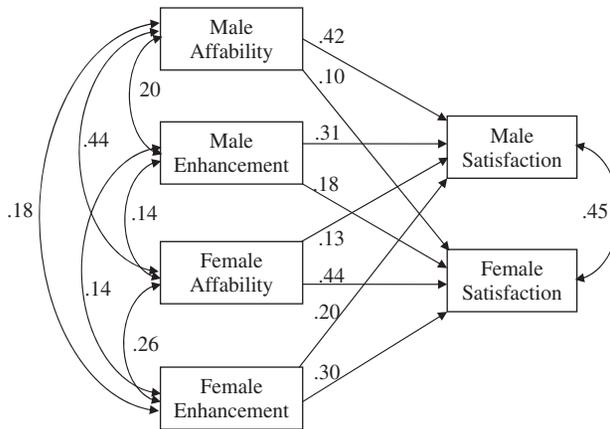
with values that fall within the familiar 0–1 range. Lastly, we report the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which is now seen as one of the most informative criteria in SEM (Byrne). A value below .05 indicates good fit (Arbuckle, 2005).

The analysis of the model presented in Figure 1 indicated that the model was an excellent fit to the data. The sample size for the SEM analysis with the cross-sectional sample was 4,784. The chi-square with 1 *df* was .01 and was not significant ($p = .952$), the TLI was .99, the CFI was .99, and the RMSEA was .01. The squared multiple correlation for Male Satisfaction was .47 and for Female Satisfaction was .44.

The coefficients in Figure 1 were all statistically significant ($p < .001$). The size of these coefficients indicated that, although affability was slightly more influential, enhancement scores were still substantially related to satisfaction even when accounting for the effects of affability and the interrelationships between the variables in the model. The enhancement results indicated that as individuals rated their partners higher than they rated themselves, their satisfaction scores increased. The correlation between male and female enhancement ratings was not large, but the correlation between affability ratings was. The size of the correlations between enhancement and affability indicated that these variables were measuring distinct concepts.

The results in Study 1 provided evidence that enhancement couple types and continuous enhancement measures had significant relationships with couple outcomes. An obvious follow-up question to these findings was what is the effect of enhancement measures on couple outcomes over time. With Study 2 we explored this question.

STUDY 2: ENHANCEMENT MEASURES AS PREDICTORS OF CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIP STABILITY

If enhancement measures are significantly related to couple outcomes as illustrated in Study 1, are they also predictive of couple outcomes over time? The attribution literature clearly shows that changes in relationship distress are associated with how partners view one another and how they attribute meaning to interpersonal behaviors (Fincham et al., 1987; Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; Gottman, 1999). Consequently, the research question addressed in Study 2 was how enhancement scores at Time 1 influenced relationship stability at Time 2.

METHOD

Sample

The Time 1 data were gathered via the RELATE questionnaire described in Study 1. The Time 2 data were gathered about 1 year later with an assessment called the RELATE-L. The

RELATE-L was developed in order to follow individuals and couples over time and obtain data that would provide insight into the long-term satisfaction and stability of couple relationships. The longitudinal version of RELATE was nearly identical to the original version of RELATE, except that questions that did not need to be asked more than once (e.g., family-of-origin structure, ethnicity) were removed and the number of items for some scales were reduced.

The longitudinal sample consisted of 335 heterosexual couples, or 670 individuals. One year after completing RELATE couples were asked to complete RELATE-L. When couples completed the original RELATE, 25% were married, 39% were engaged, and 36% were in a serious dating relationship. At the follow-up, 72% were married, 9% were engaged, 11% were in a serious dating relationship, and 8% were no longer in a relationship with their partner. The average age of participants was 27. Forty-two percent of the sample had completed a bachelor's degree or moved on to graduate studies. The sample was predominately Caucasian (90%), with smaller groups of Native American (1%), Asian (3%), Latino (2%), and African American (1%) respondents, with the remaining respondents (3%) in a mixed/biracial or other category.

Measures and Analyses

The measures in the second study were identical to those in the first study. The affability and enhancement scores were also calculated in the same manner as in Study 1. Couple types were not developed, as the purpose was to explore how continuous measures of enhancement and affability influenced changes in relationship stability. Because some couples ended their relationship before the second measurement and these couples did not complete the second assessment, it was only possible to use relationship stability as the outcome measure. Couples completed stability measures at Time 1 and Time 2 with those couples who had broken up receiving a relationship stability score of 1, indicating the lowest stability on the 5-point scale.

