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Self-Expansion Perceptions and Behaviors Uniquely Contribute to Relationship Quality Over Time

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Abstract

Self-expansion refers to the process of broadening the self via engaging in novel activities, gaining new skills and acquiring new perspectives, and is proposed to be driven in a large part by one's close relationships. Self-expansion experiences include perceptions of potential (i.e., beliefs about how self-expanding a relationship could be in the future), perceptions of current experiences (i.e., beliefs about how self-expanding a relationship is presently), and enacted behaviors (i.e., engagement in novel, interesting activities). In two preregistered dyadic daily experience studies, we examined whether self-expansion potential is an antecedent to behavioral self-expansion and current perceptions, and how these distinct self-expansion components uniquely and synergistically predict relationship satisfaction and commitment daily and over time. Results revealed that self-expansion potential prospectively predicted both behavioral self-expansion and daily perceptions of current self-expansion. Self-expansion potential, current perceptions, and behaviors separately predicted greater relationship satisfaction and commitment daily. Self-expansion potential—but not behaviors or current perceptions—also positively predicted satisfaction and commitment two months later. Implications regarding the power of potential in relationships are discussed, including the need for future research to consider this important facet of self-expansion.

Keywords: self-expansion, satisfaction, commitment, intimate relationships, dyadic data, longitudinal

Self-Expansion Perceptions and Behaviors Uniquely Contribute to Relationship Quality

Over Time

Positive relationship and family experiences, particularly those involving romantic partners, are an essential aspect of living well. Intimate relationship processes are robustly linked to physical and psychological well-being throughout life (Robles et al., 2014; Stanton et al., 2020). It is therefore critical to understand the elements involved in promoting high-quality, fulfilling relationships over time. In response to this need, many researchers have argued for the importance of excitement and shared growth between partners (i.e., self-expansion).

The self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996; Aron et al., 2013, 2022) proposes that people can fulfill their intrinsic motivation to enhance their self-efficacy by engaging in novel, challenging, and exciting activities, and incorporating others' perspectives and experiences into one's self-concept. Close relationships (especially romantic relationships) are key facilitators of self-expansion; as individuals establish new relationships, they get to know new others, are exposed to different perspectives, and engage in novel activities. Self-expansion, in turn, aids in relationship maintenance (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Graham, 2008; Muise et al., 2019). Self-expansion is most typically reflected in engagement in self-expansion behaviors, cognitive beliefs about how self-expanding the relationship currently is, as well as beliefs about the potential for the relationship to offer future self-expansion opportunities (the latter is termed self-expansion potential [Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006] or forecasted self-expansion [Sprecher et al., 2015]).

Self-expansion behaviors and current self-expansion perceptions have received substantial attention in the literature thus far. Shared self-expansion behaviors (e.g., watching a new movie or taking a spontaneous trip together) are important for sustaining and improving relationships (Aron et al., 2013). Engaging in novel and exciting activities with

one's partner predicts higher relationship quality, positive affect, and sexual desire (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Graham & Harf, 2015; Muise et al., 2019). Similarly, much is known about the relationship outcomes associated with partners' beliefs about how self-expanding their relationship is *currently*. Current self-expansion perceptions have been linked to greater relationship quality, lower interest in alternative romantic partners, and fewer depression symptoms (e.g., Harasymchuk et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2023; VanderDrift et al., 2011). Thus, maintaining and capitalizing on opportunities for self-expansion is pertinent to sustaining long-term romantic relationships.

In contrast to self-expansion behaviors and current perceptions, empirical studies have largely neglected perceptions of how a romantic partner and relationship may be self-expanding in the *future*. Distinguishing perceptions of potential from current perceptions is important because people are motivated by both current and future rewards (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), and relationship expectations have important consequences for relationship quality (e.g., Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Joel et al., 2022). For example, partners' forecasts of satisfaction in their relationships shape their later experiences of satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Baker et al., 2017; Lemay, 2016). We suggest that self-expansion potential may similarly shape future self-expansion behaviors and cognitions. Our first goal in the current research was to examine whether self-expansion potential is an antecedent of current self-expansion perceptions and engaging in self-expansion behaviors day-to-day.

We believe that self-expansion potential is vital in relationships not only because it may precede engaging in novel, exciting activities with one's partner and current self-expansion beliefs, but also because it should exert unique effects on partners' relationship quality. However, the literature on self-expansion potential is nascent, with only a few published papers systematically investigating the construct at time of writing. However, this

initial evidence points to self-expansion potential's personal and relational benefits, with self-expansion potential being linked to lower susceptibility to infidelity (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006), greater early romantic attraction (Sprecher et al., 2015), and better perceived health via higher positive affect (Stanton et al., 2020). Thus, self-expansion potential may be a critical cognitive component and forecasting variable involved in long-term relationship maintenance. Our second goal in this work was to test the unique contributions of self-expansion potential, current self-expansion perceptions, and self-expanding behaviors to relationship quality over time.

Lastly, it is possible that self-expansion potential and behaviors might synergistically predict relationship quality. Perhaps relationship quality may be especially high for partners who report greater self-expansion potential and engage in more self-expanding activities from day-to-day (i.e., the salutary effect of self-expansion behaviors on relationship quality may be amplified by greater perceptions of self-expansion potential). On the other hand, perceiving potential that is later unmet could lead to disappointment that one's relationship is not living up to one's expectations, and thus potential would have different effects on relationship quality depending on levels of behavioral expansion. However, previous research has shown that holding optimistic beliefs about one's partner or relationship in the face of negative experiences is beneficial to one's relationship (Lemay, 2016; Schoebi et al., 2012). Believing that one's relationship will offer opportunities for self-expansion in the future, then, may preserve relationship quality on days when partners do not engage in self-expanding activities. Our third goal was to explore these competing possibilities and discover whether self-expansion potential amplifies the benefits of high self-expansion behaviors or buffers the detriments of low self-expansion behaviors.

