Why People Self-Verify

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Why do people choose interaction partners who see them as they see themselves? Self-verification theorists propose that a desire to bolster perceptions of predictability and control underlies such activities. In contrast, advocates of positivity strivings argue that people choose such interaction partners in the hope of making themselves feel good. Two studies tested these competing explanations by examining the spontaneous verbalizations of participants as they chose interaction partners. The results suggested that positivity as well as self-verification strivings caused participants with positive self-views to choose partners who appraised them favorably. The epistemic considerations underlying self-verification processes, however, best explained why people with negative self-views chose partners who appraised them unfavorably.

Nearly half a century ago, Prescott Lecky (1945) proposed that people strive to confirm their self-conceptions, even if those self-conceptions are negative. Over the years, his proposal has provoked considerable controversy. Initially, critics questioned the assumption that self-confirmation strivings were powerful enough to override a desire for positive, self-enhancing information. Their skepticism grew stronger when the first widely cited study to support Lecky's claim (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962) proved difficult to replicate (for reviews, see Dipboye, 1977; Shrauger, 1975).[1] By the mid-1970s, even those who sympathized with Lecky reluctantly concluded that his hypothesis referred to a relatively circumscribed phenomenon (e.g., Shrauger, 1975).

The research literature has been kinder to Lecky's (1945) hypothesis of late. For example, recent evidence suggests that people with negative self-conceptions are more inclined to seek unfavorable evaluations than are people with positive self-conceptions (e.g., Robinson & Smith-Lovin, in press; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990, Study 3; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989, Studies 1, 2; Swann & Read, 1981, Studies 1, 2; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, in press, Studies 3, 4; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, in press, Study 2). Similarly, people with negative self-views favor interaction partners who appraise them unfavorably over partners who appraise them favorably (e.g., Swann et al., 1990, Study 2; Swann, Pelham, &

Krull, 1989, Study 3; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, in press, Studies 1 & 2) and over being in a different experiment (Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, in press, Study 1). Finally, when people with firmly held negative self-views find themselves with spouses who appraise them favorably, they tend to withdraw from the relationship (e.g., Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, in press).

Nevertheless, if researchers have established that people with negative self-views do indeed sometimes seek unfavorable evaluations and interaction partners who appraise them negatively, they have not shown why they do so. Whereas Lecky and his followers would argue that such activities are motivated by a desire for self-confirmation or self-verification, proponents of positivity strivings would argue that they are designed to make people feel good about themselves. In this article, we assessed the relative plausibility of these competing explanations.

Self-Verification Strivings

In the tradition of self-consistency theories (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Lecky, 1945; Secord & Backman, 1965), self-verification theory (e.g., Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) suggests that people want self-confirmatory feedback. Self-verification theory diverges from consistency theories, however, by abandoning the notion that people are interested in consistency for its own sake (see also Andrews, 1991; Epstein, 1985; Lecky, 1945; Secord & Backman, 1965). Instead, self-verification theory assumes that people strive to confirm their self-conceptions to bolster their per-

[1] Subsequent research has suggested that the Aronson and Carlsmith (1962) effect was unreliable because they manipulated rather than measured participants' self-views. That is, laboratory manipulations of self-views probably produce self-views that are, at best, low in certainty, and there is sound evidence that people are less inclined to work to confirm self-views of which they are uncertain (e.g., Maracek & Mettee, 1972; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988; Swann et al., in press).

ceptions of prediction and control (e.g., Heider, 1958; Kelly, 1955; Lecky, 1945; Rodin, 1986).[2]

Self-verification theory assumes that people's ability to recognize how others perceive them is the key to successful social relations (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1981). To this end, they notice how others respond to them and internalize these responses into self-concepts. From this vantage point, self-concepts are cognitive distillations of past relationships that allow people to predict how others will respond to them in the future.

Because people recognize the central role that stable self-concepts play in negotiating social reality, they come to prefer appraisals that confirm their self-concepts and eschew appraisals that do not. Consider, for example, a man who perceives himself as dull-witted. If his wife remarks that she thinks he is brilliant, he will probably be disturbed because her comment challenges a long-standing self-conception and implies that he may not know himself after all. And, if he does not know himself, what does he know?

Even if he lacked such epistemic concerns he might still want his wife to recognize his intellectual deficits for purely pragmatic or interpersonal reasons (e.g., Athay & Darley, 1981; Goffman, 1959). That is, if convinced that she recognizes his limitations, he will be confident that their interactions will proceed smoothly and harmoniously. In contrast, if he suspects that she has formed an inappropriately favorable impression, he might fear that their interactions will be fraught with misunderstanding (e.g., Athay & Darley, 1981; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Carson, 1969; Goffman, 1959; E. E. Jones, 1964; Swann, 1984).

Both epistemic and pragmatic considerations may therefore motivate people to seek self-verifying appraisals. This may be why people with negative self-views display a preference for unfavorable evaluations and for relationship partners who hold them in low esteem.

