

4-11-2014

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Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Girard, Lauren; Peterson, Sarah; Alfonso, Demeiza; and Hanrath, Lily, "Do Standards Matter? A Priori Standards, Partner Perceptions, and Relationship Evaluation" (2014). *13th Annual Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2014)*. Paper 183.

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Do Standards Matter?

A Priori Standards, Partner Perceptions, and Relationship Evaluation

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Introduction

If you value intelligence in a romantic partner, will you be more satisfied in a relationship if your partner is more intelligent? Previous research has demonstrated that greater consistency between ideal mate standards and perceptions of one's romantic partner (i.e., standards-perception consistency) predicts higher relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). However, most past research has failed to examine a priori mate standards, the standards we form before entering a relationship. Only one study of speed-daters has provided evidence that a priori standards predict later relationship evaluations (Eastwick et al., 2011).

This study aims to examine the link between a priori standards-perception consistency and relationship evaluations utilizing a less idiosyncratic sample, as well as to identify possible moderators of this association. Because we are examining a priori standards, we ensure

that the individuals' standards are not affected by the relationship. Will a priori standards still predict relationship evaluations when a more representative sample is used, for whom and under what conditions?

H1: The greater the association between individuals' a priori standards and their partner perceptions, the higher relationship quality they will report.

H2-H5: The match between a priori standards and partner perceptions will be more important for relationship quality when;

- People are in a committed relationship versus a casual relationship
- People have more salient standards
- People have higher mate value
- People have greater access to desirable potential partners (mate availability)

Method

Participants

- ❖ 79 heterosexual individuals ranging in age from 18 to 69 ($M=30.26$, $SD=11.87$)
- ❖ 16 men and 62 women
- ❖ Majority of the sample was Caucasian (69.6%) and never-married (79.7%)
- ❖ All participants were involved in a new relationship at Time 2.

Procedure

- ❖ Participants were recruited from a variety of academic and community settings and through marketplace and social media sites (e.g. MTurk, Facebook)
- ❖ Participants completed two waves of an online survey, the second of which was sent 9-10 months after the first

Measures

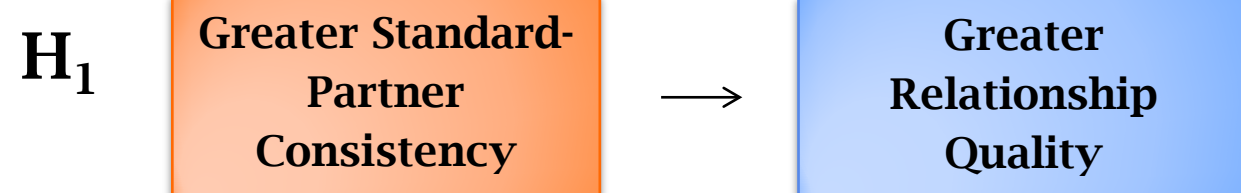
Basic Associations

Measure	Items	α
A Priori Standards	Physical attractiveness	2 items, $\alpha=.74$
	Vitality	3 items, $\alpha=.83$
	Warmth-Trustworthiness	8 items, $\alpha=.81$
	Financial Prospects	5 items, $\alpha=.85$
Partner Perceptions	Physical attractiveness	2 items, $\alpha=.76$
	Vitality	3 items, $\alpha=.72$
	Warmth-Trustworthiness	8 items, $\alpha=.88$
	Financial Prospects	5 items, $\alpha=.83$
Relationship Quality	Relationship Satisfaction	4 items, $\alpha=.90$
	Relationship Commitment	6 items, $\alpha=.94$
	Relationship Ambivalence	6 items, $\alpha=.85$

Potential Moderators

Moderator	Items	α
Relationship Type	1 = casual, 2 = committed	
Mate Value	18 items	$\alpha=.85$
Standard Salience	4 items	$\alpha=.78$
Mate Availability	4 items	$\alpha=.77$

Standards-Perception Consistency



Level metric refers to the level of a particular trait desired by an individual (i.e. high intelligence) in comparison to other individuals. Pattern refers to the overall order of traits desired by an individual (i.e. more intelligent than good looking).

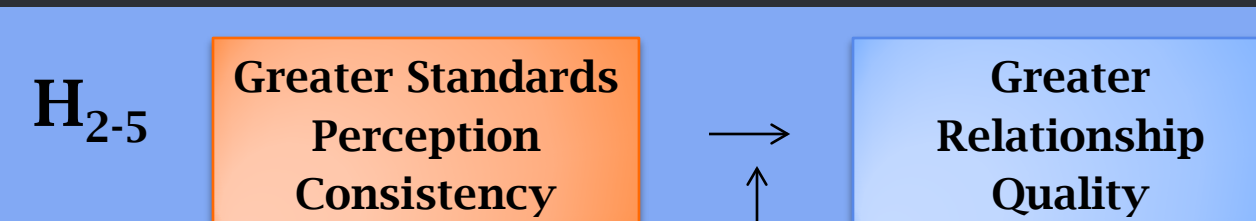
Level Metric	Relationship Satisfaction (β)	Relationship Commitment (β)	Relationship Ambivalence (β)
Physical Attractiveness	-0.01	-0.10	0.02
Vitality	-0.05	0.00	-0.05
Status/Resources	-0.13	-0.06	0.10
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-0.09	-0.21*	0.06
Overall	-0.08	-0.13	0.04
Pattern Metric	Relationship Satisfaction (β)	Relationship Commitment (β)	Relationship Ambivalence (β)
Profile Similarity	0.26*	.23 ⁺	-0.26*

+p < .10. *p < .05

Note: Conducted using regression analyses controlling for gender, age, days between T1 and T2, race, relationship length at T2, and relationship status at T1.

