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**INTERACTION TO ACHIEVE SELF-VERIFICATION IN THE ROMANTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

**By**

**Tatsuya Imai**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **INTERACTION TO ACHIEVE SELF-VERIFICATION IN THE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

**By**

**Tatsuya Imai**

**This thesis examines how people communicate to verify their self-concept in romantic relationships, using Self-Verification Theory advocated by William B. Swann Jr. Sixty-two couples were asked to fill out a questionnaire examining self-esteem, evaluation of partners, perceived feedback from partners, and communication style including self-disclosure and feedback. Results suggested that the more positive evaluation and positive perception of feedback from partners the participants had, the closer they were to their partners. In cases in which there was a consistency between valences of self-esteem and evaluation from partners, communication functioned to verify participants' self-concept. Implications, limitations, and future directions are discussed.**

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# Interaction to Achieve Self-Verification in the Romantic Relationships

## Chapter 1: Introduction

We often assume that people want others to see them positively, as kind, warm, smart, and good looking. For example, when we are students in high school, we try to avoid being perceived as unintelligent, untrustful, and arrogant by classmates and teachers. We study hard so that teachers will think that we are intelligent and we try to go to school on time so that classmates will think we are not lazy. We make our best effort to keep high grade points to go to prestigious universities because being in such schools makes us look smart and capable. People are always making efforts to be seen positively. However, it is also true that people cannot be perfect. We have socially negative characteristics we do not want to show to others such as disease, physical features, and unchangeable personality. In a society where people always make efforts to make themselves look positive, these negative characteristics remain hidden from others. As you may know and feel, keeping these characteristics hidden and showing only positive aspects often is so difficult that we feel tired of living. Therefore, it seems natural to think that it would be wonderful if we did not have to hide our negative characteristics and we could be natural and be ourselves.

Actually, we can show our natural face and be ourselves when we are with a few close and trusted people. For example, we do not have to make much effort to make ourselves look cool, smart, and generous to our parents, because they already know we are not so cool and generous. We also know even though they know we are not perfect, they accept us. The closer we are to others, the more we might want them to know about

our real attributes. Such people who we want to show our natural aspects could be family members, close friends, trustworthy teachers, and romantic partners.

Based on this assumption, I want to examine how people interact with their romantic partners in order to manage their self-concept. For example, if people have a positive self-concept, and believe themselves to possess attributes such as intelligence and good looks, they would have no trouble showing their positive aspects to others because such aspects are socially valuable and desirable. On the other hand, if people have a negative self-concept, and believe themselves to be unintelligent and unattractive, they would try to hide these characteristics from their romantic partner, especially when the partner forms a positive image of them. However, if one partner perceives their partner to be negative, they do not have to hide their negative features, and they can disclose the features to their partner. Moreover, such a consistency between self-concept and evaluation from partners is expected to relate to closeness of participants to their partners.

Specifically, this thesis examines how interpersonal communication functions to verify self-concepts in romantic relationships. Though previous studies of Self-Verification Theory (SVT) by William B. Swann Jr. demonstrated the motivation which caused people to verify their self-concept and the interactions which allowed them to do so in laboratory settings, they did not focus on daily communication in romantic relationships (Swann, 1983; Swann, 1987; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, in press). Therefore, this current study examines communication which is used daily as a tool for people in romantic relationships to verify their self-concept through interactions with their partners. In chapter 2, previous literature will be reviewed, discussing two primal

strivings, positivity strivings and self-verification strivings. SVT is detailed as well, including how it is applied to interpersonal communication. Chapter 3 focuses on rationales and hypotheses related to communication contributing to self-verification. Methods including descriptions of participants and procedures are shown in chapter 4. Chapter 5 shows results, and finally a general discussion with limitations, implications, and future directions is discussed in chapter 6.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review previous literature related to self-concept and interpersonal communication. First, I review previous studies examining positivity strivings and self-verification strivings. Second, SVT is detailed on the basis of studies conducted by William B. Swann Jr. Finally, previous research studies about self-disclosure, receiving feedback, and a perception of agreement are focused on to consider how communication might help people to verify their self-concept on the basis of self-verification strivings.

### *Positivity Strivings*

Many researchers support the idea that people are motivated to be seen positively (Goffman, 1955; Jones, 1973; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Shrauger, 1975).

Self-Enhancement Theory, which was suggested by Shrauger (1975), introduced people's basic desire to think of themselves favorably. Specifically, regardless of different valences of a self-view (negative and positive self-esteem), people prefer positive evaluation. Jones and Pittman (1982) mentioned that much of people's social behavior is motivated by a concern that others form a positive impression and attribute to them

characteristics such as kindness, humor, trust, charm, and physical attractiveness. In short, people behave to make others like them.

Moreover, in the article, “On Face-Work: an Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction,” Goffman (1955) analyzed human interactions in a society from a perspective of the motivation for people to be seen positively. The author mentioned that “The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman, 1955, p. 319). In short, a person takes the actions that will make whatever she or he is doing consistent with face, which is a socially positive attribute.

Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) conducted interviews with people who use an online dating site in order to investigate how people manage their online presentation of self to find their dating partners. Thirty-four interviews were conducted, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed. The findings showed that people consistently presented themselves positively and attractively such as posting a profile photo showing their attractive aspects and even reporting their weight as less than their actual weight.

As shown above, the idea that people want others to see them positively is supported by previous research and the motivation is called positivity strivings (Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Swann et al., in press).

#### *Self-Verification Strivings – Self-Verification Theory*

Alternatively, some researchers argue that people are motivated by the desire to be seen in a fashion consistent with their self-concept, which is called self-verification strivings (Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Swann et al, in press). Lecky (1945) was the first person who argued that people have the motivation to make efforts to be

self-consistent. Other previous research studies also have mentioned the people's desire to be consistent with their self-concept (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965).

Based on the argument of previous research, William B. Swann Jr. has developed the Self-Verification Theory (Swann, 1983; Swann, 1987; Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Swann et al., in press). The basic assumption of the theory is that people know that internalizing how others react to them into their self-concept is important to maintain their self-concept (Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992). The main argument is that people manage their environment in which they can confirm their self-concept through interactions with others (Swann, 1983; Swann, 1987; Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Swann et al., in press). The distinct argument of the theory, which contradicts the argument of the positivity strivings, is that people with a negative self-view want to be seen negatively because they want others to see them as they see themselves (Swann, 1983; Swann, 1987; Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Swann et al., in press).

Using the following example, Swann (1983) explained how people develop their self-verification strivings. A small boy wants to realize his dream to become his television idol, which is the Incredible Hulk. When he was small, his parents told him that someday he can be the Hulk because of the intention of parents that children should not lose their dream. However, through the interactions with others and the events in his environment such as his school, he comes to know reality. That is, his classmates would tell him that he is not that strong and he is just a human; and the evaluation of his achievement in the gym class from teachers suggests that he is just above the average compared with other classmates. As he has grown, his self-concept gradually coalesces

into a compromise between his ideal image like the Hulk and his real features which are predicted from the feedback. Finally, when he is matured, to bolster his prediction of himself and events around him, he comes to be guided basically by his self-concept.

Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler (1992) introduced two considerations people have when they interact with others. The first consideration, called epistemic consideration, is that people are mentally worried about the discrepancy between their self-concept and the image others form of them (Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992). For example, if a woman thinks of herself as an unintelligent person and her best friend thinks of her as an intelligent person, the friend's expectation challenges her self-concept. Consequently, she might be concerned about the discrepancy between two opposite images. The second consideration, called pragmatic or interpersonal consideration, is that people are afraid of the future interactions with the person whose image of them contradicts their self-concept (Swann, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992). In the same example, the woman who considers herself to be unintelligent is worried about how she can smoothly interact with her friend who thinks of her as an intelligent person. As shown above, the self-verification strivings are that people want others to see them as they see themselves in order to confirm their self-concept without epistemic and pragmatic problems.

### *Three Strategies of Self-Verification*

Three strategies helping people to verify their self-concept have been found on the basis of previous empirical research. The first strategy is information processing (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). One of the information processing strategies is information seeking (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann,

Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). In the Swann and Read's (1981) study (investigation 1), sixty-four female undergraduates participated and rated themselves; the goal being to classify them into self-likable and self-dislikable groups. Then, they were also asked to complete other questionnaires which checked their opinions about controversial issues such as religious values. After that, they were told that they were rated by a conversation partner who was going to talk with them about topics related to the responses they answered about the controversial issues. The participants were distributed statements of evaluation which indicated positive or negative evaluation, which were actually vague and general evaluative statements. The amount of time that participants spent on reading the statements was measured as the dependent variable. The findings suggested that self-likable participants spent a longer time reading the statements when they expected that the evaluation of them would be positive than self-dislikable participants. The self-dislikable participants spent a longer time reading the statements when they expected that the evaluation of them would be negative than the self-likable participants. As shown above, people are motivated to seek self-verification information.

Another strategy of information processing is selective recall (Swann & Read, 1981). In investigation 2 of the same study conducted by Swann and Read (1981), fifty-eight female college students were recruited, classified into likable and dislikable participants, and were informed that they were going to meet an interaction partner who evaluated participants positively or negatively like the investigation 1. The difference from the investigation 1 was that after the manipulation of expectancy of evaluation, participants were asked to listen to a tape which included the vague and general statements which were the same statements used in the investigation 1. After they

listened to the tape, they were asked to write down as many as they could remember and what they wrote was measured. The result found that self-dislike participants recalled more contents of statements when they believed they were evaluated negatively than the self-dislike participants when they believed they were evaluated positively. The self-like participants recalled more contents of statements when they believed they were evaluated positively than the self-like participants when they believed they were evaluated negatively. As shown above, people are likely to remember the information of themselves when they perceive that the information is relevant to their self-concept.

The second strategy of self-verification is that people communicate their self-view to verify their self-concept (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). In the experiment of Swann & Hill (1982), forty-six female college students were recruited and classified into self-dominant and self-submissive groups on the basis of responses of self-dominant scale. First, the participants were asked to practice playing a game with a confederate and in the game they played as a leader. After that practice, before a real game, the confederate recommended the participant to play one of two roles on the basis of the participant's behavior in the practice session. Then, participants had a chance to interact with the confederate and the conversation was tape recorded and coded on the basis of the degree of dominance the participants showed. The result showed that participants who received self-discrepant feedback were more likely to behave to disconfirm the feedback and confirm their self-concept. Specifically, self-dominant participants who were recommended to play the assistant behaved more dominantly than self-dominant participants who were recommended to play the leader. Self-submissive participants who were recommended to play the leader behaved more submissively than



self-submissive participants who were recommended to play the assistant. In other words, people tried to verify their self-concept by communication.

The third strategy of self-verification processes, which is called selective affiliation, is to construct an environment which verifies self-concept by being in a relationship with others who confirm the self-concept (Swann, Hixon, & Rond, 1992; Swann & Pelham, 2002; Swan, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992). Swan, Stein-Seroussi & Giesler (1992) used eighty-four male participants and classified them into participants with a positive or negative self-view on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire which checked their perceived sociability. Then, they were informed that they were evaluated and were going to meet the evaluator as an interaction partner. The participants were told that one of evaluators rated participants positively and another evaluator rated them negatively, and were asked to choose one of them as an interaction partner. The result showed that negative self-view participants were more likely to choose the unfavorable evaluator than the favorable evaluator and positive self-view participant were more likely to choose the favorable evaluator than the unfavorable evaluator.

In addition, there were some research studies that examined if marital couples were likely to choose a partner who sees them as they see themselves. Swann, Hixon, & Rond's (1992) study examined how marital couples chose their partner on the basis of the self-verification strivings. They recruited ninety-five married couples and asked them to rate themselves and their partner regarding their self-concepts by using Self-Attribute Questionnaire (SAQ; Pelham & Swann, 1989), which measured perceived central attributes of self-worth: intellectual capability, physical attractiveness, athletic ability, social skills, and aptitude in arts and music. The authors also asked them to fill out a

questionnaire which measured participants' commitment to their marital relationship as the dependent variable. The result showed that people committed themselves to their marital relationship when their partner verified their self-concept. Specifically, participants who had a positive self-concept committed themselves more to the relationship when their partner viewed them positively. Participants who had a negative self-concept committed themselves more to the relationship when their partner viewed them negatively. Moreover, the selective affiliation was also found in the study using pairs of college roommates (Swann & Pelham, 2002). In short, previous research supports the finding that marital couples and roommates are likely to choose partners who see them as they see themselves.

#### *A Function of Communication as Self-Verification*

Although previous research has shown that people are likely to choose the interaction partner who sees them as they see themselves, the research has not examined communication contributing to close relationships supported by the self-verification strivings. In short, communication which allows people in a close relationship to perceive that their partner correctly or wrongly knows their self-concept has not been addressed enough in previous research. The communication for people to verify their self-concept, which is the second strategy of self-verification, has been examined by previous research (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). The previous research addressed the two aspects of self-verification communication. First, previous research has examined communication of self-verification between participants and a stranger (confederate) (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). However, if researchers want to know how people in a close relationship communicate with each other in order to verify their

self-concept, they should not see the communication of strangers but of people in a close relationship. Second, previous research investigated self-verification behavior in cases where people receive self-discrepant feedback (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). Results found that when people received self-discrepant feedback from others, they tried to behave in a way that disconfirmed the feedback and confirmed their self-concept. However, the research design has not enabled researchers to examine how people in close relationships communicate with each other. If researchers want to know how dating partners daily communicate with each other, they should investigate the daily communication in close relationships, which is not temporarily caused by receiving self-discrepant feedback. Consequently, this thesis focuses on communication functioning to verify self-concept through interactions with romantic partners. In this study, self-disclosure (output) and feedback from a partner (input) are considered to compose communication.