Positivity Strivings

Theories based on positivity strivings assume that all people want positive evaluations (e.g., S. C. Jones, 1973). At first blush, this perspective would seem to have difficulty accounting for evidence that people with negative self-views seek partners who appraise them negatively. Recent variations of the theory can accommodate such evidence, however (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Epstein, 1973, 1983; Greenwald, 1980; E. E. Jones, in press; E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1985; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988). For example, interaction partners who appraise people negatively may satisfy their positivity strivings by allowing them to (a) improve themselves, (b) win converts, (c) interact with someone who has similar attitudes, or (d) interact with someone who is relatively perceptive.

Self-Improvement

Some theorists (e.g., Trope, 1983, 1986) have argued that persons with negative self-concepts seek negative evaluations to reduce uncertainty about themselves. Uncertainty reduction may, in turn, allow people to eliminate activities (e.g., excessive reassurance seeking) that provoke unfavorable evaluations.

Therefore, seeking unfavorable evaluations may ultimately promote self-improvement.

Steele (1990) has recently proposed a related but simpler self-improvement argument. He assumes that people desire and seek unfavorable feedback because it allows them to identify and remedy problematic behaviors.

Winning Converts

Most people believe that converting an enemy to a friend amounts to passing an acid test of self-worth. As such, people might choose partners who are initially unfavorable so that they have an opportunity to pass such a test and improve their self-esteem accordingly.

Perceived Similarity

Considerable research has suggested that interaction partners who have similar values and beliefs make one another feel good about themselves by validating their respective values and beliefs (e.g., Byrne, 1971). From this perspective, people with negative self-concepts might choose partners who appraise them unfavorably in an effort to validate their attitudes and beliefs rather than their self-concepts.

Perceived Perceptiveness

To the person with a negative self-view, evaluators who evaluate them unfavorably might seem exceptionally perceptive and intelligent. People with negative self-views may therefore seek partners who appraise them unfavorably because they feel better about themselves when they associate with highly competent social perceivers.

Stalking the Reasons Underlying the Relationship Partners People Choose

To date, researchers have relied on ancillary measures to assess the mediators underlying self-verification strivings (e.g., Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, in press; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, in press). We approached this issue more directly by asking participants to think aloud as they chose interaction partners. Judges' ratings of these spontaneous verbalizations served as our primary dependent variable.

To be sure, spontaneous verbalizations may sometimes offer distorted visions of human motivation. Nisbett and Wilson (1977; Wilson, 1985), for instance, showed that when people were asked why they behaved as they did, they relied on culturally shared theories about the causes of behavior. In these and similar instances, verbal reports offer a misleading picture of the antecedents of social behavior (see also Wilson, Dunn, Bybee, Hyman, & Rotundo, 1984; Wilson, Kraft, & Dunn, 1989; Wilson & Pollack, 1991).

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[2] Self-verification theory assumes that people are motivated to maximize their perceptions of control rather than their actual control. Gravitating toward a self-verifying but abusive relationship partner, for example, may make one's world seem more controllable, when in fact it is not.

Such reservations notwithstanding, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) allowed that verbal reports *can* be revealing when they relate to strong and unambiguous internal cues (see also Bem, 1972). One strategy for ensuring that self-reports emanate from strong and unambiguous internal cues is to have people report as their psychological process unfolds rather than retrospectively (e.g., Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Smith & Miller, 1978; see also Wilson, 1985; Wilson et al., 1984). We accordingly examined the self-reports that people generated as they chose interaction partners.

Study 1

We asked participants with positive and negative self-concepts to think aloud into a tape recorder as they chose interaction partners. We assumed that, as in previous research, participants would choose interaction partners who verified their self-views (i.e., people with positive self-views would prefer interaction partners who viewed them favorably, and people with negative self-views would prefer interaction partners who viewed them unfavorably). Our major question was whether positivity or self-verification strivings would influence participants' choice of interaction partners.

Method

Participants. Eighty-four men at the University of Texas at Austin participated in this study for credit in their introductory psychology course. We recruited only those who scored in the upper or lower 20th percentile on the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI; Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) during a large pretesting session earlier in the semester. The TSBI is a measure of self-perceived sociability. We deleted data from 1 participant due to an equipment malfunction and from 2 others because they misunderstood the instructions. This left 81 participants in the sample.

Procedure. The experimenter greeted each participant individually and introduced him to a study that ostensibly concerned "how people become acquainted." As part of the study, the experimenter noted, the participant would choose one of two potential interaction partners with whom he would later have a 2-3 hour interaction. To provide a basis for the participant's decision, the experimenter explained that he would allow the participant to examine evaluations of himself that had been prepared by two potential interaction partners (the evaluations were ostensibly based on the participant's responses to questionnaires completed during pretesting). The experimenter then added that one of his specific interests was in the thoughts that come to people's minds as they choose interaction partners. For this reason, he asked the participant to think aloud into a tape recorder as he chose his interaction partners.