As is evident from the statistics previously presented on the sample for Study 2, a large number of couples transitioned to marriage between Time 1 and Time 2. Therefore, we conducted a discriminant analysis using the affability and enhancement scores from Time 1 as predictors

of group membership in one of three relationship status categories at Time 2: broke up, stayed the same, or transitioned to marriage. Following the discriminant analysis we analyzed the model shown in Figure 2 using AMOS. All the variables to the left of Male and Female Stability at Time 2 were measured at Time 1.

RESULTS

The discriminant analysis was conducted to determine whether four predictors—enhancement and affability scores at Time 1 for both men and women—could predict relationship status categories at Time 2. The overall Wilks's lambda was significant, $\Lambda = .86$, $\chi^2(8, N = 335) = 48.77$, $p < .001$, indicating that overall the predictors differentiated among the three relationship status groups. In addition, the residual Wilks's lambda was significant, $\Lambda = .97$, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 9.70$, $p < .05$. This test indicated that the predictors significantly differentiated among the three relationship status groups after partialling out the effects of the first discriminant function. As a result, we chose to interpret both discriminant functions.

Table 4 contains the within-group correlations between the predictors and the discriminant functions in addition to the standardized coefficient weights. Male scores had the strongest relationship with the first discriminant function, whereas female scores had the strongest relationship with the second discriminant function. The standardized coefficients indicated that enhancement scores had a stronger influence in discriminating between the status groups at Time 2 than affability scores.

When trying to predict relationship status at Time 2 we were able to classify correctly 48% of the individuals in the sample. The predictor variables, however, were much better at predicting those who transitioned to marriage or who broke up; the percentage of cases classified correctly were 63% and 52%, respectively. The percentage of cases classified correctly was only 29% for those who stayed in the same relationship status from Time 1 to Time 2. When evaluating these statistics for the percentage of cases correctly classified, it is important to consider that, because there were three groups, 33% would be correctly classified by chance alone. Consequently, enhancement and affability measures were substantially better than chance at discriminating those who moved from the

Table 4. *Standardized Coefficients and Correlations of Predictor Variables With the Two Discriminant Functions for Relationship Status Groups at Time 2*

Predictors	Correlation Coefficients With Discriminant Functions		Standardized Coefficients for Discriminant Functions	
	Function 1	Function 2	Function 1	Function 2
Male Enhancement	.71	.05	.65	.26
Male Affability	.77	.26	.62	.18
Female Enhancement	.32	.69	.23	.91
Female Affability	.50	.51	.02	.66

single to married status or for those who broke up between Time 1 and Time 2, but were less effective than chance at predicting those who stayed in the same status across the time periods.

### *Analyzing the Influence of Enhancement Over Time*

To evaluate the influence of enhancement over time, we analyzed the model in Figure 2 using AMOS. The model in Figure 2 indicates that the influence of enhancement on stability at Time 2 is being evaluated while including the effects of affability and stability at Time 1 on stability at Time 2. We used a different approach to obtain a degree of freedom in Figure 2 than we did in Figure 1. Because the correlation between male enhancement and female enhancement was not

significant, we removed this path and thereby had 1 *df* to calculate model fit.

The analysis of the model presented in Figure 2 indicated that the model was an excellent fit to the data. The sample size for the SEM analysis with the longitudinal sample was 335 couples. The chi-square with 1 *df* was 3.03 and was not significant ($p = .08$), the TLI was .96, the CFI was .99, and the RMSEA was .08. The squared multiple correlation for Male Stability at Time 2 was .28 and for Female Stability at Time 2 was. 29.

The coefficients in Figure 2 indicate that all the enhancement measures were significantly related to stability at Time 1 and Time 2, whereas most of the affability measures were not significantly related to stability. In fact, none of the female affability measures was significant,