The Current Research

We tested the associations between self-expansion potential, current self-expansion perceptions, behavioral self-expansion, and relationship quality in two dyadic daily experience studies. Specifically, we investigated whether self-expansion potential prospectively predicted later day-to-day self-expansion behaviors (Studies 1-2) and current self-expansion perceptions (Study 2). We also tested the unique contributions of self-expansion potential and behaviors (Study 1) or all three forms of self-expansion (Study 2) to relationship satisfaction and commitment daily (Studies 1-2) and two months later (Study 2).[1] Lastly, we explored the possible amplifying versus buffering function of self-expansion potential on relationship quality over time (Studies 1-2). The hypotheses, methods, and analytic plans of both studies were preregistered on the Open Science Framework[2], and this information as well as the materials, data, and code are publicly available at https://osf.io/8tm4a/.

Hypotheses

Just as previous research has linked greater forecasted satisfaction to enacting pro-relationship behaviors (e.g., Lemay et al., 2015), self-expansion potential should motivate partners to fulfill their expectations by engaging in novel activities together. Therefore, guided by prior studies of relationship forecasting (e.g., Baker et al., 2017), we hypothesized that people who believe their relationship will be self-expanding in the future would be more likely to engage in self-expanding behaviors day-to-day. Similarly, self-expansion potential should predict later perceptions of how self-expanding the relationship currently is. In the

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[1] Satisfaction and commitment are positively correlated and can be combined into a single relationship quality index along with other variables like trust, closeness, passion, and love (Fletcher et al., 2000). However, satisfaction and commitment are unique components of several influential theoretical models (e.g., the investment model; Rusbult et al., 1998) and are two of the most common outcome variables in relationship science. Thus, our preregistered analyses involve exploring the links between cognitive (future and present) self-expansion and behavioral self-expansion with satisfaction and commitment separately.

[2] The data for Studies 1 and 2 were used in separate research conducted by two of the current authors regarding whether self-expansion moderates the associations between attachment orientations and relationship quality. Due to having some overlapping variables, these two projects were analyzed in tandem, with simultaneous preregistration of the hypotheses to ensure recursive hypothesis testing did not occur. Study information for the attachment-related research can be found at https://osf.io/3bpcj/.

interest of transparency, we note that all analyses pertaining to current self-expansion

cognitions were not included in our original preregistration or the first version of this paper

and thus are considered exploratory. Our original documentation focused solely on the facets

of self-expansion that were measured in both studies (potential and behaviors), whereas

current cognitions were measured only in Study 2. However, reviewers indicated that current

cognitions are a critical component to understanding the unique contributions of potential,

and we therefore reanalyzed the data to include current self-expansion cognitions in our

models where possible (i.e., in Study 2).

In light of previous findings linking perceived self-expansion potential to personal

and relational benefits (e.g., Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006, Sprecher et al., 2015, Stanton

et al., 2020)., we predicted that one's *own* (actor) and one's *partner's* (partner) self-expansion

potential would uniquely, positively predict relationship satisfaction and commitment over

time. Similarly, we expected to replicate previous studies such that both one's *own* (actor)

and one's *partner's* (partner) self-expansion behaviors and current cognitions would

positively predict relationship satisfaction and commitment over time.

Finally, we anticipated that one's own (actor) self-expansion potential and behaviors

would interact with each other, with higher self-expansion potential being particularly

beneficial for relationship quality on days when partners' behavioral self-expansion was low.

When generating hypotheses, we also discussed the possibility that these effects may go in a

different direction, with the beneficial effect of high self-expansion behaviors on relationship

quality being amplified when perceptions of future self-expansion potential were also high.

However, it is unlikely that the average couple can consistently maintain high levels of

behavioral self-expansion on a day-to-day basis given the practical limitations of everyday

life, and yet many do manage to be consistently satisfied with their relationships. Thus, we

hypothesized that perceived potential for self-expansion in the future would buffer

relationship quality on days when behaviors were low (cf. Lemay, 2016; Schoebi et al., 2012). We also explored actor-partner interactions (e.g., whether one's *own* self-expansion potential might buffer one's *partner's* low self-expansion behaviors) but made no *a priori* predictions due to a lack of literature testing actor-partner interactions in this domain. The treatment of human subjects in this research was in accordance with established ethical guidelines and appropriate institutional approval was obtained from Western University (Study 1) and the University of Edinburgh (Study 2). We report how we determined our sample sizes, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations (if any), and all measures in each study.

Study 1

Method

Participants

The original sample was 130 cohabiting, romantic couples, but 15 couples were excluded from analyses because one or both partners did not consent to participate ($N = 5$) or did not meet inclusion criteria ($N = 10$). The final sample comprised 115 male-female couples recruited via online advertisements, a participant email list, and flyers posted around the local community. This sample size is consistent with previous studies using similar methodologies (e.g., Hagemeyer et al., 2015) but includes more diary days (21 vs. 14 days), resulting in 4339 data points. Participants were 19-64 years of age ($M_{years} = 30.78$, $SD_{years} = 8.99$), and the majority identified as White (73%; 16.5% Asian, 5.7% Hispanic or Latino, 2.2% Black or African American, 1.7% Native American or Aboriginal, 1.7% South Asian, 0.4% Mixed race, 0.4% Arab) and heterosexual (88.7%; 10.4% bisexual, 0.4% fluid, 0.4% pansexual). Participants were in relationships lasting 5 months to 26 years ($M_{years} = 6.83$, $SD_{years} = 5.87$). Approximately 42% of participants were casually or exclusively dating their current partner,

and 58% were common-law, engaged, or married. A minority of participants had children

(41.3%).

Measures and Procedure

Data were taken from a larger longitudinal study of heterosexual couples (see

https://osf.io/42npz/). Participants were told they would be taking part in a study about daily

relationship and sexual experiences. The study involved an initial 30-minute survey (Phase 1)

and a 21-day diary period (Phase 2). All phases were completed online. For Phase 1, couples

provided informed consent and then completed a questionnaire battery that contained a self-

expansion potential measure.

During Phase 2, participants were asked to complete a 10-minute online survey each

day for 21 consecutive days. Given the varied nature of interests in the larger study,

participants completed a different subset of questionnaires on odd and even diary days.

However, some measures—including measures of self-expansion behaviors, satisfaction, and

commitment—were assessed every day. Unique and individual survey links were emailed to

participants and partners were asked to complete their survey separately and privately.

Survey links were set to expire before the next survey link was sent to ensure that partners

could not complete multiple surveys at once. The average number of daily surveys completed

was high (Range = 4-21, $M = 19.00$, $SD = 3.70$). After finishing Phase 2, participants were

debriefed and compensated up to CAD-$35.00 each based on how many parts of the study

they completed.

