

When We Want Different Things:

Self-Monitoring as a Moderator of the Ideal Standards Model

The desire to establish and maintain interpersonal connections with others has been considered a basic human motive (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1991). Consistent with the fundamental nature of this motive, the presence and absence of close relationships significantly influence individuals' physical health (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Cohen, Kaplan, & Manuck, 1994; Kiecolt-Glaser, 1999; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993; Segrin, 1998) and psychological well-being (Assh & Byers, 1996; Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Myers & Deiner, 1995; Schachter, 1959).

While the importance of successful relationships has been demonstrated, the processes whereby one gauges the success of one's relationship is still a matter of theoretical debate (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). One possibility is that judgments about a specific relationship may be based on the degree of consistency between expectations for one's relationship and actual perceptions of one's relationship. The development and maintenance of ideal standards in one's relationship has been discussed from several different theoretical approaches, including psychodynamic theories (e.g., Freud, 1961), humanistic theories (e.g., Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961), sociological theories (e.g., Waller & Hill, 1951), and social psychological theories (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1978). A recent model that has empirically tested the tendency for individuals to compare ideals to perceptions, and thereby derive their satisfaction from the discrepancy, is the ideal standards model (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999).

The Ideal Standards Model

The idea that individuals evaluate their romantic partners and relationships based on the consistency between ideal standards and perceptions is hardly novel. Murray and Holmes (1996)

provided an extensive review of partner and relationship idealization. They found that the most satisfied dating and marital partners usually project the features of their ideal partners onto their own partners, effectively seeing in their partners the person they ideally wish to find (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a). In a one-year longitudinal study involving dating couples, Murray et al. (1996b) found that: (a) relationships were more likely to remain stable the more partners idealize each other; (b) partners who idealized each other more early in the year tended to experience larger increases in satisfaction and larger decreases in relationship conflict and doubts by the end of the year; and (c) over time, individuals gradually come to share their partners' idealized images of themselves.

Interdependence theory, as formulated by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), has also addressed this topic. It posits that individuals make judgments about their relationships according to two standards: (a) the degree to which they believe they are receiving what they feel they "deserve" from their current partner/relationship (i.e., comparison level), and (b) the degree to which the current partner and relationship provide outcomes that exceed those available from the best available alternative partner (i.e., comparison level for alternatives). According to interdependence theory, individuals who believe they are receiving less than they deserve should become dissatisfied with their partner and relationship, and those with superior alternatives should be less likely to remain in the relationship over time.

By proposing that general cognitive standards exist, interdependence theory can explain why some people leave ostensibly rewarding relationships while others remain in bleak ones. However, the theory does not address the possibility that individuals may evaluate their partners or relationships on content-specific standards or dimensions. The ideal standards model suggests that individuals regularly make cognitive comparisons between their ideal standards (or

expectations) and perceptions of their current partner/relationship on multiple dimensions. In addition, unlike interdependence theory, the ideal standards model focuses on the processes involved in making these cognitive comparisons.

The Model

Partner and relationship ideals function as chronically accessible knowledge structures that most likely precede, and may causally influence, important judgments and decisions in relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999). The ideal standards model maintains that these structures contain three interrelated components: images of the self, the ideal partner, and the ideal relationship. Using an inductive approach, Fletcher and colleagues (1999) developed and validated a set of scales that measures ideal standards in romantic relationships. A factor analysis of the ideal partner items revealed three factors: (1) partner characteristics relevant to intimacy, trust, warmth, and loyalty (labeled Partner Warmth/Trustworthiness), (2) personality and appearance characteristics concerning how attractive, energetic, and healthy the partner was (labeled Partner Vitality/Attractiveness), and (3) characteristics relevant to the partner's social status and resources (labeled Partner Status/Resources). The relationship ideal items produced two factors: (1) the importance of intimacy, loyalty, and stability in a relationship (labeled Relationship Intimacy/Loyalty) and (2) the importance of excitement and passion in a relationship (labeled Relationship Passion). All five scales possess good internal consistency and adequate test-retest consistency. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the best-fitting model is one in which the five relationship and partner ideals load on two overarching factors: Warmth/Loyalty and Vitality/Status/Passion (see Figure 1; Fletcher et al., 1999). Although previous research has analyzed the five ideals (three partner ideals and two relationship ideals)

separately, they are intercorrelated and tend to behave similarly (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000).

The model contends that the more closely perceptions of the current partner/relationship match individuals' ideal standards, the more positively they should evaluate their relationship. Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, and Fletcher (2001) found that those whose partners more closely matched their ideals reported higher satisfaction with their relationship. Importantly, a partner effect also emerged such that based on the individuals' reported ideal-perception consistency, the partners of the individuals were also more satisfied with the relationship. Through multiple studies and multiple operationalizations of discrepancy between ideals and perceptions, previous research has demonstrated that higher ideal-perception consistency predicts greater perceived quality of the partner and the relationship (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher et al., 2000) and lower relationship dissolution rates (Fletcher et al., 2000).

Alternate models. It seems plausible that the model may be reversed: Evaluations of one's partner may influence the discrepancy between the ideal standard and actual perception. To test and make inferences about possible causal relations, Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (1998) used cross-lagged analyses and found that changes in ratings over time occurred in only one direction. Specifically, greater consistency between ideals and perceptions of one's partner/relationship assessed at an earlier time in the relationship predicted increases in evaluations of the partner and the relationship over time, but early evaluations did not predict later ideal-perception consistency. These results suggest that the cognitive comparisons between ideal standards and perceptions of the current partner and relationship influence the way in which partners and relationships are evaluated over time.

The Possibility of Individual Difference Variables as Moderators

Individuals are most likely to idealize their partners on attributes that are central to what they need or value in a mate (Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971). Consistent with this, Murray and colleagues (1996a) found that in both dating and marital relationships: (a) individuals' impressions of their partners tended to be more similar to their own self-images and their own images of an ideal partner than with how their partners actually perceived themselves; (b) more satisfied individuals had more idealized images of their partners; and (c) individuals were more satisfied when their partners idealized them in return. According to the ideal standards model, ideal standards are more firmly connected to the self-concept than general beliefs or attitudes about relationships. Individuals who place more importance on specific characteristics tend to desire partners with attributes that would facilitate the development of such ideal relationships (Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001). For example, individuals who had stronger beliefs about the importance of intimacy in successful relationships rated partner warmth/trustworthiness and relationship intimacy/loyalty ideals as relatively more important. Similarly, individuals who placed more importance on passion and excitement than on intimacy in their relationships desired partners who scored higher on the partner vitality/attractiveness ideals scale. Those who rated external factors (e.g., a nice house) as more important in influencing relationship success placed relatively more weight on the partner status/resources ideal. This is especially the case for individuals with less flexible standards (Campbell et al., 2001).

To date, no one has empirically examined for whom the ideal standards model may differ. For what kinds of people might the ideal standards model have differential paths? Do certain types of individuals possess personality traits from which emerge systematically different

motivational goals or desired characteristics for their romantic partner or relationship? The current research tests the hypothesis that one answer lies in the fundamentally divergent orientations of high and low self-monitors. Tying individual differences in self-monitoring to the cognitive processes and expectations underlying the number and variety of functions served by romantic relationships can illuminate both the nature of romantic relationships as well as self-monitoring as an individual difference.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is an individual trait reflecting the degree to which individuals differ in their responsiveness to social cues. Specifically, it involves the degree of concern individuals have for behaving appropriately in a given social setting (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Self-monitoring is a meaningful and interpretable causal variable with pervasive influences on social behavior.

High self-monitors possess considerable social skills and use them to engage in strategic self-presentation. They are motivated by concerns about situational or social appropriateness, and judge others' dispositions in order to identify "skilled activity partners" (Snyder & Simpson, 1984). When gathering information about a prospective romantic partner, high self-monitors decide if a potential date possesses those attributes (e.g., physical attractiveness, social status) that are valued in a romantic-specific encounter.