#### *Self-Disclosure for Self-Verification*

Self-disclosure can be defined as to “voluntarily tell(s) another person things about himself which the other is unlikely to know or to discover from other sources” (Pearce & Sharp, 1973). Derlega and Grzelak (1979) introduced five functions of self-disclosure. The first function is “Expression,” which means saying how we feel. The second function, “Self-Clarification,” is talking about our beliefs and attitudes in order to clarify our opinion. “Relationship Development” is another function which means that disclosing ourselves causes a positive outcome for a relationship. The next function, which is called “Social Control,” means that self-disclosure is used to control and exploit others. The final function, which is “Self-Validation,” means efforts to elicit feedback

from others and validate our self-concept by self-disclosure. The final function is exactly what this current research is concerned about. Rosenfeld and Kendrick's (1984) eight functions also included Self-Validation, which means that people disclose themselves to seek confirmation of a view they hold about themselves. Other previous research suggested the importance of self-disclosure as a relationship maintenance tool for close relationships such as dating couples and people in marriage (Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991; Daiton & Stafford, 1993). As previous studies suggested, self-disclosure would allow partners in dating couples to verify their self-concept.

#### *Feedback for Self-Verification*

Much previous research of self-verification theory supports the importance of receiving self-consistent feedback from a partner for maintaining close relationships (e.g., Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). Swann and Read's (1981) experiments about information seeking and selective recall of self-verification behavior suggests that people desire feedback which is consistent with their self-concept. Swann and Hill's (1982) study about communicative behaviors of self-verification strivings showed people's dislike of self-discrepant feedback. Based on these findings, receiving feedback which is consistent with the self-concept is important to maintain one's self-concept. Swann and Predmore's (1985) study showed that interactions with intimates who correctly recognize their partners (targets) insulate them against self-discrepant feedback. In other words, even if targets receive self-discrepant information, interactions with their intimates enables them to avoid both the information and changing their self-concept. Undergraduate couples were recruited and half of them were targets and the other half were their intimates. The intimates were separately asked to rate their partners (targets)

on the basis of the same scale of self-esteem. The targets were classified into a high self-esteem group and a low self-esteem group and they were given self-discrepant feedback from confederates. After that, some of targets had a conversation with their intimates who congruently rated the targets, other targets had a conversation with their intimates who incongruently rated the targets, and the rest of the targets had a conversation with a stranger. The results showed that targets who interacted with intimates who had rated the targets correctly changed their self-esteem less than targets who interacted with incongruent intimates or strangers. Specifically, congruent intimates were as effective in insulating low self-esteem targets against self-discrepant positive feedback as they were in insulating high self-esteem targets against self-discrepant negative feedback. As shown above, interactions with intimates, such as receiving feedback, were important to verify people's self-concept.

#### *Perception of Feedback*

Additionally, perception of feedback from partners is considered as an important factor in functioning to verify self-concept. Sillars, Jones, and Murphy's (1984) study demonstrated that an important predictor of marital adjustment was perceived agreement. The research examined how understanding and agreement of marital couple's opinions about marital issues influenced their marital adjustment. Results showed that perceived agreement was the most influential predictor of marital adjustment. Perceived agreement was defined as the correlation between a spouse's rating of issues and their estimate of their partner's rating. In other words, regardless of real agreements, if spouses perceived that their spouse had the same opinions as theirs, their marital adjustment was high.

As shown above, perception of communication with dating partners is considered as an important factor influencing closeness to the partners. In short, previous research implies that communication plays an important role to allow people to utilize strategies which verify their self-concept.

### **Chapter 3: Rationales and Hypotheses**

Reviewing previous studies allows us to predict that interpersonal communication, such as self-disclosure and receiving feedback, helps people to verify their self-concept. This study examines several predictions that derive directly from prior theory and research. First, this study investigates whether or not partners in dating couples prefer partners who verify their self-concept. Findings of previous studies of SVT examining how people choose their dating and marital partners implied that people are likely to choose partners who verify their self-concepts (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Although it was found that people in marital couples rather than dating couples were likely to select their partners based on self-verification strivings, this study attempts to replicate the phenomenon in dating couples. Hypothesis 1 is that there will be a significant relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and relationship closeness, such that as the consonance increases, closeness also will increase. If this is so, we can predict that:

**H1A: Negative self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively will be closer than negative self-view participants with partners who rate them positively.**

**H1B: Positive self-view participants with partners who rate them positively will be closer than positive self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively.**

Second, based upon the arguments of SVT and the self-confirmation function of self-disclosure, it is assumed that people in close relationships want to disclose themselves in ways that confirm their self-concepts. Hypothesis 2 is that there will be a significant relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and valence of self-disclosure. Specifically:

**H2A: Negative self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively will perceive themselves as disclosing more negatively than negative self-view participants with partners who rate them positively.**

**H2B: Positive self-view participants with partners who rate them positively will perceive themselves as disclosing more positively than positive self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively.**

Third, previous studies suggested that receiving self-consistent feedback from people in close relationships allows people to maintain their self-concept. Consequently, self-consistent feedback from romantic partners is assumed to be essential to maintain dating relationships. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is that there will be a significant relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and valence of feedback from a partner. Specifically:

**H3A: Negative self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively will report receiving more negative feedback than negative self-view participants with partners who rate them positively.**

H3B: Positive self-view participants with partners who rate them positively will report receiving more positive feedback than positive self-view participants with partners who rate them negatively.

Finally, previous research has suggested that perception of communication with partners is an important factor in determining satisfaction in relationships. Specifically, if participants perceive that their partners give them self-consistent feedback, they will feel satisfied with their relationship. Consequently, hypothesis 4 is that there will be a significant relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and valence of perception of feedback from a partner, and relationship closeness, such that as the consonance increases, closeness also will increase. If this is so, we can predict that:

H4A: Negative self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving negative feedback will be closer than negative self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving positive feedback.

H4B: Positive self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving positive feedback will be closer than positive self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving negative feedback.

#### **Chapter 4: Method**

*Participants.* Sixty-two heterosexual dating couples were recruited at a large public university in the midwestern United States. At least one participant in each couple was enrolled in an introductory communication course or registered in a participant pool, and participants were given course credits for the participation. To participate in the study, individuals must have been in a dating relationship for at least two weeks and not cohabited. Most were Caucasian (67.7%), African American (12.1%), Asian American



(4.8%), and other ethnicity (15.4%)). The average length of dating duration was 19.1 months (1 years and 7.1 months), and the range was 60 months (minimum and maximum durations were 1 month and 61 months, respectively).

