

Running Head: PERSONAL SELF-EXPANSION

Personal Self-Expansion and Romantic Relationship Well-Being

by

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to examine how individual self-expansion (i.e., growing as a person by learning new information and seeing the self in a new light) can be integrated into and benefit a romantic relationship. Undergraduate students were randomly assigned to either a week-long self-expanding activity or a control activity to examine the effects on relationship quality. Contrary to predictions, people in the self-expanding activity condition did not have higher relationship quality scores than participants who engaged in the control activity. However, participants who completed the self-expanding activity did share their activity with their partner more often and shared it more enthusiastically with their partner. Participating in a self-expanding activity alone may not be beneficial to a relationship, but through sharing it may benefit the individual in other ways.

Keywords: Relationship satisfaction, Self-expansion, Sharing, Romantic Relationship

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Personal Self-Expansion and Romantic Relationship Well-Being

The self-concept reflects a person's multifaceted view of themselves. For example, the roles people play in everyday life (e.g., student, parent, child) and the experiences people have (e.g., playing a sport, working, learning a new subject) are included in the self-concept. The self-concept can grow with new, exciting, arousing, and/or interesting experiences (Markus & Wurf, 1987), often referred to as self-expanding experiences. Increasing the self-concept through self-expanding experiences can bring many benefits, both to an individual and a romantic relationship. These self-expanding experiences are done by the person who eventually receives the benefit, but another way that it may also be possible to increase the self-concept is by hearing about a close other's self-expanding experience. For instance, consider Sally, who has recently begun taking cooking classes, and is really enjoying them. She feels as if she is learning a lot, which results in Sally expanding her self-concept (she is learning to cook, learning new recipes, learning that she can overcome challenges). She would be benefiting from this experience. What is unknown is if others can benefit from Sally's experience – for example, is it possible for her partner, Harry, to also benefit from Sally's new experiences? The goal of this study is to examine how personally self-expanding activities, such as Sally's cooking class experience, are transferred to romantic relationships, and what benefits this may bring to the relationship.

Self-Expansion

According to the self-expansion model people are motivated to broaden their sense of self – expanding the self is a central human motivation (Aron & Aron, 1997). People expand their personal world by acquiring new identities, gaining new

perspectives, improving their capabilities, and increasing their resources. Thus, anything that increases knowledge is potentially self-expanding. Self-expansion can occur in many contexts including individual (i.e., expansion by yourself) and partner-related expansion in a romantic relationship (i.e., a self-expanding activity that is done with a partner; Aron & Aron, 1986, Aron & Aron, 1997, Aron et al., 2000, Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013).

Partner-related expansion

Relationships provide many opportunities for self-expansion and people in romantic relationships often grow through them. When first entering a relationship, a person engages in rapid self-expansion because new relationships involve self-disclosure, which allows an individual to self-expand at an accelerated pace. As a person starts to include another in the self, and form a self-other identity with their partner, that person expands because they are now taking on the perspectives, resources, and identities of the other (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron & Aron, 1997). However, once a relationship is well-established, opportunities for self-expansion begin to decline (i.e., because couples know each other well after a period of time). Due to this decline in self-expansion opportunities, it is theorized that couples often begin to experience boredom, a lack of excitement, and a lack of positive affect, which all contribute to declining relationship satisfaction (Aron & Aron, 1986).

Research has found that to combat this, couples should participate in partner-related expansion activities (e.g., activities with the partner that are novel, arousing, and exciting). Engaging in partner-related expansion activities is shown to be beneficial to the relationship, above and beyond the benefits of just spending time with a partner (Reissman et al., 1993; Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013). For instance, in the

early stages of partner-related expansion research, a positive correlation was found between engagement in partner-related expansion activities and relationship quality: couples who reported participating in more partner-related expansion activities also rated their relationship quality as higher. Aron et al. (2000) found that couples who indicated that they participated in more self-expanding activities, in this case defined as exciting activities, felt that they had higher relationship quality.

Partner-related expansion activities have also been shown to *cause* an increase in relationship quality. Aron et al., (2000) tested the effect of partner-related expansion activities on relationship quality experimentally through three studies. They found that participating in a partner-related expansion (a physical task meant to be physiologically arousing and novel) resulted in increased relationship quality from pre-test to post-test (vs an activity that was not expanding). They also found that, when examining couples' discussions after their activities, couples who participated in the partner-related expansion activity showed greater acceptance and less hostility towards their partner when discussing an unrelated task with their partner than those who participated in the non self-expanding activity. This shows that couples who participated in the self-expanding activity also had greater behaviourally expressed relationship quality. These studies demonstrate that engaging in partner-related expansion activities (in this case, physical, arousing, and novel activities) increases relationship quality.

Further research showed that there are effects of partner-related expansion activities besides enhancing relationship quality. Coulter and Malouff (2013) examined different benefits of partner-related expansion activities and how long these effects can last by assigning couples to a partner-related expansion condition (i.e., exciting activity

condition) or a wait list control condition. Couples in the self-expansion condition wrote down a list of exciting activities and were instructed to complete at least one activity every week for 90 minutes for four weeks, while couples in the control condition were placed on a wait list for four weeks. In addition to greater relationship satisfaction, couples in the self-expansion condition had higher levels of excitement and positive affect after the intervention than did couples in the control group. The changes in excitement partially mediated the changes in relationship satisfaction and positive affect. Additionally, couples in the self-expansion condition had greater excitement, positive affect, and relationship satisfaction four months after the study than they did at the pre-test measurements. This shows that partner-related expansion activities increase more than just relationship satisfaction and that this effect is long-lasting.

Early studies on partner-related expansion activities focused on physical activities (e.g., completing a physical task, such as an obstacle course, together). However, Reissman et al., (1993) demonstrated that there was a wide range of partner-related expansion activities, not just physical activities, that could enhance relationships. They had couples make a list of self-expanding activities, and a variety of physical and non-physical activities were listed. For instance, couples listed non-physical activities such as attending concerts, lectures, or plays.

Furthering the research on types of partner-related expansion activities, Graham and Harf (2015) examined the role of challenge in self-expanding activities – they identified self-expanding activities as challenging activities. Through a series of studies, they found that challenge is beneficial to relationships as a characteristic of a partner-related expansion activity as long as the challenge of the task is not greater than the

couple's skill set to complete the task. Couples were assigned to a low, medium, or high challenge activity; those in the medium challenge activity had higher relationship quality than those in the low or high challenge task. The low challenge task did not result in expansion because it was easy, and the high challenge task created negative affect because the couples were unable to complete it. Couples who had the skills to complete the task experienced a stronger positive effect of challenge on relationship quality. This result was also found when day-to-day activities were measured: challenging activities only enhanced relationship quality if the couples had the skill set to complete them. It appears that challenging activities are self-expanding and beneficial to a relationship only if the couples have the skill set to complete them and are successful in completing them.

In other research, Graham (2008) found that partner-related expansion activities can happen anytime, whether it is in free time (i.e., where an individual is free to do as they please) or in non-free time (i.e., where an individual is doing things such as chores and errands). Couples were randomly sampled throughout the week to ask what they were doing and who they were with. They then answered questions about that activity to gauge how much potential self-expansion the activity could produce. When a participant was completing an activity with their partner that had high levels of potential self-expansion, they experienced greater relationship quality, whether this task was engaged in during free time or not (Graham, 2008). This suggests that couples do not have to set aside only free time to plan partner-related expansion activities – they can experience self-expansion, and subsequently an increase in relationship quality, during every day, non-free time activities. It appears that there is a large variety of partner-related

expansion activities available, and all of them contribute to enhancing relationship quality.