In contrast, low self-monitors attend more to their inner psychological states such as attitudes, values and personality attributes, and use these as a guide for their behavior. They are motivated by concerns about self-behavior congruence, and are thought to judge others' dispositions to determine if the individual is personally compatible with themselves. When deciding on a prospective romantic partner, low self-monitors tend to examine the individual for

characteristics they value in close relationships (e.g., shared values or similar interests; Leone & Hawkins, 2006). Generally, high and low self-monitors do not differ in the amount of attention they give to a potential romantic partner, but in the focus of their attention and the function that the potential romantic partner serves.

In order to be the “right person at the right place at the right time,” high self-monitors organize their social world to be similar to themselves. High self-monitors tend to structure their relationships in a way that allows ample flexibility and adaptability to play a variety of diverse roles without experiencing role conflict. Their social worlds involve many psychologically distant relationships, and there may be several alternative relationships that would also be well-suited to their activity-based needs. Consequently, high self-monitors adopt an uncommitted orientation to their social world in which they create a segregated social network that allows them to be both emotionally distant from others and nonexclusive, such that they can engage in a variety of activities with different partners. In terms of attachment theory, the attachment high self-monitors form with significant others tends to be avoidant (Gaines, Work, Johnson, Youn, & Lai, 2000). They may feel uncomfortable being psychologically close to significant others and fear that their close friends and romantic partners want them to be more intimate than they are.

Alternatively, low self-monitors need to structure their interpersonal relationships in a way that allows sufficient autonomy and security to express a variety of dispositional attributes without experiencing interpersonal conflict. Consequently, low self-monitors adopt a committed orientation to their social world where they create a uniform social network in which they are close and exclusive. The attachments low self-monitors form with significant others tend to be secure (Gaines et al., 2000). Low self-monitors feel comfortable being psychologically close and do not fear that their close friends and romantic partners want them to be more intimate.

Given their distinct styles toward close relationships, high and low self-monitors have been shown to have different expectations about the nature of the experiences they will have in romantic relationships (Leone et al., 2006). The dating histories of high self-monitors and low self-monitors differ both qualitatively and quantitatively. Specifically, previous research has found that high self-monitors reported dating nearly twice as many people in the preceding 12 months than did low self-monitors (Simpson, 1987; Snyder & Simpson, 1984). Similarly, the duration of long-term relationships is almost twice as long for low self-monitors (Snyder et al., 1984). Qualitatively, exclusive dating relationships are likely to become psychologically more intimate for low self-monitors than for high self-monitors (Leone et al., 2006). Furthermore, low self-monitoring couples are more likely to think in terms of future time orientation than high self-monitoring couples (Oner, 2002), and to project that their current romantic relationship will develop into marriage (Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999).

Compared with their high self-monitoring counterparts, low self-monitoring spouses (both wives and husbands) are more likely to say that they invest much of their resources in the marriage, are intensely committed to the marriage, and feel psychologically intimate with their spouse (Leone & Hall, 2003). With the knowledge of their generally uncommitted orientation to close relationships and their lower commitment to their relationships, it may not come as a surprise that high self-monitoring spouses are more likely than low self-monitoring spouses to report that they had previously been divorced at least once (Leone et al., 2003). Moreover, this difference in divorce rates was independent of other factors (e.g., age, children) known to negatively affect marital stability.

In dating relationships, high self-monitors are more likely to see love as a game, while low self-monitors are more likely to see love as an affectively profound experience or as a search

for a partner with whom they can develop a close and long-lasting attachment (Neto, 1993). Additionally, when asked to play matchmaker, high self-monitors paired couples in terms of their physical attractiveness (i.e., their short-term potential), while low self-monitors paired them in terms of personality congruence (i.e., their long-term potential).

High and low self-monitors do not differ in the time they spend gathering information about a prospective date when faced with the possibility of interaction with that partner (Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, & Dermer, 1976). Instead, high and low self-monitors gather different kinds of information about potential partners. High self-monitors tend to focus on the external qualities of the potential date. They look for and value attributes such as social status, physical attractiveness, and financial resources (Buchanan, 2000; Jones, 1993; Snyder, Berscheid & Glick, 1985). Conversely, low self-monitors tend to focus on the intrinsic qualities of the individual. They look for and value attributes such as similarity of values and beliefs, personality desirability, and other dispositional characteristics such as honesty, kindness, and responsibility (Buchanan, 2000; Jones, 1993; Snyder et al., 1985). This difference may be due to the function of the criteria used to evaluate romantic partners. When asked to think of criteria for choosing a romantic partner, high self-monitors considered physical attractiveness more important than personality whereas low self-monitors considered personality more important (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1995). A potential explanation for this finding is that physical attractiveness serves a social-adjustive function by enhancing one's social image, while personality serves a value-expressive function by enhancing one's compatibility (Leone et al., 2006).

Overview of the Present Research

The current research seeks to integrate an individual difference variable (specifically, self-monitoring) with the ideal standards model. Importantly, the qualities high and low self-

monitors desire tend to directly correspond with the two superordinate factors of the ideal standards model (warmth/trustworthiness and vitality/status/passion). When actively involved in a dating relationship, high self-monitors (compared to low self-monitors) cite the satisfaction of extrinsic motives (e.g., social status, access to new activities and individuals) as the reasons for their involvement. Alternatively, low self-monitors cite satisfaction of intrinsic motives (e.g., honesty, trust, similarity in beliefs and values) as reasons for their involvement in the relationship (Jones, 1993; Snyder et al., 1985). The ideal standards model appears to differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic features of one's romantic partner and relationship.

Citing extrinsic reasons as the motivation for one's romantic relationship may undermine the value of one's relationship, and this may affect relationship evaluations. Previous research has found that when laboratory manipulations induced couples to perceive themselves as intrinsically motivated to be in their relationship (defined as the set of rewards directly received by involvement with the partner, such as intimacy), they reported higher scores on Rubin's (1973) Loving Scale than those induced to perceive themselves as extrinsically motivated to be in their relationship (defined as rewards received from others outside of the relationship, as a product of involvement with the partner, such as social status, respect, and access to new opportunities; Seligman, Fazio, & Zanna, 1980). It seems possible that possessing high ideal standards for relationship intimacy and commitment (i.e., intrinsic rewards) may facilitate and reflect a preference for long-term mating. Alternatively, having high ideal standards for attraction, passion and excitement (i.e., extrinsic rewards) in a relationship should facilitate and reflect a preference for short-term mating.

As noted earlier, individuals are most likely to idealize their partners on attributes that are central to what they need or value in a mate (Stephan et al., 1971). I have also reviewed the

central tenet of the ideal standards model: The more closely perceptions of one's current partner/relationship match one's ideal standards, the more positively he or she tends to evaluate the romantic relationship. The current study tests the relationship between self-monitoring in romantic relationships and the components of the ideal standards model. Using the relationship and partner dimensions from the ideal standards model, I hypothesized that the dating relationships of high self-monitors would be satisfactory to the extent that these individuals receive from their partner and relationship relatively extrinsic outcomes such as social status, resources, and physical attractiveness (i.e., vitality/status/passion ideal). In contrast, relationships of low self-monitors should be satisfactory to the extent that these individuals receive from their partner and relationship relatively intrinsic outcomes such as trustworthiness, intimacy, and loyalty (i.e., warmth/trustworthiness ideal). The hypothesized model is presented in Figure 2.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Results from previous work on the ideal standards model will be replicated: Relationship quality will be predicted by the degree of consistency between one's ideal standards and perceptions of one's current romantic partner and relationship (henceforth referred to as ideal-perception consistency).

Hypothesis 2a. With regard to the warmth/trustworthiness dimension of the ideal standards model, the above effect will be moderated by one's self-monitoring orientation. Specifically, higher ideal-perception consistency will predict higher relationship quality, especially for low self-monitors.