*Procedure.* Participants were scheduled to visit a room, which had a wall to separate the room into two sections. A male investigator explained that this study was designed to examine communication in a romantic relationship and they were allowed to ask questions in this study. After this brief introduction and upon having participants accept the consent forms, the investigator distributed a questionnaire which had a number assigned to each couple so that the matching of answers between partners in a couple was possible. The investigator distributed the questionnaire in a way that he could not know which number was assigned to each couple and asked participants to return their questionnaire in a box in order to maintain their anonymity. After they received questionnaires, one of the partners in a couple was asked to move behind a wall in the room in order to avoid seeing the partner's answer. No time limit was given for them to complete the questionnaire.

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire was composed of a self-esteem scale, a self-worth scale, a scale to rate partner, a scale to rate partner's worth, a self-disclosure scale, a scale to examine feedback to partner, a scale to investigate perceived feedback from a partner, and a closeness scale.

*Independent Variables.* Valence (positivity and negativity) of self-concept was examined by using the ten item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Items included "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "At times, I think I am no good at all." Respondents also completed the five item Self-Attribute Questionnaire

(SAQ; Pelham & Swann, 1989). The SAQ measures perceived central attributes of self-worth: intellectual capability, physical attractiveness, athletic ability, social skills, and aptitude in arts and music. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was modified to allow participants to rate their partners; for examples, “My partner has a number of good qualities” and “At times, my partner is no good at all.” This score of evaluation of partner was treated as “evaluation from partner” within the study.

*Dependent Variables.* A seven item adapted self-disclosure scale developed by Wheelless (1976) was used to investigate perception of self-disclosure valence (positiveness and negativeness), and included items such as “I usually disclose positive things about myself when I talk with my partner” and “On the whole, my disclosures about myself are more negative than positive when I talk with my partner.” Feedback to partner was measured by a modified version of the adapted self-disclosure scale; for examples, “I usually say positive things about my partner when I talk with my partner” and “On the whole, what I say about my partner is more negative than positive when I talk with my partner,” and the modified scale has six items. Feedback to one’s partner was treated as “feedback from partner” in the study. Perception of feedback from a partner was also examined by a modified version of the self-disclosure scale, including items such as “My partner usually says positive things about me when I talk with my partner” and “On the whole, what my partner says about me is more negative than positive when I talk with my partner.” The scale was composed of six items. Finally, relationship closeness was measured by 13 items of a closeness scale which was composed by Dibble and Levine (2007).

For all items for the independent variables and dependent variables, a 7-step Likert-type response format was used (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) except Self-Attribute Questionnaire, which used a 10-scale ranging from 1 (bottom 5%) to 10 (top 5%).

## Chapter 5: Results

*Independence of Data.* To examine independence of the data, the intraclass correlation of each scale was calculated as follows. Self-Esteem: Intraclass  $r = .50$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Evaluation from Partner: Intraclass  $r = .32$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 1.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Self-Disclosure: Intraclass  $r = .26$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 1.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Feedback from Partner: Intraclass  $r = .37$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 2.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Perception of Received Feedback: Intraclass  $r = .27$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 1.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Closeness: Intraclass  $r = .22$ ,  $F(61, 123) = 1.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . Because the results demonstrated the non independence between data of participants in each couple, each couple rather than each individual was used as the unit of analysis. One participant in a couple was randomly selected as the “actor” and another participant in the couple was designated as the “partner.”

*Descriptive Statistics.* Descriptive statistics for each scale are shown in Table 1. Two types of means and standard deviations are calculated on the basis of the data using couple as the unit of analysis, which is divided into an actor and a partner.

**Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics.***

	Actor or partner in each couple	
	Actor	Partner
Self-esteem (Rosenberg's scale)		
<i>M</i>	5.67	5.79
<i>SD</i>	0.88	0.86
Self-worth (SAQ)		
<i>M</i>	6.98	7.19
<i>SD</i>	1.29	1.11
Evaluation from partner (Rosenberg's Scale)		
<i>M</i>	6.24	6.16
<i>SD</i>	0.55	0.73
Partner's worth (SAQ)		
<i>M</i>	7.32	7.50
<i>SD</i>	1.18	1.18
Self-disclosure		
<i>M</i>	5.20	5.25
<i>SD</i>	0.96	1.04
Feedback from partner		
<i>M</i>	5.49	5.56
<i>SD</i>	0.99	1.06
Perception of feedback from partner		
<i>M</i>	5.67	5.73
<i>SD</i>	1.13	1.13
Closeness		
<i>M</i>	5.96	5.95
<i>SD</i>	0.78	0.78

*Reliabilities.* Reliabilities of each scale are shown in Table 2. Two types of reliabilities are calculated like the descriptive statistics.

Table 2. *Reliabilities of Variables*

Actor or partner in each couple	Actor	Partner
Self-esteem (Rosenberg's scale)	.87	.88
Self-worth (SAQ)	.63	.57
Evaluation from partner (Rosenberg's Scale)	.79	.66
Partner's worth (SAQ)	.64	.65
Self-disclosure	.80	.86
Feedback from partner	.88	.86
Perception of feedback from partner	.90	.92
Closeness	.91	.92

As shown above, because of low reliabilities of SAQ, data of self-worth and partner's worth were not included in my analysis.

*Dichotomizing Participants.* Negative self-esteem participants and positive self-esteem participants were defined by dichotomizing participants on the basis of responses of Rosenberg's self-esteem scale using the median as the point to dichotomize. A median of self-esteem scale was 5.8, so participants with 5.8 or less of self-esteem were considered as "lower" self-esteem people (N = 32) and participants with more than 5.8 of self-esteem were considered as "higher" self-esteem people (N = 30). Because 5.8 out of 7.0 (7-step Likert-type response format) was not low, it was not appropriate that

participants with 5.8 or less self-esteem were defined as “negative” self-esteem people.

Therefore, in this study, *lower* and *higher* self-esteem were used to categorize participants rather than “negative” and “positive” self-esteem. Using the same procedure, lower (N = 35) and higher (N = 27) evaluation from partner (Median = 6.33) and lower (N = 31) and higher (N = 31) perceived feedback from a partner (Median = 5.92) were defined.

*Tests of Hypothesis 1.* Hypothesis 1 predicted a relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners’ rating valence, and relationship closeness.

Specifically, H1A predicted lower self-view participants with partners who rate them lower will be closer than lower self-view participants with partners who rate them higher.

H1B predicted higher self-view participants with partners who rate them higher will be closer than higher self-view participants with partners who rate them lower. First, an

independent-sample t-test was conducted to examine the effect of participants’

self-esteem and evaluation from their partners on the participants’ closeness to their

partners. The result showed a significant difference between lower ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ )

and higher ( $M = 6.22$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) self-esteem participants in their closeness to their

partners,  $t(60) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .108$  as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Closeness of Different Self-esteem and Evaluation from Partner Groups.*

	Self-esteem		Evaluation mean
	Lower	Higher	
Evaluation from	Lower	5.56a(0.92)	6.12(0.73)
			5.85(0.86)
partner	Higher	5.89(0.66)	6.38b(0.50)
			6.11(0.63)
	Self-esteem mean	5.71x((81)	6.22y(0.65)

Note.