Thus, there is evidence that partner-related expansion activities are beneficial to a relationship and can help keep relationship satisfaction high. These activities help bring back the novelty and arousal that was present when the relationship was first formed, and it is suggested that the benefits of partner-related expansion may become associated with the partner because the activity is done with the partner (Aron & Aron, 1997).

Individual Self-Expansion

Expansion within a relationship is beneficial (Aron et al., 2000, Reissman et al., 1993, Coutler & Malouff, 2013); however, couples cannot always rely on their partners for self-expansion. Research has demonstrated that self-expansion can be achieved through any activity that is novel, challenging, and/or interesting, even when these activities are not done with a partner (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013).

Previous research on self-expansion has focused largely on physical activities that are done with a partner (Aron et al., 2000). However, the research on individual self-expansion demonstrates that activities do not have to be physical to create self-expansion, nor do they have to be done with a partner. Mattingly and Lewandowski (2013) found self-expansion can be achieved individually, through both physical and cognitive activities. In their first study, they had participants carry objects across the room using either their hands (i.e., non self-expanding) or a pair of chopsticks (i.e., novel and self-expanding). They found that participants expanded more when they carried objects with chopsticks, demonstrating self-expansion through a physical activity. In their second study, participants read interesting (i.e., self-expanding) or non-interesting (i.e., non self-

expanding) facts. Participants expanded more when they read interesting facts, showing that self-expansion can be done individually through activities that are not physical in nature. In a different study, participants were seated in front of bricks that had novel or non-novel activities listed on them and were instructed to either point at or pull bricks towards themselves. Those who pulled bricks with self-expanding activities on them towards themselves experienced an increase in their self-concept size, because by pulling the brick towards themselves they felt as if they were including it in their self-concept (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). The participants experienced self-expansion without even having to do the activity on the brick.

Thus, there is evidence of many ways self-expansion can be achieved without a partner – but, is it beneficial to expand outside of a relationship? Individual self-expansion has been shown to increase self-efficacy and effort exertion, and help individuals achieve their goals. In a series of studies, Mattingly & Lewandowski (2013) demonstrated that self-expansion is correlated with and causes an increase in self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that one has the resources and abilities required to achieve a certain outcome). In one study, participants who indicated they had more traits in their self-concept had higher scores on a measure of self-efficacy, and in a different study, participants felt they would be more successful at solving difficult scenarios that required self-efficacy if they felt they had larger self-concepts. Self-concept size has been shown to be correlated with self-efficacy with a variety of measures. Increasing the self-concept size experimentally also causes an increase in self-efficacy. Participants were given a touch screen tablet with an expressionless face on it, which they were told represented their self-concept. They were told either to increase the face as much as possible with

their finger and thumb or decrease it as much as possible. Those who increased the face, which represented their self-concept, felt they would be more successful in solving difficult scenarios. They felt that their self-concept size was increasing as they pulled it larger, and this increase in self-concept size resulted in greater self-efficacy.

Self-expanding experiences also lead to greater effort exertion, possibly because of feeling greater self-efficacy (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). Participating in a self-expanding activity (i.e., carrying objects across the room with chopsticks, reading interesting facts) caused greater effort exertion on a variety of tasks (i.e., solving unsolvable anagrams, measures of grip strength). Participants in the self-expanding conditions showed greater effort exertion than those in the non self-expanding conditions (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). In addition, self-expanding activities are correlated with achieving goals, perhaps because self-expansion creates more self-efficacy and effort exertion. The relation between self-expanding activities and achieving goals was demonstrated by Xu, Floyd, Westmaas, and Aron (2010). Current smokers who had attempted to quit smoking and former smokers who had successfully quit smoking were asked to think of the two months prior to their most successful quit attempt (current smokers) or final quit attempt (former smokers), and to indicate how many self-expanding activities they had participated in during those two months. For current smokers, the amount of self-expanding tasks they had completed was positively correlated with how long they abstained from smoking during that attempt, such that the more self-expanding activities they had completed, the longer they abstained from smoking. Former smokers reported significantly more self-expanding activities than current smokers, and also rated the self-expanding activities as more helpful towards their

attempt to quit than current smokers. Self-expansion appears to increase effort exertion and help people achieve their goals.

Self-expansion can be achieved through a variety of activities, including physical and cognitive activities, and can be achieved with or without a partner. In addition to benefitting a romantic relationship, self-expansion appears to be beneficial in many ways to an individual; those who feel self-expanded have greater self-efficacy and exert more effort on tasks. Participating in self-expanding activities is also positively correlated with achieving goals (Xu et al., 2010, Mattingly & Lewandowski 2013, Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). However, little research has examined how these individual self-expansion activities can be integrated back into a relationship, and what benefits this integration may bring to the relationship. With exception, Gordon & Baucom (2009) found that personal expansion was related to marital satisfaction (through positive affectivity). They argued that engaging in personal expansion may help raise a person's positive affect, which then can help increase marital satisfaction. However, their measure examined people's tendencies to enjoy and seek out self-expansion, not actual self-expanding activities. This study also did not indicate a causal relationship, and the focus was primarily on positive affect, not personal expansion. The question of what benefits individual self-expansion can bring to the relationship and both partners still remains.

Integrating Individual Self-Expansion into a Relationship

The self-expansion model states that the best relationships are ones that provide growth. Participating in partner-related expansion activities can provide growth; but, each partner can also bring growth to the relationship through their own personalities and experiences. People expand in the beginning of a relationship because they are learning

about their partner and including them into their self-concept. If each individual in the relationship keeps growing, their partner can keep learning new things about them and adding parts of them to their self-concept. Thus, it is possible that if each person in a relationship keeps growing and expanding, they will continue to add to both the growth of their partner and the relationship. Aron and Aron (1986) suggest this:

(Optimal couples) will continue to uncover subtle aspects of the other, to grow and offer new aspects to the other, and to appreciate all expansion experiences to a greater extent because of the other's presence (p. 137).

Therefore, it is proposed that if an individual continues to expand, they will have new experiences to bring to the relationship, and the relationship will continue to expand. But, why does a person's expansion outside the relationship benefit the partner and the relationship? The benefits from individual self-expansion can affect both the person doing the self-expanding activity, and the partner who is hearing about it.

The partners who hear about the individual self-expansion their partner is experiencing may benefit by feeling self-expanded themselves. Close partners often feel as if they share part of their identity with their partner – they take some of their partner's traits and include them as their own. When talking about their relationship, close partners tend to use more pluralistic pronouns, such as "we" and "us" rather than individual pronouns, such as "I" and "me" (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), and may also confuse their traits with their partner's traits (Aron et al., 1991). Close partners also experience reflection, which is when a partner's achievements are reflected by the self. They experience pride from their partner's achievements because they feel as if their partner is part of themselves (Aron & Aron, 1997). If individuals who feel close to their

partners think of themselves as a self-and-partner entity (i.e., “we” instead of “me”) (Agnew et al., 1998), confuse their traits with their partner’s (Aron et al., 1991), and feel pride from their partner’s achievements (Aron & Aron, 1997), it may be possible that they can feel expanded from their partner’s individual self-expansion. If this is the case, they would integrate their partner’s individual self-expansion into the relationship by feeling expanded themselves.