Hypothesis 2b. With regard to the status/vitality/passion dimension of the ideal standards model, the above effect will be moderated by one's self-monitoring orientation. Specifically,

higher ideal-perception consistency will predict higher relationship quality, especially for high self-monitors.

Operationalizing discrepancy between ideals and perceptions of the partner/relationship

Multiple studies have tested the ideal standards model with regard to partner regulation and flexibility, and to demonstrate partner effects. These studies have also, however, used several different methods to calculate the discrepancy between ideal standards and actual perceptions of the partner and relationship. It has not been discussed why the researchers used one type of calculation over another. Thus, one central aim of the current study was to methodologically compare and contrast five different types of discrepancy score approaches within the same sample. As the discrepancy between one's ideal partner and perceptions of one's current partner produces a different construct than its components, simple difference scores are confounded and therefore not appropriate (Griffin, Murray, & Gonzalez, 1999; Zuckerman, Gagne, Nafshi, Knee, & Kieffer, 2002). Thus, simple difference scores will not be discussed further in the present research.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 218 undergraduates at the University of Houston who reported being in a romantic relationship for at least three months. Participants completed the study online. To ensure high quality data, six questions were embedded within the survey to ensure that participants were paying attention. Those who answered more than two of the verification questions incorrectly were removed ($n = 46$). Therefore, the final sample consisted of 172 undergraduates (86.6% female). There were no significant differences in demographics between the beginning and final samples. The average age was 23.35 ($SD = 6.11$) years and the average

relationship length was 3.39 ($SD = 3.93$) years. With regard to relationship status, 4.6% of participants reported casually dating, 49.2% reported exclusively dating, 25.7% reported nearly engaged, 5.1% reported being engaged, and 15.4% reported being married. The sample was ethnically diverse, with 29.6% Hispanic/Latino, 28.5% Caucasian, 16.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 15.1% African American, and 9.9 % who selected “Other.”

Participants first completed a section regarding individual and relational demographics. Participants were then asked about their ideals and perceptions regarding their current romantic relationship in several different ways, indirectly and directly. The order in which the ideal and perception scales were presented was counterbalanced; order effects were not present. Participants then responded to two scales which measured self-monitoring, and finally, to items about the quality of their current romantic relationship.

Measures

Discrepancy overview. The current research examined ideal-perception discrepancy using multiple operationalizations, including direct and indirect methods. The direct method simply asked participants to indicate the degree to which their partner matches a given attribute of their ideal partner, and the score is not transformed in any way. Items from the other four approaches (within-subject correlations, absolute value of the difference, covariation, and interaction) assessed partner/relationship ideals and partner/relationship perceptions. For these indirect operationalizations, the same item scores were used, but the methods used to create discrepancy (and thus the discrepancy scores) were different based on how they were calculated.

Direct items measuring discrepancy. Participants were asked to compare their current *partner* to their ideal partner (i.e., “how much does your current partner match a given attribute of your ideal partner?”) on several individual and interpersonal traits (from the Partner Ideal

Scale; Fletcher et al., 1999) using 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *does not match my ideal at all*, 7 = *completely matches my ideal*). The scales consist of three dimensions: warmth/trustworthiness (approximately 20 items: e.g., understanding, kind; Cronbach's alpha .96), vitality/attractiveness (approximately 15 items: e.g., outgoing, sexy; Cronbach's alpha .95), and status/resources (approximately 10 items: e.g., successful, financially secure; Cronbach's alpha .82). Additionally, participants also compared their current *relationship* to their ideal relationship (i.e., "how does your current relationship match a given attribute of your ideal relationship?") on several traits (from the Relationship Ideal Scale; Fletcher et al., 1999) using an identical scale to the Partner Ideal Scale. The scales consist of two dimensions: intimacy/loyalty (approximately 15 items: e.g., caring, honest, support; Cronbach's alpha .97) and passion (approximately 10 items: e.g., challenging, fun, exciting; Cronbach's alpha .93). Thus, a total of 69 items were assessed. This direct procedure was adopted because it has produced reliable and valid results in prior research (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006).

Indirect measures: Partner/relationship ideals. The four indirect methods of calculating discrepancy that were used in the current research (within-subject correlation approach, absolute value approach, covariance approach, and interaction approach) were computed using the participants' ideal and actual perception responses. The 69 primary measure items were constructed from the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales (Fletcher et al., 1999) and identical to the items used in the direct discrepancy approach. These scales have demonstrated good internal reliability, test-retest reliability, and convergent and predictive validity when used to assess the importance of partner and relationship ideal standards (Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher et al., 1999, 2000a).

Participants were asked to “rate the ideal partner in terms of the importance that each item has in describing your ideal partner in a close relationship.” Each item was answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very unimportant*, 7 = *very important*). The same format was used for the ideal relationship items, with participants being asked to rate each item “in terms of the importance that each item has in describing your ideal close relationship.”

Indirect measures: Partner/relationship perceptions. Participants also completed an adaptation of the partner and relationship ideal scales that assessed judgments of ideal-related behaviors in their *current* relationships. The partner perception scale asks participants to “rate each item in terms of how accurately each term describes your actual partner in your current relationship.” The relationship perception scale asks participants to “rate each item in terms of how accurately each one describes your actual current romantic relationship.” The items are identical to those described in the partner and relationship ideal scales, with each item being accompanied by a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all like my partner/relationship*, 7 = *very much like my partner/relationship*).

Self-monitoring: Original scale. Self-monitoring was assessed using Snyder and Gangestad’s (1986) 18-item Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS). Participants indicated “True” if the statement is true or mostly true of how they feel, and “False” if the statement is false or mostly false. Example items are “I’m not always the person I appear to be,” “I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain others,” and “I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people” (reverse-scored). Responses were averaged (after reversal where appropriate) such that higher scores reflect higher self-monitoring. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) in the current study was .68.

Self-monitoring: Revised scale. Previous research has noted that the Self-Monitoring Scale is flawed and a different, more comprehensive scale is needed (Briggs & Cheek, 1988). The Self-Monitoring Scale offers dichotomous response options, with participants indicating “True” or “False” as how they typically feel or behave. The SMS was modified where participants indicate the degree to which they feel the items represent who they are on a Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all like me*, 7 = *very much like me*). The 18 items from Snyder and Gangestad (1986) were utilized, and responses were averaged (after reversal where appropriate) such that higher scores reflect higher self-monitoring. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) in the current study was .70.

The present research analyzed data using both self-monitoring scales, and they performed similarly in all but one analysis. Thus, results are presented for the revised SMS, and results from both scales are presented only when discrepant findings emerged.

Relationship quality. The Perceived Relationship Quality Components inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000b) was selected as the indicator of relationship quality based on its previous use with research on the ideal standards model (Fletcher et al., 2000a; Overall et al., 2006). It measures six components (Love, Passion, Commitment, Trust, Satisfaction, and Closeness). Three items assess each component on 7-point Likert-type scales. Past studies have used confirmatory factor analysis (see Fletcher et al., 2000b) to show that the inventory possesses good internal reliabilities for each first-order construct and a good fit for the model in which the indicator variables load on the six first-order constructs, which in turn load on a second-order factor representing overall perceived relationship quality. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) in the current study was .96.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for each of the major variables in the study. Tables 2a-c present zero-order correlations between the different types of discrepancies used (direct and indirect) for total scores (all 69 items), warmth-trustworthiness scores (36 items), and vitality/status/passion scores (33 items), respectively.

Discrepancy Overview

Previous research has found support for the ideal standards model using different measures of discrepancy, but no studies have compared the various methods within the same sample. The current analyses consist of calculating ideal-perception discrepancy five different ways, using one direct method and four indirect methods. Thus, both hypotheses were tested with each of the five discrepancy approaches. It should be noted that the Type I error rate may be inflated due to the extensive multiple analyses. Associations with p-values between .05 and .01 may be interpreted cautiously.

