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## **BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER FEATURES, SELF-VERIFICATION, AND COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS**

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This study examines whether self-verification strivings are greater for individuals with elevated features of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) than individuals with minimal features of BPD, and whether this is especially true for those in committed romantic relationships. Participants ( $N = 329$ ) completed an online questionnaire that included an assessment of their: (1) relationship status, (2) degree of BPD traits, (3) social self concept, and (4) preference for negative feedback. Results of the study evinced a negative correlation between social self concept and the preference for negative feedback, replicating prior evidence of self-verification strivings. These strivings, however, were greatest for participants with BPD features who were involved in a relationship compared to participants with BPD features who were not in a relationship or to participants without BPD features. These results suggest that committed, exclusive romantic relationships either exacerbate or fail to meet the self-verification needs of individuals with BPD features. The implications of these findings for our understanding of BPD and for future research are discussed.

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is associated with a conflicted or unstable self image and with tumultuous close relationships (Hill et al., 2008). Close personal relationships, such as committed romantic relationships, appear to serve a self-verification function (Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). Integrating these dispa-

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rate literatures, we propose that self-verification needs are particularly strong for individuals with elevated traits of BPD, and that such needs might explain the relationship dysfunction associated with BPD. As a preliminary test of these ideas, the current study examines: (1) whether BPD features are associated with increased self-verification strivings, and (2) whether such strivings might be particularly pronounced for individuals with elevated BPD features who are in committed romantic relationships.

## **BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER**

Borderline personality disorder, often considered to be among the most severe behavioral disorders, is estimated to affect between 1.2 and 6% of the general population (Crowell, Beauchaine, & Linehan, 2009) and perhaps as many as 10.8% of adolescents (Bernstein et al., 1993). This disorder is characterized by affective instability, suicidal and/or self-injurious behavior, marked impulsivity, and frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Individuals diagnosed with BPD also tend to experience identity disturbance, dissociative episodes, and feelings of chronic emptiness. These individuals also tend to fluctuate, within a relatively short time period, between idealizing others and devaluing others.

It has been theorized that the core psychopathology of BPD is evident in the domain of interpersonal functioning (e.g., Agrawal, Gunderson, Holmes, & Lyons-Ruth, 2004; Gunderson, 1996). Consistent with this proposal, BPD is associated with greater reactivity to negative interpersonal events (Russell, Moskowitz, Zuroff, Sookman, & Paris, 2007; Zeigler-Hill & Abraham, 2006) and especially negative reactions to signs of rejection (Russell, Moskowitz, & Paris, 2010). The connection between BPD and interpersonal difficulties extends into the domain of close relationships. For example, Hill et al. (2008) found that BPD was the only disorder (including those from Axis I and Axis II) that specifically predicted dysfunction in romantic relationships (cf. Daley, Burge, & Hammen, 2000). Furthermore, Selby, Braithwaite, Joiner, and Fincham (2008) reported that romantic relationship dysfunction was predicted by the presence of BPD features, even after accounting for a diagnosis of major depressive disorder in the last year.

## SELF-VERIFICATION THEORY

Self-verification theory provides a framework that has implications for the link between self-image and close relationships (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007), and thus may have applications to BPD. Self-verification theory posits that to maintain feelings of predictability and control, individuals are internally driven to preserve self-views. According to self-verification theory, this internally-generated motivation causes people to preferentially seek out, recall, and believe self-relevant information that is consistent with their self-views (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990). Such self-confirming feedback tells people that their views of self are reliable and accurate, which fosters a sense of stability. In comparison, disconfirming feedback threatens self-perceptions and evokes feelings of instability. Importantly, self-verification theory asserts that a person will seek feedback that confirms their self-view and avoid or discount feedback that contradicts their self-view, regardless of whether their self-view is negative or positive.

One way to detect self-verification strivings is to administer a measure of self-concept along with the Feedback Seeking Questionnaire (FSQ; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). The FSQ asks respondents to imagine that they have an opportunity to have someone who is close to them answer questions about them, and then prompts the respondent to select which questions they would most like to have addressed. Respondents can choose feedback about positive qualities (e.g., what about them is likable) or negative qualities (e.g., what about them is not likable). The proportion of negative qualities selected constitutes the Preference for Negative Feedback (PNF) index, and can be interpreted as reflecting the strength of an individual's motivation to receive self-relevant negative feedback.

The presence of a negative correlation between PNF and self-esteem has been interpreted as reflecting self-verification strivings. Indeed, in several studies PNF has evinced modest negative correlations with measures of the self-concept, such as self-esteem (Pettit & Joiner, 2001; Swann et al., 1992; Valentiner, Skowronski, McGrath, Smith, & Renner, 2011). These results suggest that, consistent with the self-verification strivings hypothesis, individuals who view the self negatively are motivated to obtain feedback about negative

qualities, and those with positive self-views are motivated to obtain feedback about positive qualities.

Some degree of caution is warranted when interpreting results from the PNF measure. For example, individuals might be motivated to obtain feedback about their negative qualities for reasons other than to confirm their negative self-views (see Gregg, Hepper, & Sedikides, 2011). For example, a high PNF score might reflect the action of the self-improvement motive. However, the action of the self-improvement motive does not necessarily imply a negative relation between the strength of the self-improvement motive and self-esteem, as is suggested by the *self-verification strivings hypothesis*. Indeed, some data suggest that goals related to self-improvement and growth are positively associated with various indices that reflect views of the self, including self-esteem (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009; Sedikides, Luke, & Hepper, 2014; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2008). Thus, the presence of a negative correlation between the PNF and a measure of self-concept imply the action of the self-verification motives, and not other self motives.