Phase 1 Measures.

Baseline Self-Expansion Potential. Participants completed Lewandowski and

Ackerman's (2006) Self-Expansion Potential Scale, a 5-item measure rated on a 7-point scale

($1 = $ *strongly disagree*, $7 = $ *strongly agree*) that assesses the degree to which individuals

believe their current partner and relationship will offer them opportunities for personal

growth in the future (e.g., "I feel that if this relationship with my partner were to continue I would be able to gain more insights, experiences, and/or knowledge from my partner"). Scores were calculated by averaging responses across items, with higher scores indicating greater self-expansion potential.

Phase 2 Measures.

Daily Self-Expansion Behaviors. Participants completed a checklist measure of five self-expansion behaviors adapted from prior research (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010), and selected the behaviors they had engaged in with their partner that day (e.g., "Tried new things with your partner"). Scores were calculated by summing across items, with higher scores indicating greater daily behavioral self-expansion. We note that this checklist does not capture all of the possible specific behaviors that could be considered self-expanding, as these vary from person to person, but rather attempt to capture a variety of possible experiences through more broadly worded items (e.g., going out, trying new things, doing something spontaneous, finding common interests).

Daily Satisfaction and Commitment. Participants reported their satisfaction using four items from the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all/extremely poor*, 5 = *a great deal/extremely good*) (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your relationship?"). Participants reported their commitment using three items from the commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult et al., 1998) rated on a 9-point scale (0 = *do not agree at all*, 8 = *agree completely*) (e.g., "I feel very attached to our relationship"). In both cases, instructions specified participants should respond to each statement in terms of how well it characterized their relationship that day. Scores were calculated by averaging across the relevant items, with higher scores indicating greater daily satisfaction and commitment, respectively.

Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics, reliability information, and correlations among study variables. Our data analytic approach was guided by the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), which allowed us to test both actor and partner effects while statistically accounting for the mutual influence existing between relationship partners. We tested models using multilevel modelling (MLM), nesting partners' scores within a group of $N = 2$ as per Kenny et al.'s (2006) suggestions regarding the use of MLM with indistinguishable dyadic data. All predictors were standardized to allow ease of interpretation of the effects and to provide estimates of effect size. All predictors were fixed, and slopes were allowed to vary randomly. Although not originally preregistered, at the recommendation of reviewers from a previous iteration of this paper, all models predicting relationship satisfaction and commitment controlled for individuals' Phase 1 scores on the relevant outcome.[3] Results without controlling for baseline scores can be found in our online supplemental material on the OSF (https://osf.io/by72n).

We first ran an over-time APIM with actor and partner baseline self-expansion potential predicting self-expansion behaviors over the next 21 days. We then used a two-step process to conduct moderated over-time APIMs, with separate models for daily satisfaction and commitment as outcome variables. In the first step, the main effects of actor and partner baseline self-expansion potential and actor and partner daily self-expansion behaviors were entered as simultaneous predictors. In the second step, we added the interaction terms, with actor and partner daily self-expansion behaviors predicting satisfaction and commitment, moderated by actor and partner baseline self-expansion potential. Following the guidelines of Garcia et al. (2015), two separate moderator variables were included, one for the actor and

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[3] Based on reviewer request, we also ran models controlling for the prior day's outcome (rather than baseline scores). Controlling for the previous day's outcome score requires that participants not only completed the diary on a given day but also on the previous day. Given that not all participants completed all diary days, this approach results in data loss (versus controlling for baseline scores which were completed by all participants, thus using all days that the participant completed measures for). Therefore, the results of these additional models are presented in our online supplemental material at https://osf.io/by72n.

one for the partner. Additionally, four two-way interaction terms were added: the interaction

of the actor's self-expansion behaviors and each of the moderators, and the interaction of the

partner's self-expansion behaviors with each of the moderators, which evaluate the four

different moderator effects.[4]

Associations between Self-Expansion Potential and Daily Self-Expansion Behaviors

Consistent with hypotheses, individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential

enacted more self-expansion behaviors over the next 21 days, $\beta(SE) = .15(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.06,$

$.25]$, $p = .001$. Moreover, individuals whose *partners* reported higher self-expansion potential

enacted more daily behavioral self-expansion, $\beta(SE) = .15(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.06, .24]$, $p = .002$.

Associations between Self-Expansion Experiences and Daily Satisfaction and Commitment

As seen in Table 2 and consistent with hypotheses, daily relationship satisfaction and

commitment were higher when individuals reported higher baseline self-expansion potential

or daily behaviors, or when their partners reported higher baseline potential. Effects were

stronger for self-expansion potential than self-expansion behaviors. Contrary to prior

research, partners' self-expansion behaviors negatively predicted actor's daily satisfaction

and did not significantly predict their daily commitment.

We also found preliminary evidence for a buffering effect of self-expansion potential.

One interaction emerged for satisfaction and four interactions emerged for commitment (see

Table 2 for the overall interaction statistics, with simple slope statistics for significant

interactions presented in the following paragraphs). Although the predicted Actor $\times$ Actor

interaction did not emerge for satisfaction, a significant Actor $\times$ Partner interaction emerged.

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[4] Based on reviewer request, we also ran separate models controlling for relationship length (raw score and log-transformed, with separate models for each), age, and gender. There were only two differences in the significance levels of the effects of interest for both Studies 1 and 2 (main effect of partners' self-expansion behaviors on relationship satisfaction in Step 2 of Study 1 and the main effect of partners' self-expansion potential on relationship satisfaction in Step 2 of Study 2). Reviewers also requested models with interactions between the effects of interest and relationship length (raw score and log transformed). Although some of these interactions were significant in Study 1, none of them replicated in Study 2. Details of these analyses are included in our online supplemental material at https://osf.io/by72n.

Individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential whose partner reported more daily behavioral self-expansion were more satisfied day-to-day ($\beta(SE)$ = .13(.02), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.08, .18], $p < .001$). Individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential whose partner reported less daily behavioral self-expansion also reported higher daily satisfaction ($\beta(SE)$ = .19(.02), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.15, .24], $p < .001$). The slope was steeper for those whose partner reported less behavioral self-expansion, suggesting a buffering effect of potential.