The experimenter then left the cubicle and reappeared with two "evaluations," both of which had, in reality, been prepared in advance. The favorable evaluation stated that

> This person seems socially self-confident. He appears at ease with people he doesn't know very well. He seems to have little doubt about his social competence. That's pretty much all I can tell about him from his answers to the questionnaire.

The unfavorable evaluation stated that

> From looking at this person's answers, he appears to be ill at ease in social situations. There are probably times when he is around other people and just doesn't know quite what to do or say. There

are times when he likes being around people, but in some social situations he is uncomfortable and anxious.[3]

Below each evaluation, the "evaluator" noted that he was highly certain of his evaluation.

The experimenter placed the evaluations in front of the participant and informed him that he would have several minutes to (a) designate one of the two evaluators as his interaction partner and (b) express his desire to interact with each evaluator on 11-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much*. The experimenter then started the cassette recorder and left. He returned after 3 min. If the participant had not yet chosen an interaction partner, the experimenter gently encouraged him to do so. At the end of each session, the experimenter thanked and debriefed the participant.

Rating the audiotapes. We sought to develop a coding scheme that would include all the concerns generated by the participants themselves as well as by theorists who endorse positivity and self-verification strivings. To this end, we began by having four undergraduates (who were unfamiliar with the nature and purposes of our research) listen to the protocols of all participants and identify the reasons that participants gave for favoring one evaluator over the other. We then supplemented the reasons they generated with ones that captured the concerns raised by advocates of positivity and self-verification strivings.[4] This procedure produced seven distinct reasons why participants might choose an interaction partner:

1. Win converts: The speaker wanted to prove that the evaluator was incorrect. Explanation: The speaker felt that the evaluator had misconstrued him and wanted to show the evaluator what he was really like.

2. Self-improvement: The speaker hoped to improve himself through the evaluator's feedback. Explanation: By interacting with the evaluator, the speaker hoped to identify aspects of himself that needed improvement.

3. Epistemic: The evaluator put the speaker at ease by confirming his self-view. Explanation: The speaker was reassured that he really knew himself because the evaluator's appraisal confirmed his self-conception.

4. Similarity: The speaker felt the evaluator was similar to himself. Explanation: The speaker preferred to interact with someone who had similar values and attitudes over someone who was dissimilar.

5. Perceptiveness: The evaluator seemed perceptive and intelli-

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[3] Pilot testing revealed that people are aware of, and tend to correct for, a tendency to sugarcoat their evaluations (e.g., Blumberg, 1972; Tesser & Rosen, 1975). As a result, we expected that people would identify the unfavorable evaluation as such despite the fact that it was only mildly unfavorable in an *absolute* sense. To test this assumption, we had an independent group of judges rate the favorable and unfavorable evaluations on a series of 6-point scales. As predicted, they did rate the unfavorable and favorable evaluations on opposite sides of the midpoint (3.5), $F(1, 28) = 27.6$, $p < .001$; Ms = 4.17 and 2.6, respectively, but they did not rate the evaluations differently on the sympathetic-unsympathetic dimension (Fs < 1). Furthermore, it is unlikely that our participants' self-concepts moderated their perception of feedback. Research by Swann, Griffin, Predmore, and Gaines (1987) and Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, and Pelham (in press) has shown that people with negative self-views feel just as bad as people with positive self-views when they receive negative feedback and that people with negative and positive self-views are equally inclined to perceive negative and positive feedback as such (Swann & Tafarodi, 1991).

[4] At least one of the four naive undergraduates spontaneously generated the concepts underlying each of the specific rating categories with the exception of self-improvement. Participants' protocols are available from William B. Swann, Jr., on request.

gent. Explanation: The nature of the evaluation suggested that the evaluator was perceptive and intelligent and would therefore be better company than someone who lacked these qualities.

6. Pragmatic: The speaker expected that he and the evaluator would interact smoothly. Explanation: The speaker believed that the evaluator would know what to expect from him and that this would ensure a smooth social interaction.

7. Positivity: The evaluator gave the speaker a favorable evaluation. Explanation: The evaluator rated the speaker positively, and the speaker found this desirable.

We presented a group of five judges with each of the above descriptions of the seven categories. (An eighth "other" category was created from responses to the following instruction: "If you felt the speaker chose the evaluator for some other reason not covered above, please write down the reason in the blank spaces provided.") Training consisted of providing judges with an extended explanation of the categories to ensure that they understood them. Judges then rated the extent to which speakers used a particular reason on a scale ranging from 0 (*definitely not the participant's reason*) to 4 (*definitely the participant's reason*). Different judges rated the reasons in different orders. In addition, to maximize comprehension, we provided judges with transcripts of the protocols to read as they listened. The appendix contains examples of protocols that exemplified each category.

Interjudge reliability was quite respectable: epistemic (.84), pragmatic (.82), win converts (.94), self-improvement (.72), similarity (.71), perceptiveness (.82), and positivity (.93). We accordingly averaged all the judges' responses to each item.