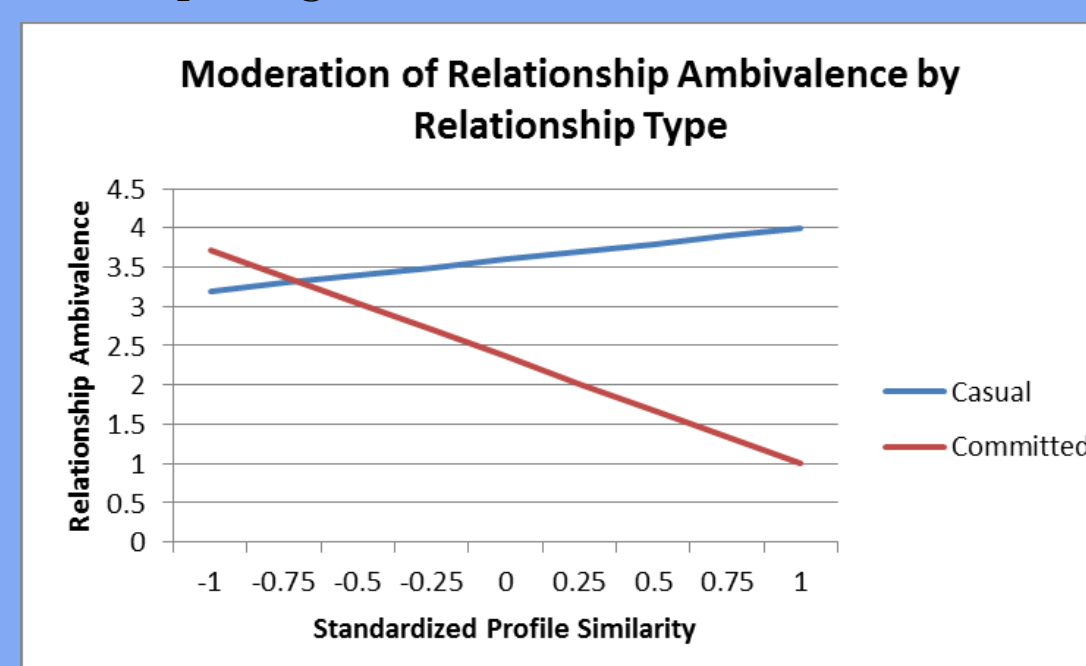
- ❖ **Inconsistent with Hypothesis 1**, for the level metric approach, we did not find that higher standards-partner perception consistency yielded higher relationship quality.
- ❖ **Consistent with Hypothesis 1**, for the pattern metric approach, higher standards-partner perception consistency yielded significantly higher relationship satisfaction, marginally higher relationship commitment, and significantly lower relationship ambivalence.

Moderation



- People are in a committed relationship versus a casual relationship
- People have more salient standards
- People have higher mate value
- People have greater access to desirable potential partners (mate availability)

- ❖ Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in revealing evidence for the majority of our moderators.
- ❖ **However, consistent with H2**, we found that higher standards-perception consistency predicted lower relationship ambivalence for those in committed, rather than casual, relationships. (Fig. 1)



Discussion

- ❖ **Our research shows that people who are romantically involved with partners who match the overall pattern of their a priori mate standards, rather than the specific levels of their mate standards, experience greater relationship quality.**
 - This is consistent with past research that suggests higher standards-perception consistency leads to better relationship quality and more positive relationship outcomes for the pattern metric rather than the level metric.
 - It appears that we are more likely to look at the big picture of our romantic partner's traits and characteristics rather than honing in on levels of specific traits.
- ❖ **Our research was largely unsuccessful in revealing potential moderators of the association between standards-perception consistency and relationship quality.**
 - All but one of our moderators showed insignificant involvement in the relationship between standards-perception consistency and relationship quality, which replicates past research on moderation.
 - However, it appears that higher standards-perception consistency predicted lower relationship ambivalence for those in committed, rather than casual, relationships for the pattern metric.
- ❖ **Further research in the field of mate standards could involve...**
 - Utilizing a longitudinal approach and examining relationships that have lasted longer than those in the sample (3 mos.).
 - Sampling relationships from across a variety of different cultures, similar to the pioneer study of mate standards done by Buss (1989).
 - Examining relationship dissolution. It may be fruitful to assess if relationships are more likely to end due to lower standards-perception consistency, and how the moderators that we tested in this study could influence such relationship dissolution.