Individual self-expansion can benefit the person doing the activity because it provides more opportunities to share good news and positive feelings with their partner. When someone experiences something positive, their instinct is often to tell someone about it – for individuals in a relationship, the person they tell is frequently their romantic partner. That is, they want to capitalize on the positive experience and build on it by sharing it with others. If their partner responds in a positive way, that individual can experience positive affect above and beyond the positive experience itself (Monfortet al., 2014) as well as feel validated (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gosnell & Gable, 2013). This allows them to feel positive and can increase their relationship satisfaction. For instance, Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, (2015) obtained some evidence of a positive effect on relationship satisfaction when partners shared a self-expanding task with each other. Partners came into the lab and were assigned to either a self-expanding task or a stressful task, which they completed alone. They were put into separate rooms and were given their tasks. Then, they could instant message with what they thought was their partner over the computer and tell them about the task (the person replying was really a researcher imitating the partner). Participants received either an active (positive) response or passive (negative) response from their “partner”. Results showed that those

who were in the self-expanding condition and received an active response from their partner had an increase in relationship satisfaction compared to those in the stressful condition, or those in the self-expansion condition who received a passive response. Sharing self-expansion with one's partner and receiving a positive response appears to benefit the relationship as a form of capitalization. However, this research did not examine how the self-expanding activity was naturally integrated because it fabricated the discussion with the partner.

Current Study

This study will examine whether a person's growth contributes to the growth of the relationship. To do so, I will examine the following research questions:

1. A) Does sharing personally self-expanding activities with a partner result in more relationship satisfaction?
B) Does sharing the activity in a positive and enthusiastic way further increase relationship quality?
2. Do people naturally share self-expanding activities with their partner?
3. Does the partner who hears about the self-expanding experience feel expanded themselves?

To assess these questions, undergraduate students in romantic relationships were recruited to participate in a week-long study on "Thinking about the Self". They were randomly assigned to either an individual self-expanding activity (i.e., participants will complete an activity that is exciting or new to them) or a control condition (i.e., participants will complete a mundane task – tracking the weather) and completed the activity over the week. At the end of the week, they answered questions about their

activity, which assessed if they shared the activity with their partner, how the self-expansion was shared (e.g., positively, negatively, actively, passively) and responded to (e.g., did the partner respond positively or negatively, actively or passively?), if it has any effect on relationship quality, and if the participant felt self-expanded.

Another feature of this research design is that the partner was also contacted and asked about their experiences throughout the week. After participants completed their follow up questionnaires, they were asked for their partners' emails. If they provided them, partners were emailed questions regarding how self-expanded they felt from hearing about their partner's activities that week, and how satisfied they are in their relationship. This allowed me to answer the research question about how the partner hearing about the self-expansion integrates it. Participants and their partners answered the questionnaires separately, so they did not influence each other's responses.

Hypotheses

The main goal of this study was to examine the effects of transferring personally self-expanding activities (e.g., completing a new and exciting activity) to romantic relationships. More specifically, the hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1. Participants in the self-expansion condition (vs. the control group) will have higher relationship quality at the end of the week.

Hypothesis 2. Participants who are in the self-expansion condition and *share the activity with their partner* will have an even greater increase in relationship quality.

Hypothesis 3. Participants in the self-expansion condition will share the activity with their partner more often than those in the control condition.

Hypothesis 4. Participants in the self-expansion condition will report higher levels of self-expansion than those in the control condition. This will be treated like a manipulation check, participants in the self-expansion condition are participating in self-expanding activities, whereas those in the control condition are not, so they should experience more self-expansion.

Hypothesis 5a. Partners in the self-expansion condition will report higher personal self-expansion than the control group due to hearing about the participant's self-expanding activities (vs. non self-expanding activities from the control group).

Hypothesis 5b. Partners who hear about the participant's self-expanding activity will have higher relationship quality than partners who hear about the participant's control activity.

Exploratory tests will also be conducted to determine if there is a difference in the way those in the self-expansion condition and the control condition share the activity with their partners.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students at Carleton University and were recruited through the university's online participation pool. Participants received .25 credits for completing the pre-test, and an additional .25 credits for completing the post-test. They also had the option to be entered into a draw to win one of two \$50 gift certificates for completing the post-test. To be included in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age, have access to the university's online participation pool, and be involved in a romantic relationship. At the time of the pre-test, 300 participants were

recruited, with the conservative estimate that 50% of participants would return for the follow-up (this was the approximate return rate of similar studies). At the end of the study, 122 participants returned for the post-test, resulting in a 40.6% follow-up rate. There were no significant differences in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, relationship length, or relationship type between those who completed the pre-test and those who completed the pre- and post-test. There was also no difference between those who completed the pre-test and those who completed the pre-test and post-test on relationship quality variables. Of the 122 participants who completed the pre- and post-tests, 106 were included in the final analyses: 5 participants were deleted for not answering any of the questions, 4 were deleted because they were not sorted into a condition due to a technical error, and 7 were deleted for not being in a relationship.

The majority of the sample was female (80%) and Caucasian (63%). Most participants were in seriously dating relationships but not living together (66%), although some were casually dating (15%), living together (15%), common-law (1%), or married (1%). Two participants did not answer but indicated their relationship length in the subsequent question. The average relationship length was 18.9 months ($SD = 17.1$), with the range spanning from half a month to 96 months. The average age was 20.1 years ($SD = 4.3$), with the minimum age being 18 and the maximum being 52.

Procedure and Materials

Before beginning the study, participants completed measures of relationship well-being. They were then randomly assigned to either the self-expansion condition ($N = 56$) or the control condition ($N = 50$). People in the self-expansion condition were told to plan an activity that was new/exciting/interesting to them, which was designed to create self-

expansion. People in the control condition were told to track the weather over the week, which was not meant to create self-expansion. All participants had a week to complete their activity. Halfway through the week participants were sent a reminder email, reminding them to complete their activity. At the end of the week they received questionnaires assessing their levels of self-expansion, relationship quality, and if, and how, they shared the activity. Furthermore, after answering the questionnaires, participants were asked for their partner's email. If they provided it, their partner was emailed questionnaires asking about their experiences in the past week.

Part 1: Pre-test Questionnaires and Conditions. Participants answered a set of questionnaires before the study began (Appendix A). The questionnaires included measures of demographics, relationship satisfaction, closeness, and relational expansion. Demographics asked age, gender, ethnicity, relationship status, and relationship length, and was used primarily to ensure the participants were involved in a romantic relationship. **Relationship satisfaction** was measured with the Relationship Assessment Scale ($\alpha = .889$) (Hendrick, 1988), which is a 5-item scale assessing thoughts about the relationship, if needs are being met by the relationship, and overall satisfaction (e.g., How well does your partner meet your needs?). **Closeness** was measured with Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) Inclusion of the Other in the Self scale (involves a series of gradually more overlapping circles, and the more overlapping the circles that a participant chooses, the closer they feel to their partner). **Self-Expansion** was measured with a 14-item measure of relational self-expansion ($\alpha = .936$; e.g., How much does you being with your partner result in your having new experiences?; How much does your partner increase your knowledge?; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002).

Experimental Conditions: Self-Expanding vs Control. Participants were randomly assigned to either the self-expansion or the control condition after completing the pre-test questionnaires. Participants in the **self-expansion condition** received the following instructions:

Over the course of the next week, we'd like for you to try an activity that is new to you, exciting, interesting, or some combination of the three. Please do not complete the activity with your romantic partner. You can, however, complete the activity with someone else, such as a friend or family member. We will send a reminder mid-week to remind you to complete the activity. Please describe the task in full below. Additionally, please indicate what day you plan to complete this task on.