Different subscripts (x and y) indicate significant difference at  $p < .05$ .

Different subscripts (a and b) indicate significant difference at  $p < .05$ .

Standard deviations are reported in parentheses

In short, participants with higher self-esteem were closer to their partners than those with lower self-esteem. No significant difference existed between lower evaluated ( $M = 5.85, SD = 0.86$ ) or higher evaluated ( $M = 6.11, SD = 0.63$ ) participants in their closeness,  $t(60) = 1.31, p = .20, \eta^2 = .028$ .

In order to test hypothesis 1, lower self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $N = 17$ ), lower self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $N = 15$ ), higher self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $N = 12$ ), and higher self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $N = 18$ ) groups were created. H1A predicted lower self-view participants with partners who rate them lower will be closer than lower self-view participants with partners who rate them higher. An independent sample t-test was used and the result did not show a significant difference,  $t(30) = 1.14, p = .26, \eta^2 = .042$ . Lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower were not closer to their partner ( $M = 5.56, SD = 0.92$ ) than lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them higher ( $M = 5.89, SD = 0.66$ ). H1B predicted higher self-view participants with partners who rate them higher will be closer than higher self-view participants with partners who rate them lower. An independent sample t-test was used and the result did not show a significant difference,  $t(28) = 1.08, p = .29, \eta^2 = .040$ . Higher self-view participants with partners who evaluated them higher were not closer to their partner ( $M = 6.38, SD = 0.50$ ) than higher self-view participants with their partners who evaluated them lower ( $M = 6.12, SD = 0.73$ ). In short, these results were not consistent with hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, in order to examine the difference among the four conditions in closeness, such as lower self-esteem – lower evaluation, lower self-esteem – higher evaluation, higher self-esteem – higher evaluation, and higher self-esteem – lower



evaluation, a single factor analysis of variance was conducted and the results showed that there was a significant difference,  $F(3,58) = 3.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .145$ . Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's procedure ( $p < .05$ ) indicated that participants with higher self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $M = 6.38$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) were significantly closer to their partners than those with lower self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $M = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ).

*Tests of Hypothesis 2.* Hypothesis 2 predicted a relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and perceived valence of self-disclosure. Specifically, H2A predicted that the lower self-view participants with partners who rate them lower will perceive themselves as disclosing more negatively than lower self-view participants with partners who rate them higher. H2B predicted that higher self-view participants with partners who rate them higher will perceive themselves as disclosing more positively than higher self-view participants with partners who rate them lower. First, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to separately see an effect of participants' self-esteem and the evaluation from their partners on the participants' disclosure to their partners. The result showed a significant difference between lower ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) and higher ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) self-esteem participants in their self-disclosure to their partners,  $t(60) = 2.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .070$  as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Valence of Self-disclosure of Different Self-esteem and Evaluation from Partner Groups*

	Self-esteem		Evaluation mean
	Lower	Higher	
Evaluation from	Lower		
partner	Higher		
Self-esteem mean			

In short, participants with higher self-esteem self-disclosed significantly more positively to their partners than those with lower self-esteem. A significant difference also existed between lower evaluated ( $M = 4.99$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and higher evaluated ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) participants in their self-disclosure,  $t(55) = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .079$ .

To investigate the sub-hypotheses, an independent sample t-test was used and the results showed a significant difference between lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower and higher in a valence of their self-disclosure to their partner,  $t(23) = 3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .288$ . Lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower disclosed themselves more negatively to their partner ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) than lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them higher ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). No significant difference was found between higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluates them lower and higher in a valence of their self-disclosure to their partner,  $t(28) = 0.25$ ,  $p = .80$ ,  $\eta^2 = .022$ . Higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them higher did not disclose themselves more positively to their partner ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) than higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). In short, these results were consistent with hypothesis 2A and were not consistent with hypothesis 2B.

In order to examine the difference among the four conditions in self-disclosure, such as lower self-esteem – lower evaluation, lower self-esteem – higher evaluation, higher self-esteem – higher evaluation, and higher self-esteem – lower evaluation, a single factor analysis of variance was conducted and a result showed that there was a significant difference,  $F(3,58) = 4.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .190$ . Post-hoc comparisons using

Tukey's procedure ( $p < .05$ ) indicated that participants with lower self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $M = 4.53a$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) self-disclosed significantly negatively to their partners than those with lower self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $M = 5.45b$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ), higher self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $M = 5.51b$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), and higher self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $M = 5.43b$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ).

*Tests of Hypothesis 3.* Hypothesis 3 predicted a relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and valence of feedback from a partner. Specifically, H3A predicted that lower self-view participants with partners who rate them lower will receive more negative feedback than lower self-view participants with partners who rate them higher. H3B predicted that higher self-view participants with partners who rate them higher will receive more positive feedback than higher self-view participants with partners who rate them lower. First, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to examine the effect of participants' self-esteem and the evaluation from their partners on feedback from a partner. The result showed no significant difference between lower ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) and higher ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) self-esteem participants in feedback from their partners,  $t(60) = 0.19$ ,  $p = .85$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$  as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Valence of Feedback from Partner of Different Self-esteem and Evaluation from Partner Groups.*

		Self-esteem		Evaluation mean
		Lower	Higher	
Evaluation from	Lower	5.03a(0.80)	4.97a(0.96)	5.00x(0.87)
partner	Higher	5.96b(0.79)	6.32b(0.67)	6.12y(0.75)
	Self-esteem mean	5.46(0.91)	5.51(1.08)	

In short, self-esteem did not affect valence of feedback from partners. A significant difference was found between lower evaluated ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) or higher evaluated ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) participants in feedback from their partners,  $t(60) = 5.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .320$ . In other words, participants with a higher evaluation from a partner received significantly more positive feedback from their partners than those with a lower evaluation from a partner.

To examine the sub-hypotheses, an independent sample t-test was used and the result showed a significant difference between lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluates them lower and higher in a valence of feedback from their partner,  $t(30) = 3.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .265$ . Lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower received more negative feedback from their partner ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) than lower self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them higher ( $M = 5.96$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). A significant difference also was found between higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluates them lower and higher in a valence of feedback from partner,  $t(28) = 4.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .389$ . Higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them higher received more positive feedback from their partner ( $M = 6.32$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) than higher self-view participants with their partner who evaluated them lower ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ). In short, these results were consistent with hypothesis 3.