FIGURE 2. SEM RESULTS FOR THE INFLUENCE OF AFFABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT SCORES ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION SCORES USING THE LONGITUDINAL SAMPLE.
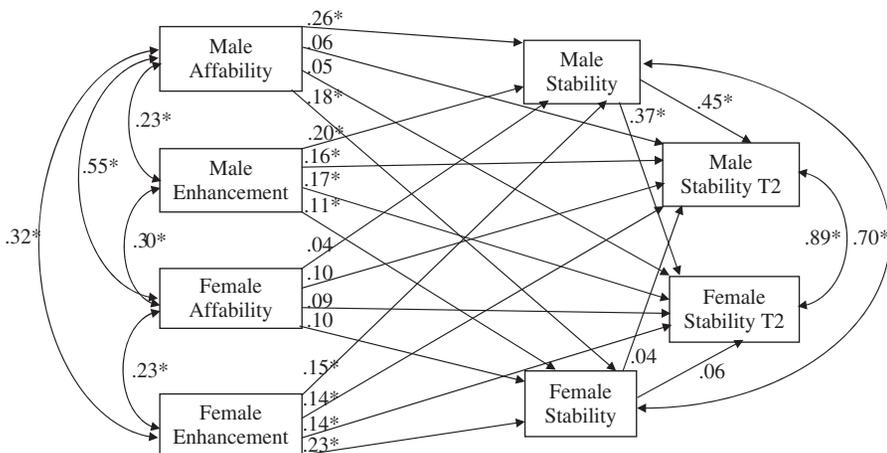
and the male affability measures were only significantly related to stability scores at Time 1.

DISCUSSION

The results from the analyses provide unambiguous answers to the research questions explored in this article. Couples in which one or both individuals enhance the self above the partner have lower relationship satisfaction and stability and higher levels of negative communication and expectations for change than all other couples. Couples where both partners enhance the self above the partner are particularly vulnerable to experiencing worse relationship outcomes. In contrast, couples in which both individuals rate their partner substantially higher than they rate themselves have the highest relationship outcome scores in the large cross-sectional sample. The means on satisfaction scores for couples in the partner enhancing categories are 15% – 27% higher than are the means for couples in the self-enhancing categories (see Tables 2 and 3).

The results reported for Study 1 about the effects of enhancement are intriguing and provide additional evidence of the benefits of positive ''illusions'' in romantic relationships (Murray et al., 1996). There is something powerful and reinforcing about being in a relationship with someone who is seen as at least the same but usually better than the self. Although these results could be interpreted to mean that people are just naturally modest and self-deprecating when rating themselves as compared to rating their partners, we suspect that it is much more complicated than this. Other studies (Murray et al., 1996; Taylor & Browne, 1988) demonstrate that individuals typically see themselves more positively than others see them, with the exception of their romantic partners, leaving in considerable doubt the idea that what is happening in our findings is a modesty or humility effect. More likely is the idea that the partner becomes integrated into the view of self in a relatively short period of time, such that the ratings of the partner reflect positively upon the self, including the ability to choose well and the ability to ''create'' or engender positive qualities in others through the expression of caring. The work of Murray and colleagues suggests as much by implying that over time people become more like these positive ''illusions'' held about them by their partners; hence, the relationship continues to be

satisfying and fulfilling and thereby more likely to help partners feel better about themselves and those they love (Murray et al., 2003).

According to the results from this study and those of others, relationships that do not possess this partner-enhancing quality are vulnerable to serious relationship problems (Murray & Holmes, 1999; Zetner, 2005). What may be missing in these couples is a crucial relationship reinforcing structure. This structure, which places the partner equal to or above the self in capabilities, may be central to resolving problems by encouraging individuals to take personal responsibility and personal action rather than blaming the partner and pressuring the partner to change. Halford and colleagues have recently shown the relevance of what they call ''self-regulation,'' which is each partner's capacity to assess the strengths and weakness in their own behavior within the relationship, to identify self-change goals to enhance the relationship, and to implement self-change (Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Judge, 2006; Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Siobhan, 2005). Although we do not measure self-regulation directly, ancillary measures that approach what may be aspects of self-regulation provide some evidence for this hypothesis as to why self-enhancing may be damaging. In the MANCOVA we conducted in Study 1 the different couple types were compared on measures of expectations for change (how much partners wanted each other to change) and negative communication (how much respondents criticized their partners, how much they saw glaring faults, and how much they felt contempt for their partner during arguments). The self-enhancing couples were much worse than those in the other groups and were approximately 22% higher than partner enhancing couples on negative communication and 27% higher on desire for change (see Tables 2 and 3). The mean differences were significant even when controlling for relationship length and the overall level of affability.

It is probable, then, that without the structure of positive enhancement of the other, many other relationship necessities such as empathy, understanding, positive communication, and commitment may be difficult to experience or sustain. If a person hears, perceives, and understands that they are seen as less capable or affable than the partner, this may be a lethal dynamic that prohibits the development of the self-regulation

relationship patterns that are necessary to sustain relationships and endure common challenges.