This activity was meant to create self-expansion (i.e., personal growth) within the participants who completed this activity. Participants were asked for a description to get them to think about an activity they may want to complete, making it more likely that they would actually complete it. Participants in the **control condition** received a more generic task to complete, that was not meant to create self-expansion. They received the following instructions:

Over the course of the next week, we'd like for you to keep track of the weather. For instance, look to see what temperature it is each day, perhaps observe whether it is getting colder or warmer.

Monitoring the weather is something many people do on a regular basis, so this activity should not have been new or exciting to most participants. Participants in the control condition were not asked to describe their activity, because they were all completing the

same activity (see Appendix B).

Reminder Emails. Each participant, regardless of their condition, was emailed three days after signing up for the study to remind them to complete their activity, if they had not done so already. If they had already completed the activity, they were asked to describe it. This email was meant to remind participants that they had signed up for the study and had an activity to complete, and to keep them engaged in hopes of having a higher return rate.

Part 2: Post-test Questionnaires. One week after beginning the study, participants were emailed the post-test questionnaires. These questionnaires included measures of personal and relational self-expansion, relationship satisfaction, and relationship closeness. They were also asked if they shared the activity with their partner, and if they did, how they shared it, and how their partner responded (Appendix C).

Personal self-expansion was measured with a modified individual self-expansion questionnaire ($\alpha = .876$), which measures how self-expanded the participant felt from completing their activity that week. Participants were instructed to think about completing their assigned activity when answering the questions. Questions were on a seven-point scale from one (not very much) to seven (very much; Lewandowski & Aron, 1992). Measures of relationship well-being (i.e., relationship satisfaction, closeness, and relational self-expansion) were the same measures used in the pre-test.

Participants were also asked if they shared the activity with their partner, and if they did, they received additional questions asking how they shared the activity, and how their partner responded. These questions were based off of the **Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts** scale, which measures if an individual's partner responds

positively or negatively, and actively or passively when hearing about the individual's good fortune (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statements from one (not at all true) to seven (very true). The questions asked how much participants agreed with the idea that they shared the activity enthusiastically, slightly positively, slightly negatively, or negatively (all separate questions). Two scales were created from these questions, an enthusiastic sharing scale (made from the enthusiastic sharing question and the negatively sharing question, reverse coded), and the neutral scale (made from the slightly positive question and the slightly negative question, reverse coded). These types of sharing were meant to mimic the types of responses the partner could give to the sharing. They were then asked how much they agree that their partner responded to their sharing enthusiastically, slight positively, slightly negatively, or negatively (all separate questions). Finally, participants were asked how engaged they felt when sharing the activity.

Partner Responses. After completing the post-test questionnaires, participants were asked for their partner's email address, so their partners could be sent questionnaires asking about their experiences in the past week and their relationship quality. Participants and partners were instructed to complete the questionnaires separately and received them at different times – partners could only receive the questionnaires after the participant had completed the post-test questionnaires and provided their email. Partners received the same relationship quality questionnaires (relationship satisfaction, closeness, and relational self-expansion), and the same self-expansion questionnaire, just modified slightly to be about the participant's self-expanding tasks, not their own (i.e., How much has hearing about your partner's activity this week increased your knowledge about the

self). They received additional questions about how expanded they felt from their partner's activities that week (i.e., I was interested in hearing what my partner had to say about their activities this week; Hearing about my partner's activities this week was a positive experience; rated on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7 = completely agree; Appendix C). These questions were meant to assess if the participant's self-expansion has any effect on the partner (i.e., does the partner feel self-expansion from the participant's self-expansion).

Results

Descriptive statistics for each of the main variables were run before conducting analyses. The average score, across all participants, was higher than the mid-point on individual expansion and the relationship quality variables (i.e., satisfaction, closeness, and relationship quality). The breakdown of mean scores for participants per condition is presented in Table 1.

One of the secondary goals of this research was to test the partners' level of self-expansion and relationship quality. I predicted that the partners who heard about the participant's self-expanding activity would experience greater levels of self-expansion than partners who heard about the participant's control activity. I attempted to recruit partners for the follow-up analyses by asking participants for their partner's email. However, only twenty-four participants provided their partner's email, and of those partners who were contacted, only nine answered the follow up questionnaires. Due to the low response rate, and subsequent lack of power, I was unable to test this hypothesis. Therefore, the results listed below only apply to the participants, no tests were run on the partner data.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for relationship satisfaction, closeness, and expansion for each condition.

| Variable | Total | | | Self-Expansion | | | Control | | | 95% C.I. of the difference |
|---------------|-------|------|------|----------------|------|------|---------|------|------|----------------------------|
| | n | M | SD | n | M | SD | n | M | SD | |
| Satisfaction | 104 | 3.98 | 0.79 | 55 | 4.02 | 0.73 | 49 | 3.93 | 0.87 | [-.22, .40] |
| Closeness | 104 | 4.67 | 1.57 | 55 | 4.71 | 1.47 | 49 | 4.63 | 1.69 | [-.54, .69] |
| Relational SE | 104 | 5.08 | 0.93 | 55 | 5.13 | 0.95 | 49 | 5.01 | 0.92 | [-.23, .50] |
| Individual SE | 106 | 4.55 | 1.08 | 56 | 4.59 | 1.16 | 50 | 4.5 | 0.98 | [-.33, .51] |

Note. All scales were rated on a scale of 1-7, with the exception of satisfaction, which was rated on a scale of 1-5.

Manipulation check

Before the main analyses were run, a t-test was conducted to determine if people in the self-expansion condition felt significantly more self-expansion than those in the control condition. The t-test was not statistically significant, $t(104) = .423, p = .673$ (means are presented in Table 1), showing that participants in the self-expansion condition did not have significantly higher self-expansion than participants in the control condition. Although the manipulation was not successful, this might have been a result of timing, instead of the actual effect of the activity. Participants were asked their expansion levels up to a week after completing their activity, so it is possible that they no longer felt the effects of their self-expanding activity. Therefore, the planned analyses on relationship quality and how participants shared their activity were still conducted, because the effects on relationship quality may still have occurred (i.e., people in the self-expansion condition might no longer report more individual self-expansion but they might experience the effects of the individual self-expansion in the form of increased relationship quality).

Given that the manipulation check did not reach statistical significance, I also decided to explore additional analyses by collapsing the two conditions. This allowed me to examine correlations between individual self-expansion and all relationship quality variables, to determine if there are associations between self-expansion and relationship quality, regardless of if the participant completed a self-expanding activity or not.