In order to examine the difference among the four conditions in feedback from partner, such as lower self-esteem – lower evaluation, lower self-esteem – higher evaluation, higher self-esteem – higher evaluation, and higher self-esteem – lower evaluation, a single factor analysis of variance was conducted and the results showed that

there was a significant difference,  $F(3,58) = 6.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .335$ . Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's procedure ( $p < .05$ ) indicated that participants with higher self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $M = 4.97a$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) and lower self-esteem – lower evaluation ( $M = 5.03a$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) received significantly more negative feedback from their partners than those with lower self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $M = 5.96b$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and higher self-esteem – higher evaluation ( $M = 6.32b$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ).

*Tests of Hypothesis 4.* Hypothesis 4 predicted a relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and perception of valence of feedback from partner, and relationship closeness. Specifically, H4A predicted that lower self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more negative feedback will be closer than lower self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving more positive feedback. H4B predicted that higher self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving more positive feedback will be closer than higher self-view participants who perceive themselves as receiving more negative feedback. First, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to examine the effect of perception of received feedback on participants' closeness to their partners. The results showed a significant difference between participants who perceived themselves as receiving more negative ( $M = 5.72$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and positive ( $M = 6.20$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) feedback in their closeness to their partners,  $t(60) = 2.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .101$  as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *Closeness of Different Self-esteem and Perception of Feedback from Partner Groups.*

	Self-esteem		Evaluation mean
	Lower	Higher	
Perception of	Lower	5.53a(0.84)	5.97(0.76)
			5.72x(0.83)
feedback from partner	Higher	5.95(0.74)	6.41b(0.49)
			6.20y(0.65)
Self-esteem mean	5.71x(0.81)	6.22y(0.65)	



In order to test hypothesis 4, lower self-esteem – lower feedback perception ( $N = 18$ ), lower self-esteem – higher feedback perception ( $N = 14$ ), higher self-esteem – higher feedback perception ( $N = 17$ ), and higher self-esteem – lower feedback perception ( $N = 13$ ) groups were created. An independent sample t-test was used and the result did not show a significant difference between lower self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more negative and positive feedback from their partners in their closeness to their partners,  $t(30) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .16$ ,  $\eta^2 = .065$ . Lower self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving negative feedback from their partners were not more close to their partners ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) than lower self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more positive feedback from their partners ( $M = 5.95$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). Moreover, the trend of this result was in a direction opposite from the expected direction. That is, the higher perception of received feedback the lower self-view participants had, the closer they were to their partner.

An independent sample t-test also did not show a significant difference between higher self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more negative and positive feedback from their partners, in their closeness to their partner even though there was a moderate difference,  $t(28) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $\eta^2 = .120$ . Higher self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more positive feedback from their partners were not more close to their partners ( $M = 6.41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) than higher self-view participants who perceived themselves as receiving more negative feedback from their partners ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). Although the difference was not significant, the trend of this result was in the expected direction. These results were not consistent with hypothesis 4.

In order to examine the difference among the four conditions in closeness, such as lower self-esteem – lower perceived feedback, lower self-esteem – higher perceived feedback, higher self-esteem – higher perceived feedback, and higher self-esteem – lower received feedback, a single factor analysis of variance was conducted and a result showed that there was a significant difference,  $F(3,58) = 3.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .185$ . Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's procedure ( $p < .05$ ) indicated that participants with higher self-esteem – higher perceived feedback ( $M = 6.41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) were significantly closer to their partners than those with lower self-esteem – lower perceived feedback ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ).

## Chapter 6: Discussion

This study examined the relationship between consonance of self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence, and an assortment of dependent variables; including closeness, valence of self-disclosure, and valence of feedback from partners. In my discussion, I will examine the various findings individually.

*Influence of Self-Esteem on Closeness.* Participants' self-esteem had a significant influence on their closeness to their partners, such that the higher self-esteem participants had, the closer they reported being. This finding was not expected and can be explained in several ways. First, a degree of self-esteem could cause a degree of closeness. If people perceive themselves positively, they could see their relationship positively and intimately. Second, a degree of closeness could cause a degree of self-esteem. Having successful and close relationships could make partners have high self-esteem. Finally, this finding could simply be a product of the method that was used. In this study, participants responded to items measuring their self-esteem and self-worth first and then they answered questions

related to their closeness to their partners. Consequently, answers on the self-esteem items might have caused a tendency to answer questions of closeness in the same pattern.

*Positivity Strivings.* My results offer qualified support for positivity strivings in relationships, rather than self-verification strivings. The more positive evaluation from a partner and perception of received feedback participants had, the closer they were to their partner. This finding is inconsistent with previous self-verification research and consistent with previous positivity strivings research, which argues that people are motivated to behave in a way to have others form a positive impression of them (Goffman, 1955; Jones, 1973; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Especially, as Self-Enhancement Theory suggests, regardless of variation in valences of self-esteem, they want to be evaluated positively (Shrauger, 1975). These inconsistent results can be explained in part by findings of a previous study conducted by Swann, De La Ronde and Hixon (1994). They suggested a shift from positivity strivings to self-verification strivings throughout the process of developing a relationship. Specifically, while people involved in dating are most intimate with their partners who evaluate them positively, people involved in marriages are most intimate with spouses whose evaluations verify their self-concept. Results of this current research seem to replicate the previous study.

*Communication.* Even though positivity strivings seemed to have a significant influence on closeness in dating couples, findings also suggested that in some situations communication functioned to verify participants' self-concept in couples. Specifically, if there was not a consistency between self-concept and evaluation from a partner, such as lower self-esteem and higher evaluation from a partner or higher self-esteem and lower evaluation from a partner, valence of communication varied. For example, even if

participants were evaluated lower when their self-esteem was higher, the participants disclosed themselves positively. Even if participants had lower self-esteem, when they were evaluated higher, they received positive feedback. Therefore, in this case, communication did not function to verify participants' self-concept. However, if there was a consistency between self-concept and evaluation from a partner, communication worked to verify their positive or negative self-concept. Specifically, valence of self-disclosure and received feedback was highest when both of participants' self-esteem and evaluation from a partner were higher. On the other hand, valence of self-disclosure and received feedback was lowest when both of participants' self-esteem and evaluation from a partner were lower.

The consonance among self-esteem valence, partners' rating valence, and communication valence in this current study can be explained as follows. Findings of previous research suggested that when people received discrepant evaluation from others, they tried to disconfirm the feedback and showed aspects of themselves which were consistent with their self-concept (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). For example, if lower self-view people received higher evaluation, they communicated negatively to disconfirm the discrepant evaluation and confirm their lower self-concept. On the other hand, results of this current study showed that communication did not function to disconfirm discrepant evaluation but was influenced by and merged with evaluation from their partners. For example, when lower self-esteem participants were evaluated higher, they communicated positively, and when they were evaluated lower, they communicated negatively. This discrepancy between these different findings may come from different phenomena that the two studies tried to investigate. While previous

studies examined how participants “respond” to immediate evaluation from a “stranger (confederate),” this current study examined how participants daily “converse” with their “romantic partner.” Evaluation from romantic partners can be considered as more influential than evaluation from strangers. As time passes, at the middle of a process of relationships, their communication and evaluation from partners may gradually influence and merge with each other. Then, if a consonance between self-esteem valence and partners’ evaluation valence is formed, their communication would function to have their partners know their true attributes further. At last, the consonance among self-esteem valence, partners’ rating valence, and communication valence might be formed. In short, results of this current study can be considered to show daily communication styles between partners in couples which have been formed through their previous interactions. Then, why do negative self-esteem people communicate with their partners in a way to verify their negative self-concept?