Results

Preferred interaction partners. Before exploring the reasons underlying participants' choices, we first examined the choices themselves for evidence of self-verification strivings. Just as 72% of participants who had positive self-concepts chose to interact with the favorable evaluator, 78% of participants with negative self-concepts chose to interact with the unfavorable evaluator. This difference was highly reliable, χ^2 (1, $N = 81$) = 20.25, $p = .001$.[5]

We also asked participants to rate how much they wanted to interact with each evaluator. A 2 (self-concept: positive or negative) × 2 (evaluator: favorable or unfavorable; a within-subjects factor) analysis of variance (ANOVA) of this measure revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1, 79) = 29.04$, $p < .001$. Simple effects tests indicated that participants with positive self-concepts preferred the favorable evaluator over the unfavorable evaluator, $F(1, 35) = 16.21$, $p < .001$ ($Ms = 8.11$ and 5.94, respectively). Participants with negative self-concepts preferred the unfavorable evaluator over the favorable evaluator, $F(1, 44) = 13.06$, $p < .001$ ($Ms = 6.84$ and 5.04, respectively). As expected, then, participants preferred interaction partners who viewed them as they viewed themselves.

Reasons for choosing self-verifying partners. The self-verification formulation led us to expect that participants who self-verified would mention epistemic and pragmatic reasons more often than those who did not. We first inspected the extent to which participants verbalized the epistemic reason. The means in Rows 1 and 3 of Table 1 support our predictions. Furthermore, a 2 (self-concept: positive or negative) × 2 (choice: favorable evaluator or unfavorable evaluator) ANOVA of the epistemic reason revealed a reliable interaction, $F(1, 77) = 33.01$, $p < .001$. Simple effects tests revealed that participants with posi-

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Epistemic and Pragmatic Reasons for Choosing Favorable and Unfavorable Partners

Partner selected and reason	Participants' self-view	
	Positive	Negative
Favorable		
Epistemic	2.65	1.40
Pragmatic	2.26	1.60
Unfavorable		
Epistemic	1.60	3.03
Pragmatic	1.18	2.16

Note. Judges' ratings are on a 0- to 4-point scale.

tive self-concepts expressed epistemic concerns more when they chose the favorable as compared with the unfavorable evaluator, $F(1, 34) = 6.97$, $p = .01$. In contrast, participants with negative self-concepts expressed epistemic concerns more when they chose the unfavorable as compared with the favorable evaluator, $F(1, 43) = 37.21$, $p < .001$.

Analysis of the pragmatic reason also supported our expectations. That is, a Self-Concept × Choice ANOVA of the pragmatic reason revealed a reliable interaction, $F(1, 77) = 12.80$, $p = .001$. As illustrated in Rows 2 and 4 of Table 1 and corroborated by simple effects tests, participants with positive self-concepts expressed pragmatic considerations more when they chose the favorable as compared with the unfavorable evaluator, $F(1, 34) = 12.46$, $p < .001$. Although participants with negative self-concepts expressed pragmatic concerns just as much when they chose the unfavorable as compared with the favorable evaluator, they did express pragmatic concerns more when they chose the unfavorable evaluator than did participants with positive self-concepts, $F(1, 43) = 9.06$, $p < .01$.

As expected, the relationship between participants' epistemic and pragmatic concerns was modest, $r(33) = .31$, ns. Examination of participants' protocols indicated that epistemic concerns focused on the extent to which the partners' appraisal confirmed their self-view. For example, one participant said, "I don't like the conflicting opinion of what I actually think." Another remarked, "Yeah, I think that's pretty close to the way I am." Still another indicated that "I think #1 [the unfavorable evaluator] is a better choice because . . . he sums up basically how I feel." In contrast, protocols that received high ratings on the pragmatic dimension conveyed a concern with having a

[5] Readers familiar with earlier work on self-verification may be surprised that people with negative self-views displayed such a strong preference for unfavorable partners in Studies 1 and 2 (78% and 85%, respectively). We attribute this to an important methodological refinement in the nature of the feedback we provided to participants. In earlier work on self-verification (e.g., Swann, 1990), we presented feedback on trait scales. We found that participants with negative self-views tended to assimilate highly favorable ratings to their own self-views (presumably because trait ratings were statistical in nature and hence difficult to interpret, e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). In the current research, we avoided this difficulty by presenting participants with feedback in paragraph form.

smooth interaction with the prospective partner. For example, one participant explained, "[the unfavorable evaluator] seems like a person I could sort of really get along with." Another indicated that "if I choose [the unfavorable evaluator] it seems to me that he'll be more prepared for my anxiety about being around people I don't know. Seeing as he knows what he's dealing with we might get along better." (For additional illustrative protocols, see the Appendix.)