Main hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that people in the self-expansion condition would have greater relationship quality at the time of the follow-up than those in the control condition. Previous literature has shown that participating in partner-related expansion increases relationship quality (Reissman et al., 1993; Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013), and previous literature has theorized that if partners in a relationship continue to expand, they can bring this expansion back to the relationship, which could enhance relationship quality. I hypothesized that one partner completing a self-expanding activity would help bring self-expansion (i.e., discussing the self-expanding activity with a partner, teaching the partner about what was learned during the activity) to the relationship, therefore, enhancing relationship quality. To test this, three separate t-tests were run, testing if there was a difference between the two conditions on relationship satisfaction, relationship closeness, and relational expansion. The t-tests did not reach statistical significance (relationship satisfaction, $t(102) = .559, p = .577$; relationship closeness, $t(102) = .246, p = .806$; relational self-expansion, $t(102) = .744, p = .459$), showing that there was not a significant difference in relationship quality between participants who completed a self-expansion activity and participants who completed a control activity. Means for each condition for all relationship quality measures are

presented in Table 1. Overall, the self-expanding activity the participants were asked to complete in this study did not appear to have an effect on relationship quality (assessed up to one week later).¹

Second, I hypothesized that those who completed the self-expanding activity would have even greater relationship quality *if* they shared the activity with their partner. A moderation analysis was conducted to determine if sharing the activity with a partner was a significant moderator of the relation between the type of activity completed (i.e., self-expanding vs control) and relationship quality. To conduct the moderation analyses, Condition (self-expansion or control) was crossed with Sharing (yes or no) to create an interaction term. A linear regression was conducted, with Condition and Sharing in step 1, and the interaction of Condition and Sharing in step 2. This linear regression was run three times – with relationship satisfaction, closeness, and relational self-expansion as the dependent variables respectively. Condition (self-expanding or control) was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, $F(2, 101) = .250, p = .779$, and Sharing did not significantly moderate the relationship, $F(3, 100) = .107, p = .919$. Condition was also not a significant predictor for relationship closeness, $F(2, 101) = .114, p = .892$, or relational self-expansion, $F(2, 101) = .288, p = .750$, and Sharing did not moderate either of those relationships, $F(3, 100) = .293, p = .830$, and $F(3, 100) = .358, p = .784$ (representing relationship closeness and relational self-expansion respectively).

Given that my hypotheses were specifically about people who shared the self-expanding activity with their partner, I decided to explore the results by excluding the

¹ Previous studies have shown relationship length to be a covariate of the effect of self-expansion on relationship quality (Fivecoat et al., 2014). I ran ANCOVAs with relationship length as a covariate, and self-expansion as the independent variable but they did not show a significant difference in relationship satisfaction $F(1, 101) = .635, p = .427$, relationship closeness, $F(1, 101) = .192, p = .662$, or relational self-expansion, $F(1, 101) = 1.11, p = .295$.

people who did not share the activity with their partner. T-tests were conducted on all relationship quality variables to determine if relationship quality was higher for those who completed a self-expanding activity than a control activity, only examining participants who shared the activity with their partner. There was not a significant difference between conditions for relationship satisfaction $t(58) = .412, p = .682$, relationship closeness, $t(58) = .655, p = .515$, or relational self-expansion, $t(58) = 1.12, p = .269$. The means for each condition on each measure of relationship quality are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for relationship satisfaction, closeness, and expansion for each condition, using only participants who shared their activity with their partners.

| Variable | Self-Expansion Condition | | | Control Condition | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|
| | n | M | SD | n | M | SD |
| Satisfaction | 37 | 4.04 | .68 | 23 | 3.97 | .77 |
| Closeness | 37 | 4.84 | 1.54 | 23 | 4.57 | 1.62 |
| Relational Self-Expansion | 37 | 5.18 | .91 | 23 | 4.9 | .82 |

Third, I hypothesized that participants in the self-expanding condition would talk about the activity with their partner more often than those in the control condition. Self-expansion is a positive activity (Gordon & Baucom, 2009), and when someone experiences a positive activity, their instinct is often to share it with someone, so they can capitalize on the activity and experience additional positive affect (Monfortet al., 2014). A chi-square test was run to determine if more people in the self-expanding condition shared the activity with their partner than in the control condition. The chi-square test was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 4.29, p = .038$; more people in the self-expanding condition shared the activity with their partner (67.9%) than in the control condition (48%). Additional analyses were run to determine how people shared the activity with

their partner. Participants who shared the activity with their partner were presented with four questions asking how they shared the activity, which made up the enthusiastic sharing and the neutral sharing scale. A t-test was run to determine if there was a difference in the way participants in the self-expanding condition and the control condition shared the activity. Participants in the self-expanding condition were more likely to agree that they shared the activity enthusiastically ($M = 5.54$, $SD = .82$) than the people in the control condition ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(58) = 3.74$, $p < .01$. In contrast, participants in the control condition were more likely to agree that they shared the activity neutrally (i.e., they shared the activity as if it was a regular activity, not with enthusiasm or positivity; $M = 4.6$, $SD = 1.10$) than the people in the self-expanding condition ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(58) = -2.14$, $p = .036$. Thus, it appears that people who experienced a self-expanding activity were more likely to talk about it in an enthusiastic way, while those who completed the control activity were more likely to talk about it as if it was an average event.

Exploratory Analyses

Due to the fact that there was no significant difference in levels of self-expansion between the people in the self-expansion and control conditions, the experimental conditions were collapsed and correlations were explored. I aimed to use these correlations to determine if there was an association between levels of individual self-expansion and different measures of relationship quality – relationship satisfaction, relationship closeness, and relational self-expansion.

Correlations were run between individual self-expansion, relationship satisfaction, relationship closeness, and relational self-expansion. All correlations are presented in

Table 3. None of the correlations between levels of individual self-expansion and the relationship quality variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction, relationship closeness, relational self-expansion) reached statistical significance. Consistent with findings in the literature, there were, however, significant positive correlations between relationship satisfaction and relationship closeness, relationship satisfaction and relational self-expansion, and relationship closeness and relational self-expansion. Of particular note is the correlation between relationship satisfaction and relational self-expansion – this indicates that having a relationship where you feel that you are expanding because of your partner is associated with higher relationship satisfaction.

Table 3

Correlations between individual self-expansion and relationship quality variables.

| | Individual Self-Expansion | Satisfaction | Closeness | Relational Self-Expansion |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Individual Self-Expansion | 1 | .060 | .075 | .078 |
| Satisfaction | | 1 | .569** | .713** |
| Closeness | | | 1 | .444** |
| Relational Self-Expansion | | | | 1 |

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to determine how individually self-expanding activities (i.e., done without a romantic partner) are transferred to the relationship and whether there are benefits for relationship quality. The primary hypothesis of this study was that engaging in individual self-expansion would enhance relationship quality, in terms of relationship satisfaction, closeness, and relational self-expansion. This hypothesis was not supported – participants in the self-expansion condition did not have higher relationship quality than participants in the control condition. Along with the hypothesis that individual self-expansion would increase relationship quality, I

hypothesized that people in the self-expansion condition – who shared the activity with their partners – would have an additional increase in relationship quality. When a person shares an event with their partner and their partner responds in a positive and enthusiastic way, that individual experiences capitalization, and subsequently, has an increase in relationship satisfaction (Monfort et al., 2014; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gosnell & Gable, 2013). Self-expansion is a positive activity (Gordon & Baucom, 2009), therefore I hypothesized that sharing it may result in an increase in relationship quality through capitalization. However, sharing the activity with a partner was not a significant moderator. Therefore, it appears that the hypothesis that completing a self-expanding activity would increase relationship quality was not supported, even when the activity was shared with a partner.

Additionally, I was interested in if, and how, people were sharing the activity with their partners. Participants who completed a self-expanding activity shared their activity with their partners more often than those who completed the control activity. They also shared the activity more enthusiastically and positively with their partner than the people in the control condition. In this way, self-expansion could benefit a relationship, through the sharing of a positive event.