Using the model previously found to have best fit (Fletcher et al., 1999), analyses were computed with the five partner and relationship ideal dimensions (69 items) collapsing onto two superordinate factors: Warmth/trustworthiness (W/T) and status/vitality/passion (S/V/P; see Figure 1). Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was good for each factor with both ideals and perceptions. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha for ideals was .95 for warmth/trustworthiness and .95 for status/vitality/passion. For perceptions, Cronbach's alpha was .98 for warmth/trustworthiness and .95 for status/vitality/passion. Strategies for calculating discrepancy using each method are reviewed in detail below, and are followed by the results for both hypotheses.

Direct Discrepancy

Participants were asked the degree to which their current partner matches a given attribute of their ideal partner. All items within each dimension were averaged, with higher scores indicating that the romantic partner closely matches the participant's ideal on a given dimension. Lower scores indicate a poorer match. To evaluate Hypothesis 1, all items were averaged to create a total direct consistency score. To evaluate Hypothesis 2, the two warmth/trustworthiness dimensions were averaged, and the three status/vitality/resources dimensions were averaged. Thus, every participant received one score for each of the two superordinate dimensions (W/T and S/V/P).

Hypothesis 1. It was expected that prior findings for the ideal standards model would replicate; specifically, a larger discrepancy between ideals and perceptions should predict lower relationship quality. This hypothesis was supported. A positive correlation emerged between the total direct consistency score and relationship quality, $r(171) = .82, p < .001$. As Hypothesis 2 separates the overall consistency into two superordinate factors, it may be helpful to also examine results of Hypothesis 1 within the two dimensions. Breaking down the total direct consistency score, consistency within the warmth/trustworthiness dimension was positively associated with relationship quality, $r(171) = .80, p < .001$. Further, consistency within the vitality/status/passion dimension was also positively associated with relationship quality, $r(171) = .71, p < .001$.

Hypothesis 2. It was anticipated that two significant interactions would emerge between self-monitoring orientation and ideal-perception consistency predicting relationship quality, one for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and one for the status/vitality/passion dimension. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analyses were employed and two separate models were

computed for each dimension of the ideal standards model (W/T and S/V/P). The first model examined the ideal-perception consistency within the specific dimension and self-monitoring orientation as predictors of relationship quality. The second model included the same terms, as well as the two-way interaction of consistency and self-monitoring orientation.

In accordance with Hypothesis 2, it was hypothesized that for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, high ideal-perception consistency would predict higher relationship quality, especially for those lower in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2a). Ideal-perception consistency predicted higher relationship quality, $t(169) = 3.65, p < .001, pr = .27$. However, self-monitoring did not significantly predict relationship quality, $t(169) = -0.51, p = .61, pr = .04$, and no significant interaction was present, $t(168) = 0.70, p = .48, pr = .05$.

Second, regarding the vitality/status/passion dimension, it was hypothesized that high ideal-perception consistency would predict higher relationship quality, especially for those higher in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2b). Results revealed that ideal-perception consistency positively predicted relationship quality, $t(169) = 13.10, p = .01, pr = .71$. Again, self-monitoring did not predict relationship quality, $t(169) = -1.23, p = .22, pr = .09$. Importantly, a significant ideal-perception consistency \times self-monitoring interaction emerged, $t(168) = 1.95, p = .05, pr = .15$. Figure 3 presents the predicted cell means, derived from the regression equation at step 2, with higher and lower values shown as one standard deviation above and below the respective centered means (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). As shown, ideal-perception consistency was significantly related to current relationship quality, especially for high self-monitors. This finding is in the predicted direction that high self-monitors would place greater emphasis on their partner's attainment of external characteristics exemplified by the items in the vitality/status/passion dimension.

Additionally, this was the only analysis where the two self-monitoring scales produced different results. Specifically, though in the same direction, the true/false version did not yield significant results for the consistency \times self-monitoring interaction, $t(168) = 1.28$, $p = .20$, $pr = .10$.

Indirect Discrepancies

The differences between the four indirect operationalizations of discrepancy lie in the statistical relationship created between each ideal item and perception item. For all four indirect analyses, each participant began with an ideal score and a perception score for all 69 items. Scores were then collapsed into two superordinate factors by averaging the relevant items, such that each participant obtained an ideal and perception score for both the warmth/trustworthiness and status/vitality/passion dimensions.

1. Within-subject correlation approach. Using within-subject correlations has been shown to be a valid operationalization of discrepancy scores because (a) it produces a single index that is not confounded with either response biases or mean levels of positivity in judgments of either ideals or the current partner and relationship, and (b) it avoids the use of difference scores, which are confounded when scores are correlated with other variables (Fletcher et al., 2000).

For each of the two dimensions (W/T and S/V/P), within-subject correlations were computed between each set of ideal ratings and the equivalent ratings of perceived qualities of the current partner and relationship. Specifically, for each participant, a correlation was calculated between the ideal and perception items corresponding to the warmth/trustworthiness dimension. A separate correlation was calculated between the ideal and perception items corresponding to the status/vitality/passion dimension. These correlations were then converted

to Fisher's z -scores. As a result, each participant obtained an index of consistency for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and an index of consistency for the status/vitality/passion dimension, and these discrepancy scores were used in further analyses. Higher within-subject correlations indicate a higher "match" (i.e., higher consistency) between that participant's evaluation of the importance of an ideal characteristic and their partner's attainment of that characteristic.

Hypothesis 1. It was expected that prior findings for the ideal standards model would replicate: Specifically, with all five operationalizations of discrepancy, greater consistency between ideals and perceptions would predict higher relationship quality. This hypothesis was supported. There was a significant relationship between Fisher's z of the overall ideal-perception within-subject correlation and relationship quality, $r(171) = .49, p < .001$. Breaking down the overall score, consistency within the warmth/trustworthiness dimension was positively associated with relationship quality, $r(147) = .45, p < .001$. Further, consistency within the vitality/status/passion dimension was also positively associated with relationship quality, $r(169) = .38, p < .001$.

Hypothesis 2. It was anticipated that two significant interactions would emerge between self-monitoring orientation and the Fisher's z of the ideal-perception within-subject correlation predicting relationship quality, one for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and one for the vitality/status/passion dimension. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analyses were employed and two separate models were computed for each dimension of the ideal standards model (W/T and S/V/P).

The first model examined ideal-perception discrepancy within the specific dimension (W/T or V/S/P) and self-monitoring orientation as predictors of relationship quality. The second

model included the same terms, as well as the two-way interaction of the Fisher's z and self-monitoring orientation. It is worth mentioning that the degrees of freedom are lower in the within-subject correlation approach because some participants ($n = 26$ for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and $n = 13$ for the vitality/status/passion dimension) indicated the same response for all of the items and thus had no variability for the relevant items. Due to the standard deviation being zero, correlations could not be estimated for these individuals.

In accordance with Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction was expected to emerge on both dimensions. First, for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, high consistency (as evidenced by a higher ideal-perception correlation) should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those low in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2a). Results revealed that ideal-perception consistency was associated with relationship quality, $t(144) = 6.05, p < .001, pr = .45$, such that higher covariation between ideals and perceptions were related to higher relationship quality. Self-monitoring did not significantly predict relationship quality, $t(144) = -0.29, p = .77, pr = .02$. Further, no significant interaction emerged, $t(144) = -0.19, p = .84, pr = .02$.

Second, regarding the Vitality/Status/Passion dimension, higher consistency was expected to predict higher relationship quality, especially for those high in self-monitoring orientation (Hypothesis 2b). Results revealed that ideal-perception consistency positively predicted relationship quality, $t(166) = 5.17, p < .001, pr = .37$, but self-monitoring did not, $t(166) = -0.66, p = .51, pr = .05$. Further, no significant interaction emerged, $t(165) = 0.81, p = .42, pr = .06$.