Having established that self-verifiers mentioned epistemic and pragmatic concerns more than nonverifiers, we focused our attention on the most theoretically interesting group of self-verifiers: participants with negative self-views who chose unfavorable partners. The means displayed in Figure 1 indicate that participants with negative self-views mentioned epistemic concerns more than any other reason, followed by pragmatic and perceptiveness considerations, which were verbalized equally. Perceived similarity, self-improvement, positivity of the evaluator, and a concern for winning converts were rarely mentioned (<1 on a 0- to 4-point scale). A one-way ANOVA, $F(7, 238) = 95.74$, $p < .001$, and Newman-Keuls test corroborated these generalizations.

Note that concerns with the perceptiveness of the interaction partner were largely independent of epistemic considerations, $r(33) = -.30$, ns.[6] Participants expressed concerns with perceptiveness with comments such as, "I think I'll choose [the unfavorable evaluator] because they were more insightful." Another participant quipped, "My personal interpretation of this is that either [the favorable evaluator] was having a bad day, or they just aren't that sharp." He went on to say, "Simply for the sake of trying to associate with someone who's a little bit more serious about what's going on, I think I'm gonna go with [the unfavorable evaluator]." Apparently, epistemic concerns and a preference for perceptive and intelligent interaction partners made unique contributions to people's choice of interaction partners.

The means displayed in Figure 1 also indicate that epistemic and pragmatic concerns were among the three most important
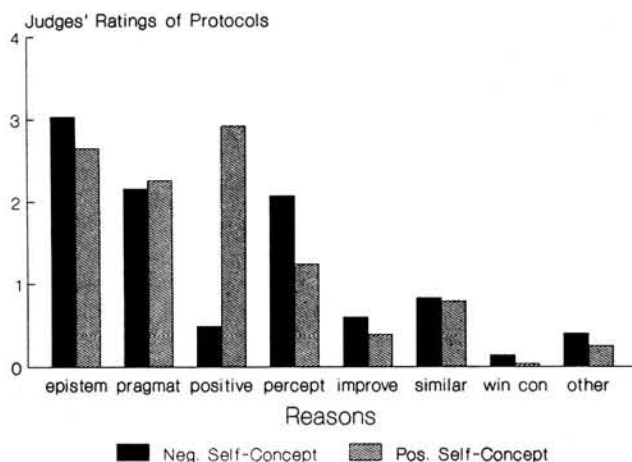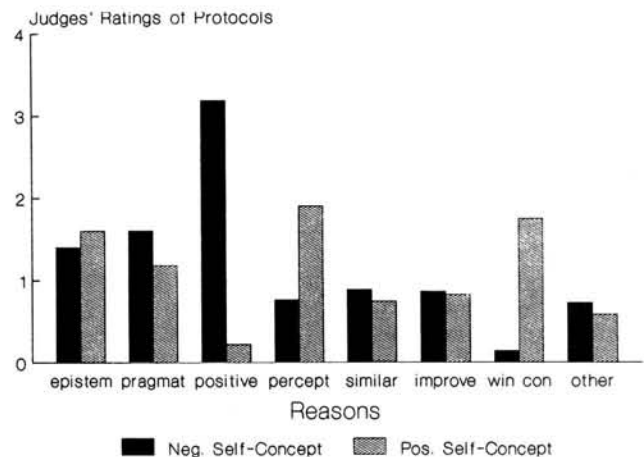

Figure 2. Reasons for not verifying. (Epistem = epistemic; pragmat = pragmatic; positive = positivity; percept = perceptiveness; similar = similarity; improve = self-improvement; win con = win converts; neg. self-concept = negative self-concept; pos. self-concept = positive self-concept.)

reasons why participants with positive self-concepts self-verified (i.e., chose favorable evaluators). These participants also endorsed the sheer positivity of the evaluation, showing that for people with positive self-views, favorable appraisals can satisfy positivity as well as self-verification strivings. A significant repeated measures one-way ANOVA, $F(7, 175) = 67.16$, $p < .001$, corroborated these conclusions. A Newman-Keuls analysis also indicated that the positivity and epistemic reasons were verbalized equally, followed by the pragmatic reason, which was verbalized to a greater degree than the rest of the reasons. The fact that these participants endorsed the perceptiveness item so infrequently suggests that it did not underlie their self-verification strivings.

Reasons for choosing nonverifying partners. Why did some 25% of our participants pass up the opportunity to self-verify? We focused first on participants with negative self-concepts who chose the favorable evaluator. The means in Figure 2 indicate that these participants were most concerned with the positivity of the evaluator; all other reasons were endorsed infrequently. The results of a one-way ANOVA, $F(7, 63) = 15.64$, $p < .001$, and a Newman-Keuls test corroborated this conclusion.

What about participants with positive self-concepts who chose unfavorable partners, thereby defying both their self-verification and positivity strivings? Although the overall ANOVA was reliable, $F(7, 63) = 3.02$, $p < .01$, a Newman-Keuls analysis

Figure 1. Reasons for self-verifying. (Epistem = epistemic; pragmat = pragmatic; positive = positivity; percept = perceptiveness; improve = self-improvement; similar = similarity; win con = win converts; neg. self-concept = negative self-concept; pos. self-concept = positive self-concept.)