A significant Actor $\times$ Actor interaction emerged for commitment. Individuals reporting more daily self-expansion behaviors and higher self-expansion potential were more committed day-to-day ($\beta(SE)$ = .25(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.19, .31], $p < .001$). Individuals reporting fewer daily self-expansion behaviors but higher self-expansion potential also reported higher commitment ($\beta(SE)$= .30(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.24, .36], $p < .001$). The slope was steeper for those engaging in fewer self-expansion behaviors, suggesting a buffering effect of potential.

A significant Actor $\times$ Partner interaction emerged for commitment. Individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential whose partner reported more daily self-expansion behaviors were more committed day-to-day ($\beta(SE)$ = .22(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.15, .28], $p < .001$). Individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential whose partner reported fewer self-expansion behaviors also reported higher commitment ($\beta(SE)$= .33(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.27, .39], $p < .001$). The slope was steeper for those whose partner reported fewer self-expansion behaviors, suggesting a buffering effect of potential.

A significant Partner $\times$ Actor interaction emerged for commitment. Individuals reporting greater daily self-expansion behaviors felt equivalently committed day-to-day regardless of their partner's self-expansion potential, $\beta(SE)$ = -.01(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [-.07, .04], p = .618. However, individuals reporting fewer self-expansion behaviors whose partner perceived higher self-expansion potential reported higher commitment, $\beta(SE)$ = .14(.03), $CI_{95\%}$ = [.09, .19], $p < .001$, providing evidence for a buffering effect of potential.

Finally, a significant Partner × Partner interaction emerged for commitment. Individuals whose partner reported more daily self-expansion behaviors and perceived higher self-expansion potential reported higher commitment, $\beta(SE)= .16(.03)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.11, .22]$, $p < .001$. Individuals whose partner reported fewer daily self-expansion behaviors felt equivalently committed day-to-day regardless of their self-expansion potential, $\beta(SE) = -.03(.03)$, $CI_{95\%} = [-.09, .02]$, $p = .205$. This interaction opposes a buffering effect.

Study 2

In Study 1, we found evidence that perceived future self-expansion potential predicted later daily engagement in self-expansion behaviors, and both potential and behaviors independently predicted relationship satisfaction and commitment over 21 days. We also found preliminary evidence that self-expansion potential protected satisfaction and commitment when daily self-expanding behaviors were low. The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and extend these findings in another dyadic daily experience study. In Study 2, we also measured current self-expansion cognitions and included a follow-up survey two months after the diary to examine lasting effects.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 100 romantic couples (87 men-women dyads, 8 women-women dyads, 2 women-trans men dyads, 2 women-nonbinary/genderqueer dyads, and 1 men-men dyad) recruited from the local community via social media posts, magazine advertisements, and flyers distributed at wedding fairs. This sample size was based on an *a priori* APIMPowerR analysis suggesting that 100 couples would provide 84% power for small-to-medium cross-sectional effects. Participants were 18-64 years of age ($M_{years} = 24.15$, $SD_{years} = 6.61$) and were in relationships lasting 3 months to 35.50 years ($M_{years} = 2.84$, $SD_{years} = 4.41$). The majority of participants identified as heterosexual/straight (80%), followed by

bi/pansexual (12.5%), lesbian (5%), queer (1.5%), gay (0.5%), or "Other" (0.5%). Most

participants identified as White (85.5%), followed by Hispanic (3%), Mixed/multiple ethnic

groups (3%), South Asian (2.5%), Southeast Asian (2.5%), "Other" (2%), and East Asian

(1.5%). Regarding education, 35.5% of the sample had obtained an undergraduate degree or

more. Participants reported household annual income ranging from £0-12,500 (31%),

£12,501-14,549 (6.5%), £14,550-24,944 (12%), £24,945-43,430 (22.5%), £43,431-150,000

(23.5%), and £150,000+ (4%).[5] A large portion of the sample were currently students

(70.5%). Approximately 85.5% of participants were casually or exclusively dating their

current partner, and 14.5% were common-law, engaged, in a civil partnership, or married. A

minority of participants were cohabiting at baseline (38%) and had kids (7%). Ninety-eight

couples were still together at the two-month follow-up.

Measures and Procedure

Data were taken from a larger longitudinal study of romantic couples (see

https://osf.io/ekv6x/). Participants were told they were taking part in a study about

relationship experiences over time. The study involved an initial 2-hour lab session (Phase 1),

a 14-day diary period (Phase 2), and a follow-up survey two months later (Phase 3). For

Phase 1, couples attended a joint lab session, provided informed consent, and then completed

several tasks including a questionnaire battery that contained self-expansion potential,

satisfaction, and commitment measures.

During Phase 2, participants were asked to complete a 15-minute online survey each

day for 14 consecutive days, which included measures of self-expansion behaviors,

satisfaction, and commitment. Unique survey links were emailed to participants at 4:00PM

each day, and partners were asked to complete their survey separately and privately before

11:59PM. Survey links were individual and set to expire at midnight the following day to

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[5] Income bracket options were based on Scottish tax brackets at time of data collection.

ensure that partners could not complete multiple surveys at once. The average number of

daily surveys completed was high (Range = 1-14, $M = 12.96$, $SD = 2.01$).

Phase 3 occurred two months after Phase 2. Participants were asked to complete a

final 45-minute online survey, which included satisfaction and commitment measures. The

Phase 3 survey links were also individual. Participants had up to one week to complete the

follow-up survey. After finishing Phase 3, participants were debriefed and compensated up to

GBP-£50.00 each based on how many parts of the study they completed.

Phase 1 Measures.

Baseline Self-Expansion Potential. Participants completed Lewandowski and

Ackerman's (2006) Self-Expansion Potential Scale. Scores were calculated the same way as

Study 1.

Baseline Satisfaction and Commitment. Participants completed the satisfaction

subscale of the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998), a 5-item measure rated on a 9-point scale (1 =

completely disagree, 9 = *completely agree*) that assesses how content individuals are in their

current relationship (e.g., "Our relationship makes me very happy"). Participants also

completed the commitment subscale of the IMS, a 7-item measure rated on a 9-point scale (1

= *completely disagree*, 9 = *completely agree*) that assesses how dedicated individuals are to

their current relationship (e.g., "I want our relationship to last for a very long time"). Scores

were calculated by averaging responses across the subscale items, with higher scores

indicating greater satisfaction and commitment, respectively.