Segrine (2001) explained why depressed people, who basically have negative self-views, seek and elicit negative feedback from others on the basis of self-verification theory. In short, self-verification strivings motivate negative self-view people to seek negative self-confirming feedback in order to improve their sense of prediction and control (Segrine, 2001). Based on this argument, in this current study, why participants with lower self-esteem disclosed negatively and received negative feedback can be explained. First, it is assumed that by disclosing negative aspects of themselves and receiving negative self-confirming feedback, people with a negative self-view can be comfortable, maintaining a consistent self-concept. Second, negative self-confirming communication would allow them to make accurate predictions of interactions with

others. In short, negative self-esteem people would be afraid of how their partners would react to them when their partners discover their negative aspects. Therefore, when people with negative self-view are in a relationship with their partner who evaluates them negatively, the negative self-view people could be likely to disclose their negative aspects to and elicit negative feedback from their partner. This reassurance would enable them not to worry that they would leave a bad impression and be discovered to be negative. These two explanations are consistent with arguments of SVT, which are the epistemic and interpersonal considerations, as discussed previously in this study.

Moreover, previous research suggested that the reassurance seeking by people with low self-esteem made others reject the reassurance seekers (Joiner, Alfano, and Metalsky, 1992). The finding may explain a result of this current study that participants with lower self-esteem who were evaluated negatively were less close to their partners. In short, participants with lower self-esteem might have disclosed their negative aspects to and sought negative feedback from their partners as reassurance seeking. The communication would make their partners reject the reassurance seekers and then closeness of the reassurance seekers who are rejected by partners would decrease.

*Implications.* This thesis significantly contributes to our knowledge of self-disclosure and impression management. Although many findings of previous research suggested people are motivated to show their positive aspects (Goffman, 1955; Jones, 1973; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Shrauger, 1975), the results of this current study shows that lower self-view people who are in a relationship with their partners who evaluate them lower are likely to disclose themselves negatively to verify their self-concept. Moreover, while many self-disclosure studies have focused on catharsis or

developing relationship functions of self-disclosure (Derlega & Winstead, 2001; Greene, Derlega & Mathews, 2006; Venetis, Greene, Banerjee & Bagdasarov, 2008), there is limited self-disclosure research focusing on self-validation functions (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984).

Practically, the findings of this study potentially contribute in helping to improve methodologies of psychotherapy. Swann (1983) expressed concern that even if treatment of psychotherapy successfully helps clients to have a positive self-concept, the environment around clients – including relationship partners such as family members, romantic partners, and friends – would change them back to the previous negative condition. The environment can be considered a self-verifying condition in which people around clients keep giving the clients feedback causing them to perceive themselves as negative again. Therefore, in order to maintain the positive self-concept of clients, not only clients themselves, but also people around the clients should be changed. This current research found that communication with significant others functions to verify people's self-concept. Therefore, if therapists can prevent clients from communicating with others around the clients in a way that verifies their negative self-concept, further effects of psychotherapy can be expected because of not only the change of clients but also the environment in which interactions with people around the clients help to maintain their positive self-concept.

*Limitations and Future Directions.* There are some limitations of this current study. The first limitation is the restriction of a range observed in certain measurement indices. Because most of the participants in the current study had positive self-esteem (Median = 5.8), only a few participants actually scored in a fashion suggestive of low

self-esteem. Therefore, findings of this current research can not be applied to truly “negative self-view” people.

The second limitation is that results of this current study can be generalized only to a limited population. Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003) found that if the self was formed relationally with others, consistency between self-concept and perception from others might be less important in well-being. Specifically, for individuals with a highly relational self-construal, the consistency is not as significant predictor of their well-being and behaviors as it is for individuals with a low relational self-construal. For example, people with a negative self-concept would not self-disclose negatively if their self-construal is highly associated with relationships with people around them because their self-concept would not work to drive them to communicate with others.

Furthermore, because results of this study were obtained on the basis of North American college students, the results can not be generalized to other populations such as Asians who mostly have highly relational self-construal or middle age marital couples.

An additional limitation is that using a questionnaire with only closed questions to ask participants their perception of their communication does not measure actual conversation. In short, asking participants what they *would* talk about with their partners is not the same as observing them actually interacting with their partners. Future studies should strive to record conversations of dating couples and code them.

The final limitation is that examining communication by using a questionnaire only once does not allow us to investigate what people talk about every day. Consequently, future scholars may consider diary methods as an alternative method.



Such a methodology would allow us to investigate what participants in dating relationships daily converse about with each other.

Some directions for future research are considered. First, a difference in communication styles between dating couples and marital couples needs to be investigated. Because a previous study demonstrated that phenomena of self-verification varied between these two types of couples, different communication style would be found in a future study (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Additionally, Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) will allow us to deal with an issue of interdependency between partners in couples keeping variables continuous without dichotomizing them. *Actor effect* is an influence of a person on her or himself and *partner effect* is an influence of a person on her or his partner (Kenny, 1996). For example, a person's self-disclosure would not only influence her or his partner's closeness but also influence closeness of her or himself to the partner. Therefore, in future research, APIM is recommended to analyze self-verification communication research for dyad participants.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis examined how people manage their self-concept by communication through interactions with dating partners on the basis of two different motivations. Mixed results of this current research partially supported both strivings. Specifically, the results showed that while participants' closeness to their partners was mainly influenced by positivity strivings, their communication functioned to verify their self-concept in cases for which there was a consistency between self-esteem valence and partners' rating valence. As I mentioned in the introduction, an assumption before conducting this study is that communication which allows people to verify their self-concept would help them

to live happily in a society. Now, results of this study imply that the assumption could be true for people with higher self-esteem but not for people with lower self-esteem.

However, because this study does not fully allow us to make an argument that communication to verify self-concept causes changes in relationship closeness, future research is recommended to investigate how self-verification communication impacts relationship closeness and well being of communicators themselves such as their mental health. Hopefully, this study contributes significantly to our knowledge of communication functioning, and opens the door for future work examining communication and verification of self-concept in the discipline of communication studies.