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[6] Although the epistemic and perceptiveness reasons appear to be negatively correlated, a closer look at the data reveals that this negative correlation was driven primarily by two participants who scored extremely low (>3 standard deviations below the mean) on the epistemic item and very high on the perceptiveness item. Eliminating these participants' data from the analysis indicates that epistemic concerns and perceptiveness concerns were slightly positively correlated, $r(31) = .14$. Also, deleting these same participants' data from the correlation between the epistemic and pragmatic item reduced the r from .31 to .14.

suggested that none of the reasons stood out from the others. Inspection of the means displayed in Figure 2 suggests that these participants chose the unfavorable partner because they thought he was perceptive or would satisfy their epistemic concerns or because they wanted to convert him. Examination of the correlations between these measures revealed that the epistemic and perceptiveness items were positively associated with one another, $r(8) = .42$, but negatively associated with the win convert item, $rs(8) = -.93$ and $-.56$, respectively. Although one should interpret these correlations cautiously owing to the small n, they suggest that people with positive self-views chose unfavorable partners because they hoped to gain insight into themselves or because they hoped to convert their partners.

Interestingly, those skeptical of self-verification theory sometimes suggest that participants with negative self-concepts choose unfavorable partners to win converts. The foregoing data show that only persons with positive self-concepts manifested this concern.

Summary

Our results suggested that self-verification as well as positivity strivings caused participants with positive self-views to choose partners who appraised them favorably. The epistemic concerns underlying self-verification strivings, however, best explained why people with negative self-views chose partners who appraised them unfavorably.

Study 2

Critics of verbal report methodology (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, 1985) have suggested that the act of verbalization may change the mental processes themselves. For example, the think-aloud procedure we used in Study 1 may have somehow focused participants on issues that created or amplified their self-verification strivings (see also Fischoff, Slovic, & Lichtenstein, 1980).

We think that there are sound theoretical reasons to believe that our *particular* think-aloud procedure did *not* increase the self-verification activities of participants. For example, Ericsson and Simon (1980) have pointed out that if information required for verbalization is necessary to conduct a task, then the verbalization procedure should not affect that process. Because self-verification activities presumably require people to consider the advantages and disadvantages of interacting with various interaction partners, our participants presumably would have generated the information contained in their think-aloud protocols spontaneously.

Nevertheless, although our think-aloud procedure probably did not *create* self-verification strivings artificially, it may have *exaggerated* such strivings. In fact, studies of concurrent verbalization have demonstrated that when there is an effect of verbalization, it either makes people think more about the task (e.g., Wilder & Harvey, 1971) or increases the time they devote to the task (Erber & Fiske, 1984). Considered together with evidence that thinking time is associated with self-verification (e.g., Swann et al., 1990), this suggests that the verbalization procedure used in Study 1 may have amplified the extent to which participants pondered epistemic and pragmatic considerations and self-verified.

To test the notion that verbalizing reasons for choosing an interaction partner exaggerates self-verification strivings, we compared participants who verbalized their thoughts as they chose an interaction partner with those who did not. As we were most interested in the self-verification strivings of people with negative self-concepts, we focused on these persons exclusively. We wondered whether the verbalization manipulation would increase the tendency for participants to self-verify by choosing the unfavorable interaction partner over the favorable one.

Method

Participants. Twenty-six male students at the University of Texas at Austin participated in this study for credit in their introductory psychology course. We recruited only those who scored in the lower 20th percentile on the TSBI.

Procedure. As in Study 1, participants chose between two evaluators who demonstrated relatively favorable or unfavorable appraisals of participants' social skills. We allotted all participants the same amount of time to make their decision but had only some think aloud. We assessed which evaluators participants chose as well as how much they wanted to interact with each.

Results

Did having participants verbalize their thoughts influence the interaction partners they chose? No. In fact, precisely the same number of participants (85%) chose to interact with the unfavorable evaluator in the verbalization and no-verbalization conditions. Participants' ratings of how much they wished to interact with each partner yielded similar findings. A 2 (verbalization: yes or no) × 2 (evaluator: favorable or unfavorable; a within-subjects factor) ANOVA revealed only the predicted main effect of evaluator, $F(1, 24) = 6.44$, $p = .02$, with participants desiring to interact with the unfavorable evaluator more than the favorable evaluator ($Ms = 7.54$ and 5.89, respectively). No main or interactive effects of the verbalization manipulation emerged ($Fs < 1$). Therefore, verbalizing the reasons underlying their preferences had no impact on the extent to which participants with negative self-concepts preferred the unfavorable evaluator over the favorable one.

General Discussion

Why do people choose interaction partners who see them as they see themselves? Our findings suggest that a desire to maintain perceptions of predictability and control contributes to such activities. The participants in our research expressed this desire for prediction and control in two ways. First, they indicated that they would be reassured by a partner who would confirm their self-views—an epistemic consideration. Second, they mentioned that they would be more likely to have a smooth, harmonious interaction with a self-verifying partner— a pragmatic consideration.