Phase 2 Measures.

Daily Self-Expansion Behaviors. Participants completed a checklist measure of six

self-expansion behaviors adapted from Harasymchuk & Fehr (2010) and selected the

behaviors they did with their partner that day (e.g., "Did something spontaneous with your

partner"). Scores were calculated the same way as Study 1.

Daily Self-Expansion Cognitions. Participants completed a three-item measure of current self-expansion cognitions adapted from the Self-Expansion Questionnaire (Lewandowski & Aron, 2002). Items assessed how much individuals felt their relationship helped them grow that day (e.g., "Today, I gained more insight, experiences, and/or knowledge from my partner") and were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Scores were calculated by averaging responses across items, with higher scores indicating greater current daily self-expansion perceptions.

Daily Satisfaction and Commitment. Participants completed a one-item measure of daily satisfaction (i.e., "How satisfied are you with your relationship today?") and a one-item measure of commitment (i.e., "How committed are you to your relationship today?") adapted from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (Fletcher et al., 2000). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), with higher scores indicating greater daily satisfaction and commitment, respectively.

Phase 3 Measures.

Follow-Up Satisfaction and Commitment. As in Phase 1, participants reported satisfaction and commitment using the relevant subscales of the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Results

Table 3 displays descriptive statistics, reliability information, and correlations among study variables. Our data analytic strategy was identical to Study 1, with the addition of actor and partner current self-expansion cognitions to all models and two other moderated over-time APIMs with follow-up satisfaction and commitment as outcome variables. We again controlled for prior scores on the relevant outcome variable when predicting relationship satisfaction and commitment. Specifically, we controlled for the most recent measure of the outcome (Phase 1 score when predicting Phase 2 daily outcomes, mean Phase 2 score when predicting Phase 3 follow-up outcomes). Models not including our control variables can be

found in our online supplemental material on the OSF (https://osf.io/8tm4a/). We again

standardized continuous predictors for ease of interpretation and to provide estimates of

effect size.

Associations between Self-Expansion Potential and Daily Self-Expansion

Consistent with Study 1, individuals perceiving higher self-expansion potential at

Phase 1 reported more daily behavioral self-expansion in Phase 2, $\beta(SE) = .11(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} =$

[.01, .21], $p = .026$. Moreover, individuals whose *partners* reported higher self-expansion

potential enacted more daily behavioral self-expansion, $\beta(SE) = .16(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.06, .26]$, p

$= .002$.

We also explored whether self-expansion potential at Phase 1 predicted current self-

expansion cognitions at Phase 2. Results indicated that individuals perceiving higher self-

expansion potential later reported higher perceptions of current self-expansion, $\beta(SE) =$

$.35(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.25, .44]$, $p < .001$. Moreover, individuals whose *partners* reported higher

self-expansion potential perceived higher daily self-expansion, $\beta(SE) = .15(.05)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.05,$

$.25]$, $p = .003$.[6]

Associations between Self-Expansion Experiences and Daily and Follow-up Satisfaction

and Commitment

As seen in Tables 4 (daily outcomes) and 5 (follow-up outcomes), replicating and

extending Study 1, at the daily level actor's self-expansion potential, daily behaviors, and

current cognitions were all uniquely, positively associated with their relationship satisfaction

and commitment. When predicting relationship satisfaction and commitment two months

later, of the actor effects only self-expansion potential was consistently and positively

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[6] We also ran an exploratory mediation model where self-expansion potential at Phase 1 predicted daily self-expansion behaviors and cognitions, which in turn predicted Phase 3 self-expansion potential to understand whether there is a cyclical nature to self-expansion associations. Results revealed no evidence for mediation. Given the exploratory nature of these results and the lack of significant effects we do not discuss these analyses further in this paper, and instead present these results in our online supplemental material at https://osf.io/rtd4b/.

associated with these outcomes. That is, actors' potential predicted higher follow-up

relationship satisfaction and commitment, whereas actor's behavior predicted higher

satisfaction only and current cognitions were unexpectedly negatively associated with future

commitment. For the partner effects, only self-expansion potential was significantly

associated with higher daily relationship satisfaction and commitment and higher satisfaction

two months later.

        Two interactions emerged for daily satisfaction and one interaction emerged for daily

commitment (see Table 4 for the overall interaction statistics, with simple slope statistics for

significant interactions presented in the following paragraphs). A significant Actor × Actor

interaction emerged for daily satisfaction. Individuals perceiving higher self-expansion

potential were equally satisfied day-to-day when they reported more daily behavioral self-

expansion (β(SE) = .08(.05), CI$_{95\%}$ = [-.02, .17], p = .111). However, when daily behavioral

self-expansion was low, perceiving higher self-expansion potential was associated with

higher relationship satisfaction (β(SE) = .17(.05), CI$_{95\%}$ = [.08, .27], p < .001), suggesting a

buffering effect of potential. Although this interaction was not found in Study 1, the direction

of the effect is similar and consistent with hypotheses.

        Additionally, a significant Partner × Actor interaction emerged for daily satisfaction.

When their partner perceived higher self-expansion potential, individuals were equally

satisfied day-to-day when they reported engaging in more behavioral self-expansion (β(SE) =

.01(.05), CI$_{95\%}$ = [-.08, .11], p = .764). However, when they engaged in less behavioral self-

expansion, perceiving higher self-expansion potential was associated with higher relationship

satisfaction (β(SE) = .15(.04), CI$_{95\%}$ = [.06, .23], p = .001), suggesting a buffering effect of

potential. Although this interaction was not found in Study 1, the direction of the effect is

similar.

Finally, replicating Study 1, a significant Partner × Actor interaction emerged for daily commitment. When their partner perceived higher self-expansion potential, individuals were more committed day-to-day when they reported engaging in more behavioral self-expansion ($\beta(SE) = .08(.04)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.003, .16]$, $p = .042$) or less behavioral self-expansion ($\beta(SE) = .20(.04)$, $CI_{95\%} = [.13, .28]$, $p < .001$). The slope was steeper for those engaging in fewer self-expansion behaviors, suggesting a buffering effect of potential.

No interactions emerged predicting follow-up satisfaction or commitment, suggesting that any buffering effects of self-expansion potential may occur solely at the daily level.