2. Absolute value approach. Discrepancy was computed using the absolute difference of the components, controlling for each component, on the basis that overestimating a partner or relationship ideal should be as detrimental to the relationship as the partner or relationship falling

short (Lynch, La Guardia, & Ryan, 2009). This method (recommended by Kenny, 1988) tests whether discrepancy affects relationship quality, after correcting for the main effects.

Specifically, every participant began with 69 ideal scores and 69 perception scores. Scores on each of the five dimensions were averaged, producing five ideal scores and five perception scores. The two warmth/trustworthiness dimensions were then averaged, and the three status/vitality/resources dimensions were averaged, such that each participant then possessed an ideal score and a perception score for each of the two dimensions (W/T and S/V/P).

Hypothesis 1. In accordance with Hypothesis 1, it was expected that prior findings for the ideal standards model would replicate: Specifically, a larger discrepancy between ideals and perceptions should predict lower relationship quality. In a multiple regression equation, the two main effect terms (ideals and perceptions) were entered, followed by the absolute value difference term (absolute value of ideals – perceptions), predicting relationship quality. Hypothesis 1 was not supported using this method. Specifically, the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference did not significantly predict relationship quality beyond the components, $t(168) = -0.30, p = .77, pr = .02$.

It may be helpful to also examine results of Hypothesis 1 within the two dimensions. Breaking down the overall absolute value score, the same analyses were run with only the items relevant to the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and again with only the items relevant to the vitality/status/passion dimension. The absolute value of the ideal-perception difference with the warmth/trustworthiness items did not significantly predict relationship quality beyond the components, $t(168) = -0.28, p = .78, pr = .02$. However, the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference with the vitality/status/passion items did significantly predict relationship quality beyond the components, $t(168) = -2.54, p = .01, pr = .19$.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that two significant interactions would emerge between self-monitoring orientation and the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference predicting relationship quality; one for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and one for the vitality/status passion dimension. To test this hypothesis, hierarchical regression analyses were employed and two separate models were computed for each dimension of the ideal standards model (W/T and S/V/P).

The first model examined ideal-perception discrepancy (the absolute value of the difference between ideals and perceptions, controlling for the components) within the specific dimension and self-monitoring as predictors of relationship quality. The second model included the same terms, as well as the two-way interaction of the absolute value of the difference between ideals and perceptions and self-monitoring orientation, controlling for the components.

In accordance with Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction was expected to emerge on both dimensions. First, for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, low discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those lower in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2a). When ideals, perceptions, the absolute value of the difference, and self-monitoring were entered simultaneously in the first equation, only a significant association of perceptions emerged, $t(167) = 2.94, p < .01, pr = .22$. This result suggests a perception that one's partner possesses positive qualities related to being loyal and intimate positively predicts relationship quality. Warmth/trustworthiness ideals, self-monitoring, and the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference did not significantly predict relationship quality (all $ts < 0.90, ps > .40$). Further, no significant interaction between the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference and self-monitoring emerged, $t(166) = -0.28, p = .78, pr = .02$.

Second, regarding the Vitality/Status/Passion dimension, lower discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those higher in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2b). When ideals, perceptions, the absolute value of the difference, and self-monitoring were entered simultaneously in the first equation, all but self-monitoring significantly predicted relationship quality. Specifically, lower ideals, $t(167) = -2.31, p = .02, pr = .18$, higher perceptions, $t(167) = 7.75, p < .001, pr = .51$, and a smaller difference between ideals and perceptions, $t(167) = -2.25, p = .01, pr = .17$, positively predicted relationship quality. Self-monitoring did not significantly predict relationship quality, $t(167) = -0.76, p = .45, pr = .06$. Further, no significant interaction between the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference and self-monitoring emerged, $t(166) = -0.10, p = .92, pr = .01$.

3. Covariance approach. Previous research has created a measure of ideal-perception consistency that does not confound the ideal standard and the current perception components (Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001; Overall et al., 2006). Using this method, scores on each of the five dimensions were averaged, producing five ideal scores and five perception scores. The two warmth/trustworthiness dimensions were averaged, and the three status/vitality/resources dimensions were averaged, such that each participant then possessed two ideal scores (W/T and S/V/P) and two perception scores (W/T and S/V/P). Mean levels of perceptions were regressed on mean levels of ideal standards for each ideal dimension (W/T and S/V/P). The result is a residualized variable that reflects perceptions of one's current partner, independent of one's ideal partner. More negative residuals represent a greater discrepancy between current perceptions and ideal standards relative to the sample. This direction was chosen rather than the alternative (examining the effect of one's ideal partner independent of one's current partner) because theoretically, we are more interested in how

current partner perceptions influence outcomes beyond ideals. The standardized residuals from this regression were used as an index of ideal-perception consistency.

Hypothesis 1. In accordance with Hypothesis 1, it was expected that prior findings for the ideal standards model would replicate: A larger discrepancy between ideals and perceptions would predict lower relationship quality. Specifically, ideals and perceptions were entered in a multiple regression equation predicting relationship quality. Results from this method revealed a significant effect of perceptions controlling for ideals, $t(169) = 17.46, p < .001, pr = .80$.

It may be helpful to also examine results of Hypothesis 1 within the two dimensions. Breaking down the overall association, the same analyses were run with only the items relevant to the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and again with only the items relevant to the vitality/status/passion dimension. With the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, results from this method revealed a significant effect of perceptions controlling for ideals, $t(169) = 16.47, p < .001, pr = .78$. With the vitality/status/passion dimension, results from this method revealed a significant effect of perceptions controlling for ideals, $t(169) = 12.63, p < .001, pr = .70$. Results using this residualized perception variable indicate that higher perceptions of one's partner and relationship strongly predict relationship satisfaction, independent of the importance of the traits for one's ideal partner.

Hypothesis 2. It was anticipated that two significant interactions would emerge between self-monitoring orientation and ideal-perception discrepancy predicting relationship quality, one for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and one for the vitality/status passion dimension. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analyses were employed and two separate models were computed for each dimension of the ideal standards model (W/T and S/V/P).

The first model examined ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring as simultaneous predictors of relationship quality. The second model included the same terms, as well as the two-way interaction of perceptions and self-monitoring orientation. In accordance with Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction was expected to emerge on both dimensions.

First, for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, lower discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those lower in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2a). Similar to previous analyses, perceptions significantly predicted relationship quality such that perceiving one's partner possesses positive qualities related to being loyal and intimate positively predicted relationship quality, $t(168) = 16.45, p < .001, pr = .79$. Ideals and self-monitoring did not significantly predict relationship quality ($ts < 0.90$ and $ps > .35$). Further, no significant interaction between perceptions and self-monitoring emerged, $t(167) = 0.29, p = .77, pr = .02$.

Second, regarding the Vitality/Status/Passion dimension, low discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those high in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2b). Results revealed that having higher ideals predicted poorer relationship quality, $t(168) = -3.19, p = .01, pr = .24$. Further, more positive perceptions also predicted higher relationship quality, $t(168) = 12.58, p = .01, pr = .70$. Self-monitoring did not significantly predict relationship quality, $t(168) = -0.71, p = .48, pr = .05$. Further, the predicted interaction between perceptions and self-monitoring was nonsignificant, $t(167) = 1.28, p = .20, pr = .10$.

4. Interaction approach. The interaction of ideals and perceptions allows for a test of the effects of the discrepancy between ideals and perceptions independently of the effects of its components (ideals and perceptions; Zuckerman et al., 2002). Specifically, the ideal \times perception interaction indicates whether, in addition to their main effects, ideals and perceptions *together* influence relationship quality.

Scores on each of the five dimensions were averaged, producing five ideal scores and five perception scores for each participant. The two warmth/trustworthiness dimensions were then averaged, as well as the three status/vitality/resources dimensions, producing two ideal scores (W/T and S/V/P) and two perception scores (W/T and S/V/P) for each participant.