Our evidence that epistemic concerns were associated with self-verification strivings corroborates several related findings. For example, Swann, Hixon, and De La Ronde (in press) found that married persons reported being more committed to spouses to the extent that such spouses made them feel "that

they really knew themselves." Similarly, Swann and Tafarodi (1991) obtained self-verification effects in a setting in which only epistemic factors appeared to be operating. Specifically, after receiving criticism or praise regarding one set of abilities, participants chose feedback about a set of unrelated abilities from a different evaluator. Just as participants with high self-esteem responded to criticism by intensifying their search for favorable feedback, participants with low self-esteem responded to praise by intensifying their search for unfavorable feedback.

Epistemic and Related Concerns

Of course, although Swann and Tafarodi's (1991) findings suggest that epistemic concerns are sufficient to produce self-verification strivings, pragmatic concerns clearly contribute to such strivings in some contexts. The participants in our investigation, for example, often referred to pragmatic concerns as they chose self-verifying interaction partners. Note that such pragmatic concerns focused on a desire for a smooth interaction rather than for a positive evaluation. For example, pragmatic concerns were unrelated to concerns with self-improvement, winning converts, or associating with persons who were similar or perceptive. In addition, there was little indication that participants with negative self-views chose unfavorable evaluators in an effort to protect their self-esteem. In fact, the only participants who did show signs of choosing unfavorable partners in an effort to satisfy their positivity strivings were those with positive self-concepts who sought to win converts!

This evidence that self-verification strivings are independent of positivity strivings suggests that two independent motivational forces (self-verification and positivity strivings) contribute to self-esteem maintenance processes. Tesser and his colleagues (e.g., Tesser, 1988; Tesser & Campbell, 1983), for example, have shown convincingly that people engage in numerous activities to maintain positive perceptions of themselves. Because Tesser generally recruits subjects from unselected samples and because most people have positive self-views (e.g., Swann, 1987), our analysis suggests that his findings may reflect a desire for his participants to verify their (in most instances positive) self-views, on the one hand, and to satisfy a desire for positivity, on the other. This may, in part, explain why self-esteem maintenance processes are so robust.

Our findings also bear on claims that people are motivated to seek diagnostic information about themselves (Trope, 1986). Consistent with this notion, our findings indicate that participants with negative self-views were enticed by the perceptiveness of partners who appraised them unfavorably. Nevertheless, note that our findings also show that the desire for perceptiveness was independent of epistemic and pragmatic concerns. Apparently, in their quest for prediction and control, people seek appraisals that confirm their self-concepts (i.e., self-verifying partners) and that seem perceptive (i.e., ones that seem Accurate, with the capital "A" denoting accuracy in an absolute sense).

In our research, both the desire for self-verification and Accuracy seem to have encouraged people with negative self-views to choose partners who appraised them unfavorably. What happens if the two motives oppose one another? We suspect that

such occasions are quite rare. That is, people form self-concepts precisely because their past experiences lead them to believe that such concepts are Accurate. If sound evidence indicates that a self-conception is not Accurate, they will become uncertain of it and such uncertainty will undermine their inclination to self-verify (e.g., Maracek & Mettee, 1972; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988). Rather than self-verify, people who are uncertain of a self-conception will tend to seek Accurate feedback. If in so doing they then encounter evidence that further discredits the initial self-view, they will change it. After gathering sufficient support for the new self-view, they will verify it.

Are Verbal Reports Viable Indexes of Motivation?

In light of the reservations that some have leveled at self-report methodology, it is instructive to consider how skeptics might evaluate the results of our spontaneous verbalization procedure. One criticism might be that our participants relied on culturally accepted explanations of the causes of their behavior (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). This possibility seems untenable, however, considering that participants with negative and positive self-views explained their choice of unfavorable evaluators quite differently. That is, because people with negative and positive self-views grew up in the same culture, they should have explained their behavior in a similar manner, and they did not.

Skeptics could also argue that something about our procedure caused participants to embrace epistemic and pragmatic concerns rather than positivity concerns. This argument implies that we should have found an overall main effect, such that everyone was inclined to mention epistemic and pragmatic reasons when they chose partners who appraised them negatively. This was not so. For example, only self-verifiers tended to cite epistemic and pragmatic concerns; nonverifiers frequently referred to positivity strivings, such as the desire to gain approval, win converts, and interact with a perceptive partner. In a similar vein, we doubt that participants with negative self-views expressed epistemic concerns because they construed such responses as highly socially desirable; if anything, acknowledging the self-descriptiveness of negative attributes would seem to be socially undesirable.