General Discussion

Extending the self-expansion and the relationship forecasting literatures, in two dyadic daily experience studies we found that baseline self-expansion potential predicted later engagement in shared self-expanding activities and daily self-expansion cognitions. Across studies, actor and partner self-expansion potential and actor self-expansion behaviors uniquely predicted greater daily satisfaction and commitment, and in Study 2 current actor's self-expansion cognitions also uniquely contributed to these daily outcomes. In Study 2, actor self-expansion potential also predicted greater satisfaction and commitment two months later, while partner self-expansion potential and actor expansion behaviors predicted greater satisfaction only. Lastly, we tested the possibility that self-expansion potential might buffer against lower relationship quality on days with lower behavioral self-expansion. Although we found interactions supporting the general pattern of a buffering effect, the particular interactions that emerged were largely different across the two studies.

Our findings support the relationship forecasting literature, as partners' beliefs about how their relationship might help them grow in the future prospectively predicted their day-to-day engagement in self-expanding activities and day-to-day beliefs about how self-expanding their relationship is. This finding dovetails with studies demonstrating that

expected satisfaction predicts later pro-relationship evaluations and behaviors (e.g., Baker et al., 2017; Lemay, 2016). Also replicating previous research, which has demonstrated various relational benefits associated with engaging in self-expanding activities (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Graham & Harf, 2015; Muise et al., 2019), we found that actor daily self-expansion behaviors were uniquely associated with higher daily relationship satisfaction and commitment, and higher satisfaction two months later. However, there were no consistent partner effects of self-expansion behaviors across studies, suggesting that one's partner's reports of shared novel and exciting activities do not necessarily uniquely contribute to relationship quality. Importantly, our findings extend the self-expansion model by revealing that both actor *and* partner perceptions of self-expansion potential uniquely predicted higher daily satisfaction and commitment. In addition, actor and partner self-expansion potential predicted satisfaction two months later, and actor potential predicted later commitment. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that holding optimistic, growth-oriented beliefs about one's relationship are linked with greater relationship quality and reduced marital distress (e.g., Harasymchuk et al., 2020; Schoebi et al., 2012). Additionally, we extend the findings of the few existing studies on self-expansion potential in romantic relationships (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; Sprecher et al., 2015; Stanton et al., 2020), demonstrating its links to global relationship evaluations for the first time.

Our research is also the first to examine various facets of self-expansion simultaneously. In doing so, we found that individuals' experiences of perceived self-expansion potential, behaviors, and current cognitions each uniquely contribute to their daily relationship satisfaction and commitment. Interestingly, the effects of current self-expansion cognitions were the largest of the three components of self-expansion included in Study 2, while the effects of perceived potential on daily relationship quality were consistently larger

than behavioral self-expansion across both studies. Additionally, perceived potential for self-expansion in the future uniquely contributed to relationship quality two months later. This is consistent with the forecasting literature, where expected satisfaction was a stronger predictor of commitment and breakup than current experiences of satisfaction (e.g., Baker et al., 2017; Lemay, 2016). Our findings indicate that traditional measures of self-expansion based on enacted expansion behaviors should be expanded to include other self-expansion components in future research. We suggest that perceived self-expansion potential in particular should be more readily and commonly incorporated into conceptualizations of self-expansion.

Finally, we investigated whether there is a buffering effect of self-expansion potential, preserving relationship satisfaction and commitment when behavioral expansion is low, and an amplifying effect, further increasing satisfaction and commitment when behavioral expansion is high. We found support for the general pattern of self-expansion potential being especially important on days when behavioral self-expansion was low, but the specific interactions that emerged were largely different in each study, with only one interaction (Partner Potential × Actor Behaviors predicting daily commitment) found in both studies. Thus, we interpret these results as somewhat inconclusive and recommend that future research further investigate the buffering function of self-expansion potential in preserving relationship quality.

There were a few different effects in these studies that were theoretically inconsistent. First, in Study 1 we found a negative association between partners' (but not actors') self-expansion behaviors and relationship satisfaction. This is inconsistent with previous research finding that expansion behaviors are beneficial for relationships (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Graham, 2008; Muise et al., 2019). However, in all other cases (for commitment in Study 1 and for both satisfaction and commitment in Study 2) partners' self-expansion behaviors were not uniquely associated with relationship quality. Thus, we believe this negative effect may

be attributable to Type 1 error. Similarly, we found a negative association between actors'

current self-expansion cognitions and commitment two months later. This could also be a

Type 1 error. One alternative explanation is that perceiving high levels of self-expansion may

be beneficial in the moment (hence the daily effects) but decreases over time as couples shift

out of the honeymoon phase, similar to other relationship "positives" such as passion and

satisfaction (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019; Weber & Baucom, 2022). Decreased self-expansion

could create opportunities for upward comparisons (i.e., comparing one's relationship to how

great it used to be), which previous research has shown to be associated with lower

relationship quality (e.g., Smith LeBeau & Buckingham, 2008). Additionally, partner

behaviors and actor and partner current cognitions did not predict future relationship

satisfaction. Similarly, partner perceived potential, actor and partner behaviors, and partner

current cognitions did not predict future commitment. The lack of long-term partner effects is

not surprising, however, given a large-scale meta-analysis found that partner effects may not

predict relationship quality beyond actor effects alone (Joel et al., 2020). It is also possible,

however, that individual differences in preferences for self-expansion (Hughes et al., 2020)

may lead to differential responses (i.e., responding positively versus negatively) to a partner's

attempts to self-expand, resulting in an overall nonsignificant effect. This possibility could be

examined in future research.

   Our research addresses several limitations of previous studies. For instance, prior

work has largely tested the effects of self-expansion in samples of individuals.

Interdependence theory, however, posits that the experiences of individuals in a relationship

causally affect one another (e.g., Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Thus, the dyadic nature of our

studies provides a more holistic view of self-expansion experiences, adding to the growing

couple-level literature in this domain (e.g., Harasymchuk et al., 2020; Muise et al., 2019).

Moreover, we examined both individuals' and their partners' efforts to engage in behavioral

self-expansion separately, rather than using a global shared activities score, allowing us to test the relative contribution of each partner's self-expansion behaviors to relationship quality.