Overall, I found that completing a self-expanding activity did not have an effect on relationship quality. However, the people in the self-expansion condition did share the activity more often with their partners than those in the control condition, and they tended to share it more enthusiastically and positively. This suggests that outside activities, such as self-expanding activities, are making their way into the relationship through sharing. This may have benefits besides relationship quality, such as increased communication.

Does individual self-expansion affect relationship quality?

The main hypothesis of this study was that completing an individually self-expanding activity would enhance relationship quality; this hypothesis was not supported. This may be due to the length of time that had passed between the activity and the follow up questionnaires – the effects on relationship satisfaction were no longer prevalent. It may also be the case that the effects of the self-expanding activity itself were no longer prevalent, therefore, the intended effect on relationship quality did not have an opportunity to materialize. As demonstrated by the manipulation check, there was no difference in levels of self-expansion between participants who completed the self-expanding activity, and participants who completed the control activity. Participants may have felt self-expanded after completing the activity, but in the time that lapsed between the activity and the questionnaires, the feeling faded. Aron and Aron's (1986) model of self-expansion is a cyclical one, with an expanding phase and an integrating phase. In the expanding phase, an individual is motivated to expand and increase complexity, novelty, and stimulation. Once they have found an activity that satisfies this need for expansion, they enter the integration phase, where they are seeking to decrease complexity and stimulation by integrating this self-expanding activity into their self-concept. After a participant has integrated the activity into their self-concept, they are ready to expand again (Aron & Aron, 1986). It is possible that after passing through the integration phase, they are no longer feeling the effects of the previous self-expanding activity. It is unknown how long each of these phases last, but it may be that within the week, participants went through the integration phase and integrated their self-expanding activity into their self-concept. At this point, they may not be feeling the effects of their

self-expanding activity anymore. Therefore, it may be the case that there is an effect of self-expanding activities on relationship quality, but because the effect of self-expansion did not last the week, the effect on relationship quality did not have a chance to materialize or was no longer present.

It is also possible that completing a self-expanding activity and sharing it with a partner may only work for individuals who have self-expanding tendencies. Gordon and Luo (2011) showed that having a tendency towards expansion can be an individual trait (labeled personal expansion), represented by novelty and augmentation. This is in contrast to self-expansion, which is felt from completing a self-expanding activity. Gordon and Luo (2011) even suggest that possessing higher levels of the personal expansion trait could make someone a renewable source of stimulation, therefore leading to more expansion when in a relationship with them. I did not measure personal expansion, so this hypothesis cannot be tested at this time.

Finally, it may be that completing an individually self-expanding activity just does not have an effect on relationship quality. I hypothesized that individual self-expansion would have enhanced relationship quality for a combination of reasons: completing a partner-related expansion activity (i.e., a self-expanding activity done with a partner) increases relationship quality (Aron et al., 2000, Reissman et al., 1993, Coulter & Malouff, 2013); and a person can also expand by learning new things from their partner. This is most prevalent in the beginning of a relationship, when a person is learning new things about their partner and integrating them into their self-concept. As those opportunities for self-expansion decrease, relationship quality also tends to decrease, due to a lack of excitement and positive affect, as well as boredom (Aron &

Aron, 1986). However, Aron and Aron (1986) theorized that optimal couples are the ones who continue to grow and expand, and bring these experiences back to the relationships, therefore giving the relationship more opportunities to expand. From this theory, and the fact that completing a partner-related expansion activity enhances relationship quality, I hypothesized that an individually self-expanding activity would also enhance relationship quality. Nonetheless, this was not the case in the present study. It is possible that self-expansion must be done with a partner; doing it by yourself and talking about it with a partner may not have a strong enough effect to boost relationship quality. The exploratory analyses I conducted did show that individual self-expansion was not correlated with measures of relationship quality, regardless of condition, lending credibility to the idea that individual self-expansion may not have an effect on relationship quality.

The second hypothesis was that participants in the self-expansion condition who also shared the activity with their partner would have an additional increase in relationship quality. Unexpectedly, those who shared the activity with their partner did not have an increase in relationship quality. Self-expansion is a positive activity (Gordon & Baucom, 2009), and sharing a positive activity with a partner often results in increased relationship quality, due to capitalization. Capitalization occurs when a person shares a positive experience with his or her partner, and the partner, in turn, responds in a positive and enthusiastic way. By sharing the experience with the partner, and receiving a positive response, the individual experiences positive affect above and beyond the original event (Monfortet al., 2014), and feels validation in sharing the event with their partner (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gosnell & Gable, 2013). It is, therefore, unexpected that sharing the event with a partner did not moderate the relationship between self-expanding

activities and relationship quality, as this effect has been shown before. It is possible that partners did not respond in an enthusiastic way, therefore not giving the individuals who completed the activity the validation they needed to experience an increase in relationship quality. It is also possible that too much time had lapsed between the sharing of the activity and the measuring of relationship quality, and the effect on relationship quality had diminished. Additionally, only 60 participants shared the activity with their partner, making the sample size for these analyses small, leading to a lack of power.

How was self-expansion shared in the relationship?

Although sharing the event with a partner did not moderate the relationship between completing a self-expanding activity and relationship quality, I did find that participants who completed a self-expanding activity shared the activity more often with their partners, and when they did share it, they shared it more enthusiastically and positively than those who completed the control activity. This can be beneficial to the individual who is sharing the activity. Research has found that sharing good news creates an interaction that lets individuals feel that others are happy for them, which is likely to boost self-esteem (Beach & Tesser, 1995; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). Gable et al., (2006) found that when an individual shared a positive event with another person, they experienced significantly higher positive affect and life satisfaction. These effects work best when the individual receives a positive response back from the person they are discussing the event with, but still show that completing a self-expanding activity and talking about it with another person can be beneficial for the individual who completed the self-expanding activity.

Although sharing the self-expanding activity with a partner did not increase

relationship quality, even though participants shared it enthusiastically, it may have benefits that were not measured, or that show up if measured soon after the discussion, such as increased positive affect and self-esteem. At the very least, completing a self-expanding activity can foster the discussion of positive events between romantic partners.

In summary, completing a self-expanding activity does not appear to enhance relationship quality and sharing the event with a partner does not moderate this effect, at least not with the current manipulations and measures. However, participants who completed a self-expanding activity were more likely to share the activity with their partner and did so in a positive way. Although I did not see benefits to the relationship in this study, sharing the activity may have benefits that are not measured, or did not show up here.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the biggest limitations in this study lies with the self-expanding activity manipulation (e.g., the time during the week that participants completed the activity, checking if the activity was completed, and the type of activity that participants completed). In terms of timing of the activity, it is unknown when throughout the week participants completed their activity, making it uncertain how much time elapsed between completing the activity and completing the follow up questionnaires. This makes it unclear if the non-significant results are because individual self-expansion actually does not have an effect on relationship quality, or simply because too much time had passed, and the effect was no longer present.

Another limitation was that there was no way to ensure that participants actually completed their activity. I followed up with the participants midweek and reminded them

to complete it, but it is possible that some participants did not complete their activity. This is one of the disadvantages of having participants complete the self-expanding “homework” outside of the observation of the researchers.