A multiple regression approach was employed to test whether relationship evaluations were more positive to the extent that perceptions of the current partner and relationship were more consistent with ideals in each category. In this approach, two separate models were computed for the ideal variable and the perception variable. The first model examined the ideal variable and the perception variable as predictors of relationship quality. The second model included the same terms, as well as the two-way product of the ideal and perception scores (i.e., ideal \times perception) to determine whether it accounts for increased variance over the main effects. It was anticipated that a significant ideal \times perception interaction would emerge, such that high ideal scores combined with low perception scores should be associated with particularly low relationship quality, for both dimensions. Previous research (Fletcher et al., 1999) has used this method to examine ideal-perception discrepancy and its association with relationship quality.

Hypothesis 1. In accordance with Hypothesis 1, it was expected that prior findings for the ideal standards model would replicate here: A larger discrepancy between ideals and perceptions (as evidenced by the ideal \times perception interaction) would predict lower relationship quality. This hypothesis was not supported. While ideals and perceptions significantly predicted relationship quality ($t_s = -2.39$ and 17.46 , $p_s = 0.01$ and $< .01$, respectively), the interaction was nonsignificant, $t(168) = -1.48$, $p = 0.14$, $pr = .11$.

It may be helpful to also examine the results of Hypothesis 1 within the two dimensions. Breaking down the overall association, the same analyses were run with only the items relevant

to the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and again with only the items relevant to the vitality/status/passion dimension. With the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, ideals did not predict relationship quality, $t(168) = 0.89, p = .37, pr = .07$. Having positive perceptions of one's partner and relationship did, however, predict higher relationship quality, $t(168) = 2.01, p = .05, pr = .15$. The interaction was nonsignificant, $t(168) = -0.96, p = 0.34, pr = .07$. With the vitality/status/passion dimension, neither ideals nor perceptions significantly predicted relationship quality ($ts < 1.45, ps > .15$). Further, the interaction was nonsignificant, $t(168) = 0.20, p = 0.84, pr = .02$.

Hypothesis 2. It was anticipated that two, three-way interactions would emerge between ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring, predicting relationship quality: one for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension and one for the vitality/status passion dimension. In accordance with Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction was expected to emerge on both dimensions.

First, for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, low ideal-perception discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those low in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2a). To test this hypothesis, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to predict relationship quality. Relationship warmth/trustworthiness ideals, warmth/trustworthiness perceptions, and self-monitoring were entered simultaneously as predictors of relationship quality. The first equation included only the main effects of ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring. The second equation also included the two-way interaction terms (ideal \times perception, ideal \times self-monitoring, and perception \times self-monitoring). The third equation added the three-way interaction of ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring. No lower-order effects were found ($ts <$

1.13, $ps > .26$), and the three-way interaction was also nonsignificant, $t(164) = 0.74, p = .46, pr = .06$.

Second, regarding the Vitality/Status/Passion dimension, low ideal-perception discrepancy should predict higher relationship quality, especially for those high in self-monitoring (Hypothesis 2b). To test this hypothesis, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to predict relationship quality. Relationship status/vitality/passion ideals, status/vitality/passion perceptions, and self-monitoring were entered simultaneously as predictors of relationship quality. The first equation included only the main effects of ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring. The second equation also included the two-way interaction terms (ideal \times perception, ideal \times self-monitoring, and perception \times self-monitoring). The third equation added the three-way product of ideals, perceptions, and self-monitoring. No lower-order effects were found ($ts < 1.70, ps > .09$), and the three-way interaction was nonsignificant, $t(164) = .64, p = .52, pr = .05$.

Supplemental Analyses

It was plausible that variables like attachment style, relationship length, and gender could further moderate or change the results. Thus, additional analyses were employed to determine if the results would change when controlling for potential covariates. All analyses were run again controlling for anxious attachment, relationship length, and gender. No theoretically significant findings emerged. A few associations did change as a function of including the covariates, however. In the absolute value approach, including length of relationship caused the main effect of the absolute value of the ideal-perception difference within the vitality/status/passion to become nonsignificant, $t(165) = -0.03, p = .98, pr = .00$. Using the covariance approach, including length of relationship caused the main effect of perceptions in the

vitality/status/passion dimension to become nonsignificant, $t(166) = 1.32, p = .19, pr = .10$.

Finally, using the covariance approach, including gender caused the main effect of perceptions in the vitality/status/passion dimension to become nonsignificant, $t(166) = 1.54, p = .12, pr = .12$.

General Discussion

Although previous research has indicated that partner and relationship ideal standards are chronically accessible and are used to evaluate both potential mates and partners in existing relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999), the current research suggests that positive perceptions of one's partner appear to be a much stronger predictor of current relationship quality than ideals.

Across all approaches to operationalizing discrepancy, it was hypothesized that predicting relationship quality with ideals and perceptions would differ as a function of self-monitoring orientation. This hypothesis was supported in one of the several cases. Generally, results revealed that the degree of ideal-perception consistency for warmth and trustworthiness in one's relationship does not significantly predict relationship quality differentially for low and high self-monitors. Moreover, the degree of ideal-perception consistency for vitality, status, and passion also does not significantly predict relationship quality differentially for low and high self-monitors, except in one method of analyzing discrepancy. Thus, contrary to expectations, low and high self-monitors do not generally place more emphasis on one dimension of ideals over another.

Using the direct approach did reveal a significant interaction between ideal-perception consistency and self-monitoring in predicting relationship quality. This was in the expected direction as high self-monitors were hypothesized to place additional weight on greater ideal-perception congruence for relatively external characteristics such as status, attractiveness, and passion. There is a potential explanation for why this effect was found and the hypothesized

effect for warmth/trustworthiness was not found for low self-monitors. Intimacy-related ideals and perceptions in relationships tend to be the most central and important factors that people use to rate their partner in long-term relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999). Thus, regardless of one's self-monitoring orientation, these intimacy-related ideals and perceptions may be equally important to all individuals and the true difference may lie in the more external characteristics.

Still, this general lack of findings across the different methods is surprising given the extant research demonstrating that high self-monitors place additional emphasis on external qualities of romantic partners while low self-monitors place greater emphasis on internal qualities (Snyder et al., 1984, 1985). It could have been, however, that using the ideal standards model as the standard of evaluation for external and internal qualities created issues that did not allow for a true test of how individuals place weight on specific characteristics in romantic partners and relationships. Specifically, results revealed that the effect of perceptions was much stronger than the effect of ideals; this effect may have been so strong that it restricted the variability in ideals and, more importantly, self-monitoring.

Self-monitoring

An examination of the internal reliability for the study demonstrates that with both different methods of measurement, the self-monitoring variable did not possess particularly high consistency among the items comprising the score. This is not a new phenomenon and previous research has criticized the self-monitoring scale and the construct more broadly for its measurement limitations in not tapping a comprehensive individual difference variable (Briggs & Cheek, 1988; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). Further, other researchers have noted a marked lack of congruence between the scale and the construct of self-monitoring (Briggs, Cheek, & Buss, 1980; Gabrenya & Arkin, 1980). This is a restriction beyond the scope of the current research,

but readers should be aware that the lack of findings in the current study may be in part attributable to the lack of power underlying valid measurement of the construct.

Discrepancy Scores

The current paper is among the first to compute different kinds of discrepancy and allows for a comparison of the differences in the methods. Evaluating the results with all five approaches to discrepancy scores reveals some interesting conclusions about the different methods to calculate discrepancy. Each method has strengths and weaknesses, and without a universal standard it is impossible to determine which method is inherently the best. One critical point one can draw from this study is that discrepancy values will differ as a function of the way in which they are analyzed. Although nonsignificant in all but one case, none of the five methods revealed the same standardized parameter estimates for any of the hypothesized effects.