Although the longitudinal design of our studies is an additional strength of this research, allowing us to conclude that self-expansion experiences precede relationship quality, establishing true causal evidence for these associations is an important direction for future research. Experimental and intervention studies have already demonstrated that couples asked to engage in shared self-expanding (vs. neutral or familiar) activities experience increases in relationship quality (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Graham & Harf, 2015). However, to our knowledge no studies to date have experimentally manipulated self-expansion potential and tested whether changes in potential predict changes in relationship outcomes. Considering our findings, which suggest that self-expansion potential is a stronger predictor of later relationship quality than are self-expansion behaviors, discovering how partners may enhance perceptions of self-expansion potential is a logical next step for future research.

The current research is not without limitations. Our studies included a relatively limited, though broadly worded, list of novel and exciting activities to capture behavioral self-expansion. Future research should consider alternate methods of collecting behavioral self-expansion data, such as using open-ended questions where partners list their self-expansion activities from their perspective (e.g., Harasymchuk et al., 2020), or a variable-interval approach where participants complete measures at random intervals throughout the day and indicate what behaviors they are currently engaging in. The generalizability of our findings is also limited based on sample characteristics. We collected data largely from monogamous, men-women dyads in relatively established relationships, but it is possible that self-expansion behaviors and potential function differently in other types of relationships

(e.g., fledgling, long-distance, or consensually non-monogamous relationships). For example, fledgling relationships may not have a strong basis for determining self-expansion potential, and thus current cognitions and behaviors may be particularly important in this context. In contrast, long-distance relationships may rely more heavily on perceptions of potential for self-expansion when the couple is reunited in the future. These lines of inquiry are readily amenable to future research.

Conclusion

Altogether, this research reveals the unique contributions of different facets of self-expansion and, specifically, the predictive power of potential for relationship satisfaction and commitment both day-to-day and over time. Our findings raise interesting questions about how self-expansion experiences inform each other and have potentially important implications for how couples maintain high-quality relationships. Future studies should replicate these effects across more diverse samples, examine a wider variety of self-expansion behaviors, and investigate how experimentally increasing self-expansion potential influences relationship outcomes immediately and longitudinally.

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Table 1

Study 1: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Information, and Correlations among Study Variables

	Variable	Descriptives and Reliability			Correlations					
		Range	*M(SD)*	α or *R*c	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Phase 1 Satisfaction	2.14-5.57	8.33(1.15)	.86	**.52*****	.71***	.75***	.15***	.72***	.59***
2	Phase 1 Commitment	2.00-9.00	4.77(.67)	.93		**.37*****	.68***	.15***	.61***	.65***
3	Self-Expansion Potential	1.20-7.00	5.99(1.08)	.87			**.26*****	.15***	.60***	.56***
4	Daily Expansion Behaviors	0.00-5.00	1.62(1.49)	N/A				**.47*****	.22***	.19***
5	Daily Satisfaction	1.00-5.00	4.42(0.71)	.80					**.52*****	.76***
6	Daily Commitment	1.00-7.00	6.48(0.95)	.90						**.40*****

Note. N = 115 romantic couples. Higher scores on continuous variables represent greater standing on the variable (e.g., greater self-expansion potential). We present actor correlations, with actor-partner correlations (e.g., actor self-expansion potential and partner self-expansion potential) appearing in boldface along the diagonal.

***p < .001

Table 2

Study 1: Main and Interactive Associations among Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Potential and Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Behaviors Predicting Daily Satisfaction and Commitment

Predictor	Daily Satisfaction		Daily Commitment	
	$\beta(SE)$	$CI_{95\%}$	$\beta(SE)$	$CI_{95\%}$
Step 1				
Intercept	4.43(.03)***	[4.37, 4.49]	6.49(.03)***	[6.42, 6.55]
A Expansion Potential	.17(.02)***	[.13, .21]	.29(.03)***	[.24, .34]
P Expansion Potential	.04(.02)*	[.01, .08]	.07(.02)**	[.02, .12]
A Expansion Behaviors	.07(.01)***	[.05, .08]	.07(.01)***	[.05, .09]
P Expansion Behaviors	-.02(.01)*	[-.03, -.003]	-.01(.01)	[-.03, .01]
Phase 1 Outcome	.32(.02)***	[.29, .35]	.32(.02)***	[.28, .36]
Step 2				
Intercept	4.43(.03)***	[4.38, 4.49]	6.49(.03)***	[6.43, 6.56]
A Expansion Potential	.16(.02)***	[.12, .21]	.27(.03)***	[.22, .33]
P Expansion Potential	.04(.02)*	[.004, .08]	.06(.02)**	[.02, .11]
A Expansion Behaviors	.06(.01)***	[.05, .08]	.08(.01)***	[.05, .10]
P Expansion Behaviors	-.02(.01)*	[-.03, -.001]	-.01(.01)	[-.04, .01]
A Potential × A Behaviors	.004(.01)	[-.01, .02]	-.03(.01)*	[-.06, -.001]
A Potential × P Behaviors	-.03(.01)***	[-.05, -.01]	-.06(.01)***	[-.09, -.03]
P Potential × A Behaviors	-.01(.01)	[-.02, .01]	-.08(.01)***	[-.11, -.05]
P Potential × P Behaviors	.01(.01)	[-.01, .02]	.10(.01)***	[.07, .12]
Phase 1 Outcome	.32(.02)***	[.28, .35]	.32(.02)***	[.28, .36]

Note. $N = 115$ romantic couples. A = actor; P = partner.

$*p < .05, **p \leq .01, ***p \leq .001$

Table 3

Study 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Information, and Correlations among Study Variables

	Variable	Range	M(SD)	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		Descriptives and Reliability			**Correlations**									
1	Phase 1 Satisfaction	1.60-9.00	7.47(1.18)	.87	**.46***	.60***	.56***	.08***	.19***	.44***	.43***	.64***	.46***	.43***
2	Phase 1 Commitment	2.86-9.00	7.76(1.13)	.83		**.48***	.56***	.06***	.13***	.38***	.45***	.56***	.75***	.54***
3	Phase 1 Expansion Potential	2.80-7.00	6.08(0.91)	.86			**.14***	.09***	.29***	.37***	.37***	.44***	.40***	.65***
4	Daily Expansion Behaviors	0.00-6.00	1.69(1.44)	N/A				**.50***	.41***	.24***	.20***	.16***	.11***	.15***
5	Daily Expansion Cognitions	1.00-7.00	4.71(1.30)	.81					**.37***	.39***	.33***	.17***	.10***	.27***
6	Daily Satisfaction	1.00-7.00	6.22(1.20)	N/A						**.46***	.74***	.47***	.33***	.40***
7	Daily Commitment	1.00-7.00	6.52(0.99)	N/A							**.42***	.49***	.39***	.42***
8	Follow-Up Satisfaction	1.00-9.00	7.47(1.27)	.88								**.11***	.63***	.61***
9	Follow-Up Commitment	3.71-9.00	7.85(1.30)	.86									**.43***	.58***
10	Follow-Up Expansion Potential	2.00-7.00	6.03(.92)	.85										**.28***

Note. $N = 100$ romantic couples. Higher scores on continuous variables represent greater standing on the variable (e.g., greater self-expansion potential). We present actor correlations, with actor-partner correlations (e.g., actor self-expansion potential and partner self-expansion potential) appearing in boldface along the diagonal.