Finally, critics could point out that spontaneous verbalizations are best suited for detecting motives that are (or can be made) conscious rather than those that are nonconscious. We agree. Nevertheless, we should add that there is some tentative evidence that our participants' nonconscious motives agreed with the ones that they reported. Consider that the verbalization manipulation had no impact on our participants' preferred interaction partners in Study 2 (for similar evidence, see Erber & Fiske, 1984; Ericsson & Simon, 1980). This is telling because Wilson et al. (1984) have shown that when people verbalize reasons that are different from the concerns that drive their preferences, their preferences change. Thus, for example, if nonconscious positivity strivings drove the preferences of participants with negative self-views, then the verbalization manipulation should have altered their preferences. The fact that it did not suggests that our participants' conscious and nonconscious motives were in harmony.

Having said this, we should emphasize that spontaneous ver-

balizations are merely one means of laying bare the complex processes that mediate people's choice of interaction partners and that the scheme that we developed for coding vocalizations is surely idiosyncratic in some respects. We accordingly urge future researchers to employ alternative methodologies to assess the reasons why people choose relationship partners. One could, for example, manipulate variables that might influence people's choice of interaction partners. In addition, in studies in which people choose interaction partners, one could have participants complete ancillary measures that might provide information regarding the motives underlying their choices.

Conclusions

We sought to understand why people choose interaction partners who see them as they see themselves. Examination of people's spontaneous verbalizations suggested that positivity as well as self-verification strivings encouraged participants with positive self-views to choose partners who appraised them favorably. The epistemic considerations underlying self-verification processes, however, best explained why people with negative self-views chose partners who appraised them unfavorably; pragmatic concerns and a desire for a perceptive partner also contributed to this tendency, albeit more modestly. Moreover, the epistemic and pragmatic concerns underlying self-verification strivings were independent of positivity strivings.

Our findings therefore bring us closer to understanding the phenomenon that Prescott Lecky (1945) introduced so long ago: the tendency for people with negative self-views to embrace the very persons who think poorly of them. Apparently, people enact such paradoxical behaviors because negative evaluations bolster their perception that their social worlds are predictable and controllable. From this vantage point, people go to great lengths to maintain the perception that they are in touch with social reality, however harsh that reality may be.

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Appendix

Examples of Protocols That Exemplified Each Category

Win Converts

"But uh, but I kind of think that [the unfavorable evaluator] is, probably, is the kind of guy or girl I'd like to meet and I would like to show them that I'm really not that uncomfortable."

"I think I'm gonna pick [the unfavorable evaluator] just because it sounds like it will be more of a challenge to meet somebody, like, who's got this description of me."

"Cause if I choose [the unfavorable evaluator] I could prove him wrong or something. . . I'm going to choose [the unfavorable evaluator] because I think it would be more exciting or something."

Self-Improvement

"I would like to meet [the favorable evaluator]. Maybe he could help me be more socially confident."

"Um, hopefully getting together with someone who thinks I'm confident will help my confidence grow where I don't seem so anxious or uncomfortable."

Epistemic

"[the unfavorable evaluator] better reflects my own view of myself, from experience."

". . . number 1 just because [the unfavorable evaluator] seems to be more accurate about what I think about myself. . . I'd feel more at ease with someone who . . . can actively judge me for what I am."

"That's just a very good way to talk about me. Well, I mean, after examining all of this I think number 1 [the negative evaluator] pretty much has me pegged."

Similarity

"I guess I would prefer to meet with the one who thinks I'm socially self-confident. I don't know why . . . maybe they are socially self-confident, too."

". . . maybe he's a little bit more like me or something."

"Maybe they are the same way I am."

Perceptiveness

"Well actually [the unfavorable evaluator] probably knocks me to . . . hits me right on the point. . . someone who could see that just by the answers is pretty astute."

"But I would definitely want to meet with [the unfavorable evaluator] because at least I know that person is uh. . . a little more on target

whether they're just a little more intelligent or just understood what they were looking at."

"And I'd like to meet with [the favorable evaluator] because obviously they're more intelligent and deciphering what the questionnaire, what I meant was my answers, are more able to see the truth."

Pragmatic

"I'd probably have to go with the [the unfavorable evaluator] because it seems if they are going with the approach that I would have, that I would be sure of my social competence then I could be able to handle the situation with them. . . ."

"Maybe if, you know since [the unfavorable evaluator] seems to know my position and how I feel sometimes maybe I'll be able to get along with him or, whatever better."

"Seeing as he knows what he's dealing with we might get along better . . . so I think I'll have an easier time getting along with [the unfavorable evaluator]."

Positivity

"But, of course I'll probably pick the positive one just because it was more positive."

"Well I like [the favorable evaluator] probably because it says good stuff about me.

". . . this one's fairly accurate but a little bit less than the other one but it is more positive in a way."

Other

"[I want to] find out why they think that I might be ill at ease in some social situations. How they got that from my, um, questionnaire or my evaluation. What made this so obvious to them."

"I think I probably may choose [the favorable evaluator], because when you initially start to relate to somebody, I think it sometimes is pretty important that you seem self-confident, and if they think you appear self-confident it makes it easier for the whole relationship to, to spark and get going."

"It just sounds funner to go with [the favorable evaluator]."