First, scores from all five of the approaches were significantly correlated with each other (see Tables 2a-2c). The direct scores, within-subject correlations, covariance scores and interaction scores were all positively correlated with one another. This occurred because higher scores with the other methods indicate a smaller difference between ideals and perceptions. The absolute-value scores were negatively correlated with the other four scores, however. This occurred because higher absolute value scores indicate a *larger* difference between ideals and perceptions.

When comparing the different methods across dimensions of the ideal standards model, the relationships between the methods remained relatively stable. Overall, when methods used the vitality/status/passion items, scores were less highly correlated with one another. This may be due to the greater variability among these items when compared to the items from the warmth/trustworthiness dimension. Across all three dimensions (total, warmth/trustworthiness,

and vitality/status/passion), the two approaches that were most strongly related were the covariance approach and the interaction approach. The reason for this can be seen in how both variables were calculated is examined. The interaction “score” was calculated from the additional effect of ideals \times perceptions, controlling for both components. The result is a score that is residualized from its constituents. The covariance “score” for each participant was obtained by calculating the product of the parameter estimate of ideals with that participant’s ideal score, and subtracting that product from that participant’s perception score. This score is equivalent to the number obtained from the main effects in step 1 testing the interaction approach. As the interactions were nonsignificant, the two approaches produced very similar scores.

The primary assumption of the ideal standards model, that overall ideal-perception consistency would predict higher relationship quality, replicated in the current research with three of the five methods. Specifically, the direct approach, within-subject correlation approach, and the covariance approach revealed significant results for Hypothesis 1. Why might a finding that has replicated several times in previous research not be replicated with two of the five operationalizations of discrepancy? At this point, it may be helpful to evaluate each method to facilitate understanding of each approach’s strengths and weaknesses.

The direct approach is the most straightforward approach and would score highest of all the methods in face validity. Asking participants simply how much their partner matches their ideal on particular characteristics assesses their perceived ideal-perception consistency without employing additional analyses. Not surprisingly, this is the only approach where a significant result was found for Hypothesis 2.

The within-subject approach creates an indicator of the degree of congruence between responses for ideals and perceptions. This approach then converts the degree of congruence (i.e., the correlation) to a Fisher's z score, which is an averaged, normalized Pearson correlation coefficient. As the sampling distribution of Pearson's r is not normally distributed, the Fisher's z transformation converts the score to one that is normally distributed.

The within-subject correlation approach is idiographic and reflects the relative ranking of all ideals and perceptions within each person, providing a precise estimation for the relationship between ideals and perceptions. A critical limitation of this method, however, is that it assesses relative correspondence between the two variables and not absolute differences. Thus, this method would not differentiate between (a) an average response of "4" for ideals and "2" for perceptions and (b) an average response of "7" for ideals and "5" for perceptions. Effectively, the only feature that is relevant in calculating the within-subject correlation method is the degree of covariation between ideals and perceptions. In testing other hypotheses, it may be important to account for more than correspondence and factor in where participants rated the two variables on average with regard to the entire scale.

The absolute value approach was computed on the basis that overestimating a partner or relationship ideal should be as detrimental to the relationship as the partner or relationship falling short (Lynch et al., 2009). This method tests the effect of discrepancy on relationship quality, after correcting for the main effects. Something worth noting is that this method of calculating discrepancy accounts only for the size of the difference and does not account for the direction of the difference. For example, if a participant rated an item with an importance of "4," they would receive identical absolute value scores if they indicated that the item accurately described their

partner with a “2” as with a “6.” It is important to account for the direction of the difference, and that is a weakness of this approach.

The covariance approach does not confound the ideal standard and the current perception components (Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001) and has previously been used in discrepancy analyses with the ideal standards model (Overall et al., 2006). Regressing mean levels of perceptions on mean levels of ideal standards creates standardized residuals which can be treated as an index of ideal-perception consistency. In this case, more negative residuals represent a greater discrepancy between perceptions and ideal standards relative to the sample. It is important in this approach to understand which variable should be controlled.

The interaction approach tests the effects of the discrepancy between ideals and perceptions independently of the effects of ideals and perceptions. It is a more appropriate approach to calculating discrepancy because if the hypothesis does not focus on the main effects of ideals and perceptions, the simple difference score procedure cannot test it (Zuckerman et al., 2002). However, the ideal \times perception interaction indicates whether, in addition to their main effects, ideals and perceptions *together* influence relationship quality. This method may be an excellent approach to calculating discrepancy, but it is also one of the least powerful methods. As the test of Hypothesis 2 involved a predicted three-way interaction, this approach was also among the least likely to detect a result.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study utilized individuals from a young, college-student population, which restricts the extent to which the findings may be generalized. Further, the order in which the ideal and perception scales were presented was counterbalanced, but not the order in which all scales were presented. In the future, counterbalancing all the scales would be a more optimal

way of collecting data so that all potential order effects would be eliminated. The current research also tested hypotheses about satisfaction in relationships with committed individuals who were required to be in committed relationships for at least three months. This requirement was created to ensure only individuals who were fully invested in their relationships would participate, but it limited the sample obtained. If high self-monitors are relatively uncommitted, as previous research demonstrates, placing a criteria of commitment of at least three months likely reduces the number of high self-monitors who are participating. Also, of those high self-monitors who do voluntarily participate, these committed, satisfied individuals are likely to be the exception rather than the rule. It may be beneficial in capturing extra variability in self-monitoring to examine these hypotheses with the only criterion being individuals in relationships, without the commitment or three-month requirement. Future research would also benefit from examining how ideals and perceptions influence larger social networks such as friendships with self-monitors. Finally, future research should explore additional ways to measure self-monitoring, because to truly capture this construct would provide interesting and meaningful new avenues to explore human behavior.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among All Major Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Mean	(SD)	Range
1. Self-monitoring	-											3.65	(0.82)	1.72-6.
2. Direct (total)	-.07	-										5.84	(1.11)	1.21-7
3. W/T Direct	-.09	.97***	-									5.79	(1.22)	1.0-7
4. V/S/P Direct	.02	.92***	.83***	-								5.70	(1.05)	1.63-7
5. Ideal (total)	.07	.26***	.25***	.31***	-							6.18	(0.54)	4.53-7
6. W/T Ideal	-.06	.27***	.25***	.30***	.90***	-						6.51	(0.45)	5-7
7. V/S/P Ideal	.14	.20**	.18**	.26***	.93***	.69***	-					5.65	(0.81)	3.39-7
8. Perception (total)	-.08	.93***	.91***	.84***	.31***	.33***	.23**	-				5.74	(1.00)	1.39-7
9. W/T Perception	-.12	.91***	.93***	.74***	.22**	.25***	.14	.97***	-			5.85	(1.12)	1-7
10. V/S/P Perception	.02	.82***	.75***	.89***	.43***	.43***	.36***	.91***	.78***	-		5.55	(0.94)	1.52-7
11. Relationship Quality	-.06	.82***	.78***	.71***	.15*	.19**	.07	.80***	.79***	.79***	-	5.94	(1.13)	1-7

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Table 2a. *Zero-order correlations of all types of discrepancy: Total Ideal-Perception Scores*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Direct	-				
2. Within-subject correlation	.55***	-			
3. Absolute value	-.80***	-.57***	-		
4. Covariance	.91***	.49***	-.78***	-	
5. Interaction	.84***	.37***	-.63***	.97***	-

*** $p < .001$

Table 2b. *Zero-order correlations of all types of discrepancy: Ideal-Perception Scores for the Warmth/Trustworthiness Dimension*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Direct	-				
2. Within-subject correlation	.42***	-			
3. Absolute value	-.85***	-.53***	-		
4. Covariance	.92***	.49***	-.91***	-	
5. Interaction	.88***	.39***	-.78***	.96***	-

*** $p < .001$

Table 2c. *Zero-order correlations of all types of discrepancy: Ideal-Perception Scores for the Vitality/Status/Passion Dimension*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Direct	-				
2. Within-subject correlation	.37***	-			
3. Absolute value	-.62***	-.41***	-		
4. Covariance	.88***	.30***	-.64***	-	
5. Interaction	.74***	.11	-.46***	.88***	-