***$p < .001$

Table 4

Study 2: Main and Interactive Associations among Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Potential and Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Behaviors Predicting Daily Satisfaction and Commitment

Predictor	Daily Satisfaction		Daily Commitment	
	$\beta(SE)$	$CI_{95\%}$	$\beta(SE)$	$CI_{95\%}$
Step 1				
Intercept	6.22(.06)***	[6.10, 6.33]	6.51(.05)***	[6.41, 6.61]
A Expansion Potential	.13(.04)**	[.05, .22]	.10(.04)*	[.02, .17]
P Expansion Potential	.10(.04)*	[.01, .18]	.16(.04)***	[.09, .23]
A Expansion Behaviors	.08(.02)***	[.04, .12]	.03(.02)*	[.0003, .07]
P Expansion Behaviors	.02(.02)	[-.02, .07]	.02(.02)	[-.02, .05]
A Expansion Cognitions	.33(.02)***	[.28, .37]	.18(.02)***	[.14, .21]
P Expansion Cognitions	.04(.02)	[-.001, .08]	.02(.02)	[-.01, .05]
A Phase 1 Outcome	.34(.03)***	[.28, .40]	.33(.03)***	[.27, .39]
Step 2				
Intercept	6.23(.06)***	[6.12, 6.34]	6.52(.05)***	[6.43, 6.62]
A Expansion Potential	.12(.04)**	[.04, .21]	.09(.04)*	[.01, .16]
P Expansion Potential	.08(.04)*	[.001, .16]	.14(.04)***	[.07, .21]
A Expansion Behaviors	.09(.02)***	[.05, .13]	.04(.02)*	[.01, .07]
P Expansion Behaviors	.02(.02)	[-.02, .06]	.02(.02)	[-.02, .05]
A Expansion Cognitions	.32(.02)***	[.28, .37]	.17(.02)***	[.14, .21]
P Expansion Cognitions	.04(.02)	[-.003, .08]	.02(.02)	[-.01, .05]
A Potential × A Behaviors	-.05(.02)*	[-.09, -.01]	-.02(.02)	[-.05, .01]
A Potential × P Behaviors	-.01(.02)	[-.06, .04]	-.02(.02)	[-.06, .01]
P Potential × A Behaviors	-.07(.02)**	[-.11, -.02]	-.06(.02)***	[-.10, -.02]
P Potential × P Behaviors	.01(.02)	[-.03, .05]	-.01(.02)	[-.05, .02]
A Phase 1 Outcome	.34(.03)***	[.28, .40]	.33(.03)***	[.27, .38]

Note. $N = 100$ romantic couples. A = actor; P = partner.

*p < .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

Table 5

Study 2: Main and Interactive Associations among Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Potential and Actor and Partner Self-Expansion Behaviors Predicting Follow-Up Satisfaction and Commitment

Predictor	Follow-Up Satisfaction		Follow-Up Commitment	
	β(*SE*)	CI$_{95\%}$	β(*SE*)	CI$_{95\%}$
Step 1				
Intercept	7.40(.07)***	[7.26, 7.55]	7.81(.10)***	[7.62, 8.01]
A Expansion Potential	.32(.09)***	[.13, .50]	.39(.10)***	[.19, .59]
P Expansion Potential	.17(.08)*	[.001, .33]	.13(.09)	[-.06, .32]
A Expansion Behaviors	.22(.11)*	[.005, .43]	.19(.11)	[-.02, .41]
P Expansion Behaviors	-.01(.10)	[-.21, .20]	.03(.11)	[-.19, .25]
A Expansion Cognitions	-.22(.11)	[-.44, .005]	-.34(.12)**	[-.58, -.10]
P Expansion Cognitions	-.04(.11)	[-.25, .18]	.02(.11)	[-.20, .24]
A Mean Phase 2 Outcome	.69(.10)***	[.50, .88]	.56(.11)***	[.35, .77]
Step 2				
Intercept	7.38(.08)***	[7.23, 7.53]	7.81(.11)***	[7.60, 8.02]
A Expansion Potential	.37(.10)***	[.18, .55]	.41(.11)***	[.19, .63]
P Expansion Potential	.17(.09)	[-.01, .35]	.15(.10)	[-.06, .36]
A Expansion Behaviors	.23(.11)*	[.01, .45]	.22(.12)	[-.01, .45]
P Expansion Behaviors	-.04(.11)	[-.25, .18]	.06(.12)	[-.18, .29]
A Expansion Cognitions	-.24(.12)*	[-.47, -.004]	-.36(.13)**	[-.61, -.11]
P Expansion Cognitions	-.02(.11)	[-.24, .19]	.02(.12)	[-.22, .25]
A Potential × A Behaviors	-.01(10)	[-.20, .19]	-.06(.12)	[-.29, .17]
A Potential × P Behaviors	.09(.11)	[-.13, .30]	.14(.13)	[-.13, .40]
P Potential × A Behaviors	-.002(.11)	[-.21, .21]	-.02(.13)	[-.27, .24]
P Potential × P Behaviors	.03(.11)	[-.18, .24]	-.15(.13)	[-.40, .11]
Mean Phase 2 Outcome	.68(.10)***	[.49, .88]	.46(.12)***	[.23, .70]

Note. *N* = 100 romantic couples. A = actor; P = partner. Baseline satisfaction was included as a covariate in the follow-up satisfaction model, and baseline commitment was included as a covariate in the follow-up commitment model.

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