## APPENDIX

## **APPENDIX**

**We currently are investigating the nature of romantic relationships and how people communicate with their partners.**

**Each section is separate, and asks different questions, so please read the directions carefully for each section.**

**Thank you for participating in this study!**

-----Section1-----

**Instructions:** Please take a moment: Think about your perception of your self-esteem/self-worth. Then, complete the items below. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

2. At times, I think I am no good at all.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

6. I certainly feel useless at times.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

-----Section2-----

**Instructions:** Please take a moment: Think about your perception of **your partner's** self-esteem/self-worth. Then, complete the items below. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

11. At times, my partner is no good at all.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

12. My partner has a number of good qualities.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

13. My partner is able to do things as well as most other people.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

14. My partner does not have much to be proud of.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

15. My partner is useless at times.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

16. My partner is a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

17. I wish I could have more respect for my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

18. All in all, I am inclined to feel that my partner is a failure.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

19. I take a positive attitude toward my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

-----Section3-----

**Instructions:** This questionnaire has to do with your attitudes about some of your activities and abilities. For the items below, you should rate yourself relative to other college students your own age by using the following scale:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Bottom	lower	lower	lower	lower	upper	upper	upper	upper	upper
5%	10%	20%	30%	50%	50%	30%	20%	10%	5%

An example of the way the scale works is as follows: if one of the traits follows were "height," a person who is just below average height would choose "E" for this question, whereas a person who is taller than 80% (but not taller than 90%) of others her/his age would mark "H," indicating that the person is in the top 20% on this dimension.

20. intellectual ability \_\_\_\_\_

21. social skills/ social competence \_\_\_\_\_

22. artistic and/or musical ability \_\_\_\_\_

23. athletic ability \_\_\_\_\_

24. physical attractiveness \_\_\_\_\_

-----Section4-----

**Instructions:** This questionnaire has to do with your attitudes about some of **your partner's** activities and abilities. For the items below, you should rate **your partner** relative to other college students her/his age by using the following scale:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Bottom	lower	lower	lower	lower	upper	upper	upper	upper	upper
5%	10%	20%	30%	50%	50%	30%	20%	10%	5%

An example of the way the scale works is as follows: if one of the traits follows were "height," a person who is just below average height would choose "E" for this question, whereas a person who is taller than 80% (but not taller than 90%) of others her/his age would mark "H," indicating that the person is in the top 20% on this dimension.

25. intellectual ability \_\_\_\_\_

26. social skills/ social competence \_\_\_\_\_

27. artistic and/or musical ability \_\_\_\_\_



28. athletic ability \_\_\_\_\_

29. physical attractiveness \_\_\_\_\_

-----Section5-----

**Instructions:** Now, take a moment: Imagine a situation where you and your partner talk. Think about what you disclose about yourself to your partner daily. Then, complete the items below. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

30. I usually disclose positive things about myself when I talk with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

31. On the whole, my disclosures about myself are more negative than positive when I talk with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

32. I normally reveal bad feelings about myself when I talk with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

33. I generally express my positive emotions about myself when I talk with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

34. I often reveal more undesirable things about myself than desirable things when I talk with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

35. I habitually disclose negative information about myself when I talk with my partner.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

36. In general, what I disclose about myself is more positive than negative when I talk with my partner.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

-----Section6-----

**Instructions:** Now, take a moment: Imagine a situation where you and your partner talk. Think about what you say **about your partner** to her/him daily. Then, complete the items below. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

37. I usually say positive things about my partner when I talk with my partner.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

38. On the whole, what I say about my partner is more negative than positive when I talk with my partner.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

39. I normally talk about my partner's negative feelings when I talk with my partner.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

40. I often discuss more undesirable things about my partner than desirable things when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

41. I habitually give negative information about my partner when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

42. In general, what I speak about my partner is more positive than negative when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

-----Section 7-----

**Instructions:** Now, take a moment: Imagine a situation where you and your partner talk. Think about what your partner says **about you** to you daily. Then, complete the items below. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

43. My partner usually says positive things about me when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

44. On the whole, what my partner says about me is more negative than positive when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

45. My partner normally talks about my negative feelings when I talk with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

**46. My partner often discusses more undesirable things about me than desirable things when I talk with my partner.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

**Strongly disagree**

**Strongly agree**

**47 My partner habitually gives negative information about me when I talk with my partner.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

**Strongly disagree**

**Strongly agree**

**48. In general, what my partner speaks about me is more positive than negative when I talk with my partner.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

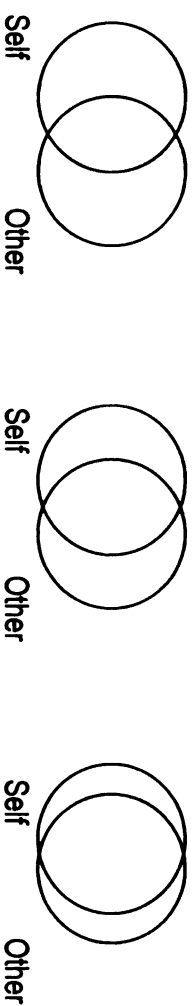
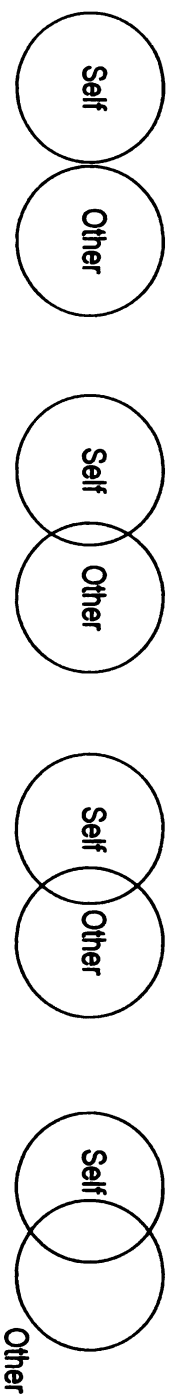
**Strongly disagree**

**Strongly agree**

-----Section 8-----

**Instructions:** Think about your relationship with your partner. Please circle the picture below that best describes your relationship with your partner.

49.



-----Section9-----

**Instructions:** The following questions refer to your relationship with your partner. Please think about your relationship with your partner when responding to the following questions. Circle the number that best represents your agreement/disagreement of the statement.

50. My relationship with my partner is close.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

51. When we are apart, I miss my partner a great deal.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

52. My partner and I disclose important personal things to each other.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

53. My partner and I have a strong connection.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

54. My partner and I want to spend time together.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

55. I'm sure of my relationship with my partner.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

56. My partner is a priority in my life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

57. My partner and I do a lot of things together.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

58. When I have free time I choose to spend it alone with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

59. I think about my partner a lot.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

60. My relationship with my partner is important in my life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

61. I consider my partner when making important decisions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

-----Section 10-----

**Instructions:** Please circle or fill-in the response that BEST describe you and your relationship:

62. Your gender?

Male

Female

**63. Ethnicity:**

**Caucasian**

**African American**

**Native American**

**Asian American**

**Hispanic**

**Pacific Islander**

**Mixed**

**Other \_\_\_\_\_**

**64. How long have you been dating your current romantic partner?**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Years** \_\_\_\_\_ **Months**

**Thank You!**



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