*** $p < .001$

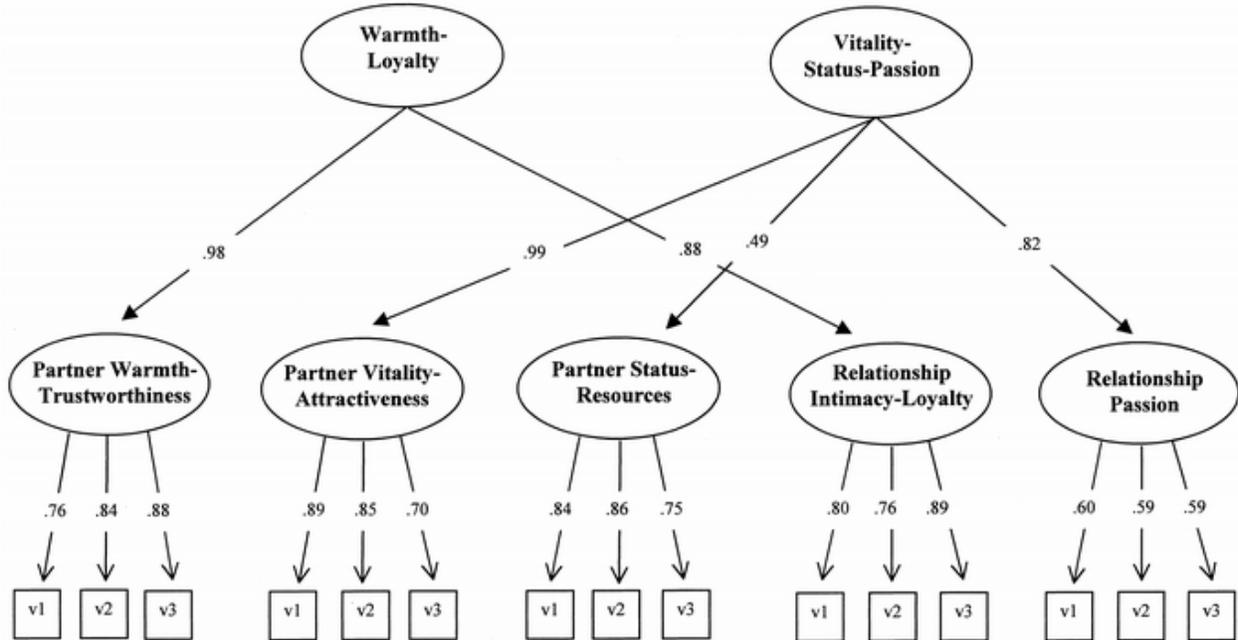


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the ideal partner and ideal relationship scales (taken from Fletcher et al., 1999).

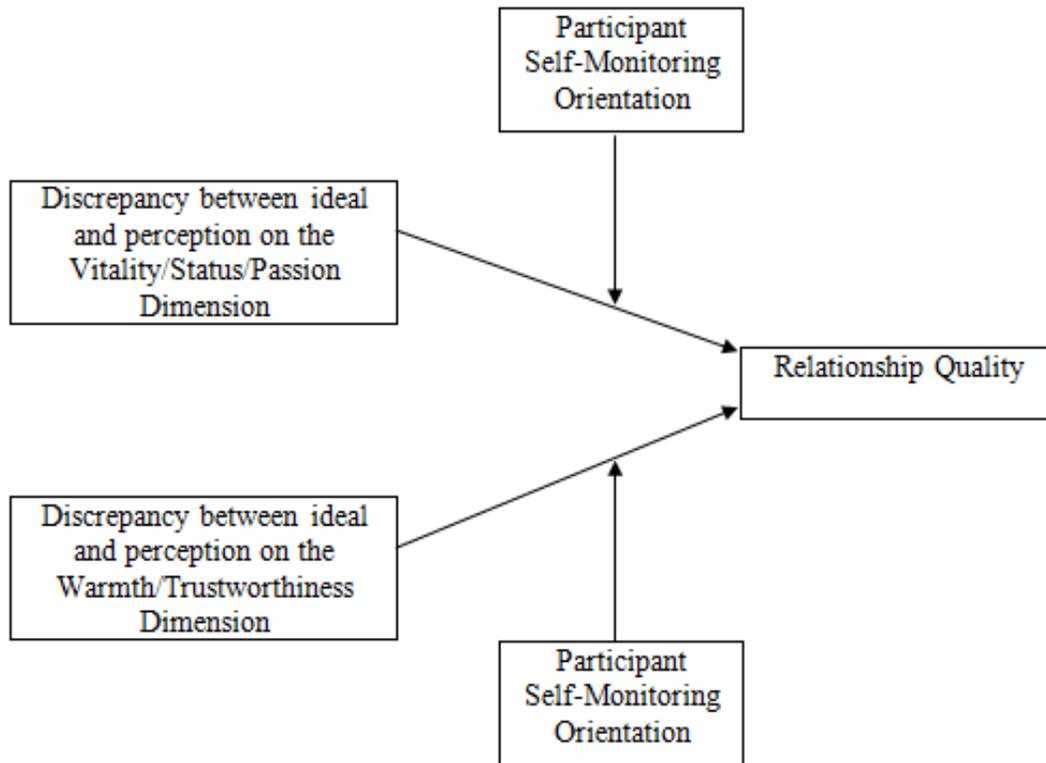


Figure 2. Hypothesized model.

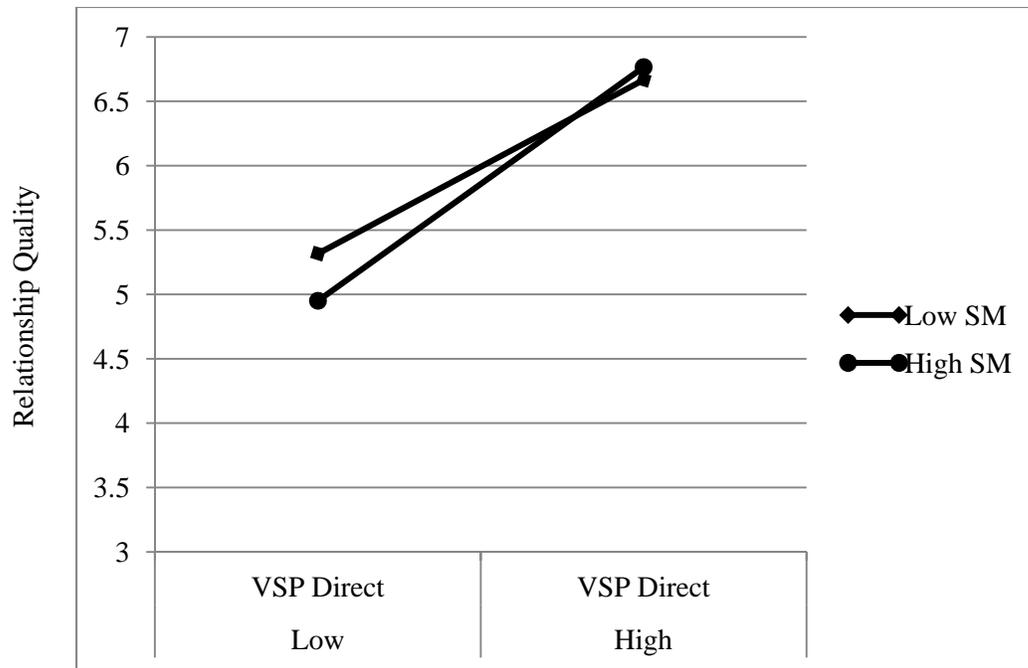


Figure 3. Ideal-perception discrepancy predicting relationship quality as a function of self-monitoring for the Vitality-Status-Passion dimension.