The findings from Study 1 are relevant even when length of the relationship is controlled. Although it is common to expect newer, more infatuated relationships to be filled with positivity, this is an unlikely explanation for the results in this study. Relationship duration is related to self- and partner-enhancing patterns, but not so dramatically that the influence of enhancement is no longer significant when relationship length is controlled. Newer couples may be more positive than couples who have been together longer, but the evidence here suggests that partner enhancing couples fare better regardless of how long they have been together.

Even more important, in terms of eliminating alternative explanations, is the fact that the benefits of partner enhancement are present regardless of the overall levels of affability. The structural equation model in Study 1 shows that the overall levels of affability are important predictors of relationship satisfaction; enhancement scores, however, continue to be significant. In fact, with the model in Figure 2, affability measures were all insignificant as predictors of stability at Time 2. The MANCOVA results also indicate the enduring significance of enhancement patterns when controlling for overall levels on affability, making it clear that enhancement patterns are influential for couples at all levels of affability. It might be best to be in a relationship with someone who is very affable compared to others, but even if a person is less affable than others it is still beneficial if she or he is perceived as more affable than the self. It may be that the reference point of the self is simply much more important than the reference points of other people.

Two results are intriguing from the longitudinal analyses. The discriminant analysis results indicate that enhancement is more influential than affability in predicting which couples will change their status from premarried to married or which couples will break up. The analysis of the model depicted in Figure 2 also indicates that enhancement but not affability influences stability at Time 2. The implication of this finding is that, over time, partner enhancement becomes more important, whereas overall levels of affability recede in relevance. This provides preliminary support for our ideas that partner enhancement may be an indication of partner

blame or related to negative attributions that erode the relationship over time.

The small differences between men and women are noteworthy. The results from the first study are almost identical for men and women. For the second study the weak effects of female stability are substantially different than the effects for male stability. Still, the large correlations between male and female stability at each time period suggest that most of the variance may be accounted for in these correlations rather than the direct effects. These large correlations also provide additional evidence for the strong interrelationship between male and female scores. It may be that with data from couples over longer periods of time, gender differences will emerge beyond what were found in this study.

This study has a few limitations that may influence the generalizability of the results. Neither sample was a representative sample; hence idiosyncrasies of the participants may partially explain the results. In addition, the longitudinal sample is important in verifying how results from one measurement might influence outcomes in the future, but the sample was even less representative. Couples were also only followed for 1 year, and this may not be long enough to see substantial changes in results.

Some authors have criticized the use of difference scores in couple research, suggesting that difference scores often wash out important distinctions between couples, as very different patterns can result in the same difference scores, and sometimes difference scores do not provide any new information above that provided in the original measures (Edwards, 1994; Griffin et al., 1999; Murray et al., 1996). Others have suggested that there is value in using this type of calculation when relevant (McCrae, 1993; Tisak & Smith, 1994). Unlike some researchers who use difference scores without specific hypotheses or theories, we explored a particular type of difference, one in which individuals rated their partners higher than they rated themselves. Hence, we were less prone to misinterpret difference score results that grouped together very unique types of couples. In addition, we grouped couples only when a specific difference was larger or smaller than the average difference by at least half a standard deviation. Thus, we were less likely to consider couples as ''different'' when in fact they were the same. Furthermore, in both the MANCOVA and SEM

analyses the effects for the overall levels of affability were included in the models so that we could evaluate the effects of difference scores over and above that of the original variables as suggested by Griffin et al. (1999).

In summary then, even with the weaknesses of the samples and the analyses, there is something unique influencing outcomes when couples are in a relationship where it is clear that at least one person sees the partner more positively than they see the self, even if both people see the self in a relatively positive or relatively negative way as compared to others. This indicates that the couple dynamics in a relationship of either partner or self-enhancers are more than simply a reflection of low self-esteem or vanity. Although we might expect that in any relationship each person will have strengths and weaknesses that are sometimes in contrast to or sometimes congruent with those of the partner, when we are asking couples to rate something as central to relationship health as affability, it is preferable if couples possess the partner-enhancing patterns. In support of attribution theory (Fincham et al., 1987), it is important that partners attribute positive motives and characteristics to their partners and that this pattern holds over time. Beyond the typical attribution finding, it is also important that partners attribute positive motives and characteristics to their partners at least equal to and preferably superior than their views of their own motives and characteristics.

NOTE

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