A further limitation is that participants chose their own self-expanding activity based on the instructions to complete an interesting, exciting, or novel activity. This is the current definition of a self-expanding activity, but the definition is variable (Aron et al., 2000; Mattingly and Lewandowski, 2013) – therefore, the instructions may not have actually led them to complete a self-expanding activity. It is also possible that, even with the instructions, participants may not have chosen an activity that was self-expanding, especially if they did not follow the instructions closely. For example, I asked participants what activity they planned to complete, and there was a large variety in the kinds of activities. Some participants indicated activities that seemed like they would be self-expanding, such as visiting a museum or taking skiing lessons. However, other participants indicated activities that may not necessarily be self-expanding, such as going to the gym or the mall, as they were activities that these participants may have done before. Although some participants may view these activities as self-expanding, it is also possible that they simply listed an activity they wanted to do, regardless of if it was actually self-expanding.

Future research should recreate this study with a self-expanding activity that has a greater effect on the participants. This study should also measure the participants sooner after completing the activity, to get the true effect of the self-expanding activity, and find a way to ensure they are actually completing the activity, such as conducting the study in a lab, rather than online.

Another limitation is the fact that the sample was not diverse. This is a product of the environment that the study was conducted; the sample was made up of university students who can complete studies for credit. Although this population provides easy access to participants, it does mean that the sample was composed entirely of university students, who were predominately Caucasian and female. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalizable to a population outside of a university setting. Future research should use different populations to determine if the results are replicable across a more diverse sample.

This study also focused specifically on the effects of the self-expanding activity on relationship quality, and did not measure additional variables, such as positive affect or tendencies towards self-expansion. However, additional variables may be at play here. For example, the effects of self-expanding activities on relationships may only materialize for people who have tendencies towards self-expansion. Furthermore, sharing positive activities, such as a self-expanding activity, can raise positive affect. Even though participants who shared their self-expanding activity with their partner did not experience an increase in relationship quality, they may be benefitting in other ways, such as an increase in positive affect (Gable et al., 2006). Future research should measure more variables, such as trait levels of personal expansion and positive affect.

The limitations listed above apply to the participants, and the way they completed the study. However, there was also a limitation in collecting information from the partners. Participants had the option to provide their partner's email and were instructed to ensure they had their partner's permission before giving their email. This led to very few participants ($n = 24$) actually providing their partner's email. Of the partners who

were emailed, only nine answered the questionnaires. Due to this low recruitment and response rate, I was unable to measure the partners, and test my hypothesis that the partners would experience greater self-expansion because they heard about the participant's self-expanding activity. A study that recruits both partners should be conducted, in order to be able to measure the effects of individual self-expansion on partners. One partner could be assigned to complete the self-expanding activity, and then both partners measured at the follow up. This would ensure that responses from both people in the relationship are recorded.

Conclusion

The majority of the hypotheses in this study were not supported – completing a self-expanding activity alone, at least how it was manipulated in this study, does not appear to have an effect on relationship quality. However, participants who completed the self-expanding activity did share it more with their partners than those who completed the control activity and shared it more enthusiastically as well. Although I did not see effects on relationship satisfaction, closeness, or relational self-expansion, there may be other effects that were not measured due to this higher prevalence of enthusiastic and positive sharing. There are many future avenues of research in this area, in terms of the limitations of this study, and in future areas of inquiry.

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Appendix A

Pre-Test Questionnaires

Demographics

What is your gender?

Man

Woman

Transgendered

Other _____

What is your age? _____ years

What is your race/ethnicity?

Caucasian, European descent

African American

First Nations/Metis/Inuit

Hispanic

South American

Middle Eastern

Asian

Other, please specify:

Prefer not to say

Please select the response that best describes your current relationship status

Single

Casually dating

Seriously dating relationship, but not living together

Seriously dating relationship and living together

Married

____ Other please specify _____

How long have you been in your current romantic relationship? (in months) ____

Relationship Satisfaction

For each question, please circle the number that best characterizes the relationship with your romantic partner.

How well does your partner meet your needs?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---------|---|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Poorly | | Average | | Extremely well |

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|---------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Unsatisfied | | Average | | Extremely satisfied |

How good is your relationship compared to most?

| | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Poor | | Average | | Excellent |

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

| | | | | |
|-------|---|---------|---|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | Average | | Very often |

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations:

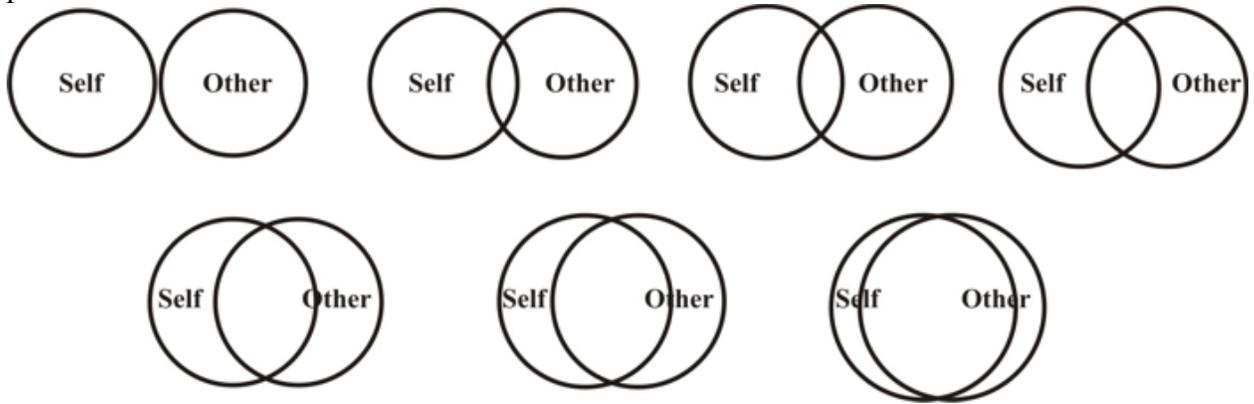
| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---------|---|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Hardly at all | | Average | | Completely |

Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of*

Marriage and the Family, 50(1), 93-98. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/352430>

Inclusion of Other in the Self

Please circle the picture below that best describes your relationship with your romantic partner.



Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(4), 596-612.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/10.1037/0022-3514.63.4.596>

Appendix B

Experimental Conditions

Self-Expansion Condition

Over the course of the next week, we'd like for you to try an activity that is new to you, exciting, interesting, or some combination of the three. Please do not complete the activity with your romantic partner. You can, however, complete the activity with someone else, such as a friend or family member. We will send a reminder mid-week to remind you to complete the activity.

Please describe the task in full below. Additionally, please indicate what day you plan to complete this task on.

Control Condition

Over the course of the next week, we'd like for you to keep track of the weather. For instance, look to see what temperature it is each day, perhaps observe whether it is getting colder or warmer.

Appendix C

Post-Test Questionnaires

Modified Individual Self-Expansion Questionnaire (manipulation check)

Please think about the activity you completed this week when answering the following questions.

Items are rated on a seven point scale (1 = not very much, 7 = very much)

Do you feel a greater awareness of things concerning the self?

Do you feel an increase in your ability to accomplish new things?

How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things?

How much has doing the previous activity resulted in your learning new things about the self?

How much has doing the previous activity increased your knowledge about the self?

Lewandowski, G.W., Jr., & Aron, A. (2002). The self-expansion scale: Construction and validation. *Paper presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, Savannah, GA.*

Sharing

Did you share the activity (i.e., what you had to do for this study) you completed this week with your partner?

Yes

No

If you shared the activity with your partner, please answer the following questions.

Think back to your discussion with your partner then about the your activity. How did you share the activity with your partner?

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements from 1 to 7

When I shared the activity with my partner, I shared it enthusiastically, as if it was a positive event and I was happy it had happened to me.

When I shared the activity I mentioned it casually, it was a good event but I did not say much about it.

When I shared the activity I also pointed out the downsides of it.

When I shared the activity I made it seem like I did not care about it very much.

My partner reacted enthusiastically to my sharing of the activity, they showed they cared about them.

My partner seemed happy for me when I told them about the activity, but they did not say much.

My partner pointed out downsides of the activity.

My partner did not seem to care about the activity.

How engaged did you feel in the discussion about the week's activities with your partner? 1(not at all engaged) to 7(very engaged).

Adapted from Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do

you do when things go right? the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of

sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2),

228-245.

Please answer the following questions regardless of whether you shared the activity with your partner or not.

Relationship Satisfaction

For each question, please circle the number that best characterizes the relationship with your romantic partner.

How well does your partner meet your needs?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---------|---|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Poorly | | Average | | Extremely well |

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|---------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Unsatisfied | | Average | | Extremely satisfied |

How good is your relationship compared to most?

| | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Poor | | Average | | Excellent |

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

| | | | | |
|-------|---|---------|---|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | Average | | Very often |

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations:

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---------|---|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Hardly at all | | Average | | Completely |

Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of*

Marriage and the Family, 50(1), 93-98. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/352430>

Self-Expansion Scale

Please answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale. Place your answer in the space next to each item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not very much - very much

_____ 1) How much does being with your partner result in your having new experiences?

_____ 2) When you are with your partner, do you feel a greater awareness of things because of him or her?

_____ 3) How much does your partner increase your ability to accomplish new things?

_____ 4) How much does being with your partner make you more appealing to potential future mates?

_____ 5) How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?

_____ 6) How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?

_____ 7) Do you often learn new things about your partner?

_____ 8) How much does your partner provide a source of exciting experiences?

_____ 9) How much do your partner's strengths as a person (skills, abilities, etc.) compensate for some of your own weaknesses as a person?

_____ 10) How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things because of your partner?

_____ 11) How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?

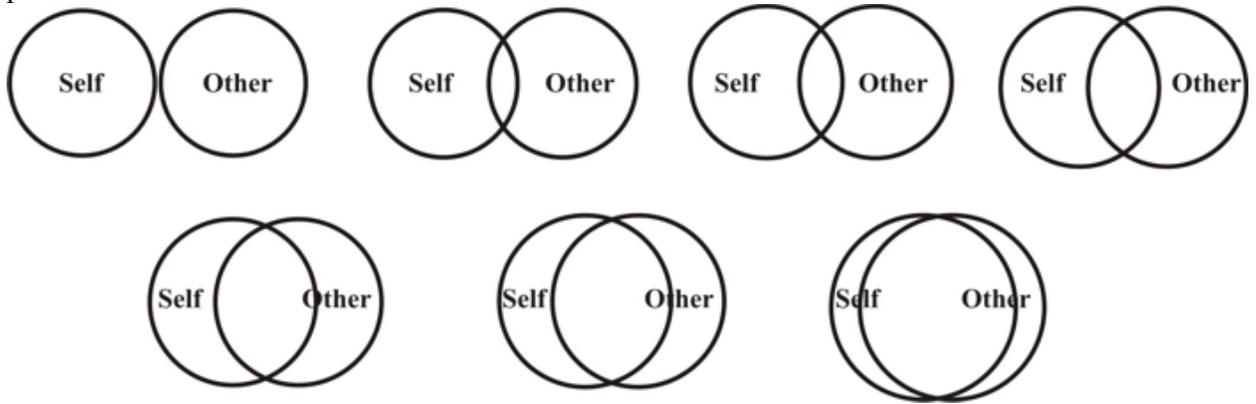
_____ 12) How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?

_____ 13) How much does being with your partner increase the respect other people have for you?

_____ 14) How much does your partner increase your knowledge?

Inclusion of Other in the Self

Please circle the picture below that best describes your relationship with your romantic partner.



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Partner Recruitment

As we mentioned in the informed consent at Time 1, we are interested in contacting your partner to ask them questions about the relationship. Will you provide your partner's email address? Yes No

If yes, what is your partner's email?

Note. Your responses will not be shared with your partner. We will be asking them similar questions as the ones we asked you today.

Questions for the Partner

Checking if the partner completed the activity

Did your partner complete a personal activity this week as a result of this study?

Yes

No

Did your partner share a personal activity they engaged in this week with you?

Yes

No

If your partner shared the activity with you this week, please complete the following questions.

Modified Individual Self-Expansion Questionnaire

If you partner told you about the activity they completed in this study, please think about them telling you about the activity when answering these questions.

Items are rated on a seven point scale (1 = not very much, 7 = very much)

Do you feel a greater awareness of things concerning the self?

Do you feel an increase in your ability to accomplish new things?

How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things?

How much has hearing about your partner's activities resulted in your learning new things about the self?

How much has hearing about your partner's activities increased your knowledge about the self?

Lewandowski, G.W., Jr., & Aron, A. (2002). The self-expansion scale: Construction and validation. *Paper presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, Savannah, GA.*

Extra Questions about Self-Expansion for the Partner

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements on a scale from 1 to 7.

I was interested in hearing what my partner had to say about their activities this week.

Hearing about my partner's activities this week was a positive experience.

Please answer the following questions regardless of if your partner shared their activity this week with you.

Relationship Satisfaction

For each question, please circle the number that best characterizes the relationship with your romantic partner.

How well does your partner meet your needs?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---------|---|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Poorly | | Average | | Extremely well |

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| | | | | |
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|-------|---|---------|---|------------|
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To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations:

| | | | | |
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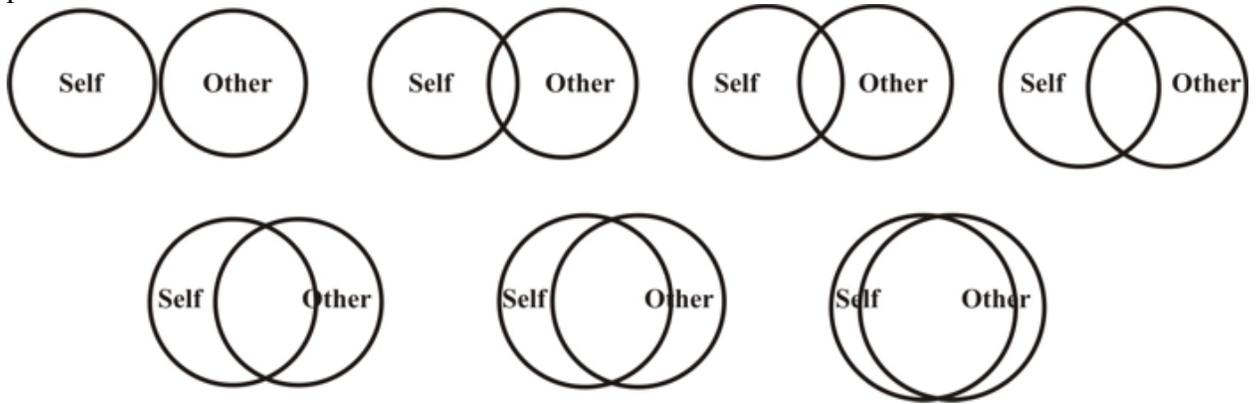
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