## SELF-VERIFYING FUNCTION OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The self-verification motive seems to be important in the context of close relationships and appears to increase in importance as romantic relationships persist past three months (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Indeed, these romantic relationships seem to attenuate the need for self-verification (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006), a result that suggests that such relationships satisfy self-verification needs.

Moreover, satisfying this motive may be functional to a close relationship. For example, results of a study by Katz and Joiner (2002) indicated that participants who perceived their dating partners to view them as they viewed themselves were most likely to report high levels of intimacy and commitment (but for a different result, see Swann et al., 1994). Similarly, self-verifying effects on relationship quality among married couples have been well-documented (e.g., Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992): People are most committed to, intimate with, and satisfied with spouses who view them in a manner that is congru-

ent with their self-views. Swann et al. (1994) postulated that self-verification occurs among married couples because marriage serves as an environment in which people are likely to be certain that their partners will remain in the relationship. As a result, marriage partners may prefer that their spouses recognize both their strengths and weaknesses. The authors asserted that this recognition is likely to produce perceived predictability and perceived manageability, both of which are among the main motivations underlying self-verification strivings.

### LINKING SELF-VERIFICATION TO BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

The instability of the self and of close relationships, central to many models of BPD (e.g., Bender & Skodol, 2007), suggests that individuals with BPD are poorly buttressed against the epistemological insecurity that is believed to motivate construction of the self (Swann, 1990; see also Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). Thus, self-verification processes may have special urgency for individuals with BPD. Accordingly, we propose the *BPD self-verification strivings hypothesis*: Individuals with elevated BPD features are hypothesized to be especially motivated to try and verify their unstable self images. Therefore, individuals with elevated BPD features should be especially likely to evince strong self-verification strivings, and this might be revealed by a negative correlation between the PNF and a measure of self-concept.

We further hypothesize that the self-verification function of relationships for individuals with elevated BPD features may be complicated by an unstable self concept. Consistent with the view that close romantic relationships serve a self-verification function and thereby lead to a de-intensification of self-verification strivings, Hiraoka and Valentiner (2009) observed that evidence of self-verification strivings was not present among individuals without significant BPD features who reported being in exclusive and committed romantic relationships. That is, a negative association between PNF and self-esteem indices was not observed for individuals with minimal BPD traits in committed romantic relationships. Presumably, the self-verifying needs of these individuals were met within their

romantic relationships. In contrast, these researchers also observed that self-verification strivings were present for individuals with elevated BPD features who were in a committed romantic relationship. Hiraoka and Valentiner (2009) offered the *self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis* to explain this latter finding, speculating that the tumultuous romantic relationships associated with BPD might be due to a failure of committed relationships to sufficiently fulfill the self-verification needs of individuals with BPD.

However, there are several reasons to be skeptical about the findings reported by Hiraoka and Valentiner (2009). First, the data were not collected for the purpose of testing the self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis, raising the possibility of a Type I error. Second, the sample did not include comparisons to individuals not in romantic relationships. Thus, there was a direct examination of self-verification strivings in relationship-involved individuals as a function of BPD status, but no direct comparisons of the self-verification strivings as a function of both BPD status and relationship involvement. The current study addressed these two issues.

To summarize, the study reported here explored three hypotheses. First, consistent with past research on self-verification theory (e.g., Valentiner et al., 2011; see Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), we hypothesized that self-concept would be negatively associated with tendency to seek negative feedback (i.e., the self-verification strivings hypothesis). Second, based on the findings of Hiraoka and Valentiner (2009), and consistent with the view that BPD is characterized by difficulties maintaining a stable sense of self, we hypothesized that individuals with elevated BPD features would evince stronger self verification strivings than individuals without BPD features (i.e., the BPD self-verification strivings hypothesis). Third, based on the findings of Hiraoka & Valentiner (2009) and the idea that relationships mitigate self-verification strivings (Campbell et al., 2006) for individuals without BPD features, but not for individuals with elevated traits of BPD, we hypothesized that self-verification strivings would be especially apparent for individuals with BPD features who were involved in a committed romantic relationship (i.e., self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis).

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Participants ( $N = 329$ ) were recruited from Introductory Psychology courses at a large Midwestern university. Partial course credit was received as compensation for participation. Fifty-two percent of the sample was female. Most (73%) individuals in the sample self-identified as white/Caucasian (13% black/African-American, 9% Latino/a, 2% Asian, and 2% other race or ethnicity). The average age of participants was 19.2 years ( $SD = 1.82$ ).

Students who signed up for the study using the course's online recruitment system received an email message that included a web link and a unique username and password. Informed consent and questionnaires were completed online. Questionnaires were presented in a fixed order.

Participants were placed into one of four groups based on whether they reported being involved in an exclusive romantic relationship and whether they endorsed the presence of elevated BPD features. The process produced four groups: participants with minimal BPD features not in a committed relationship ( $n = 176$ ); participants with minimal BPD features in a committed relationship ( $n = 118$ ); participants with elevated BPD features not in a committed relationship ( $n = 22$ ); and participants with elevated BPD features in a committed relationship ( $n = 13$ ).

Classification of relationship status followed Katz and Beach (1997) and Katz and Joiner (2002). Committed romantic relationships were defined as those that had a duration of three months or greater; 39.8% ( $n = 131$ ) of participants were classified as being in a committed romantic relationship (coded as 1). Ninety-eight percent of participants who were involved in a committed romantic relationship reported that their partner was of the opposite-sex. The remainder of the sample (60.2%,  $n = 198$ ) were classified as not in a committed romantic relationship (coded as 0). For participants that reported being in a romantic relationship for at least three months, the length of romantic involvement ranged from 3 to 60 months ( $M = 17.8$  months,  $SD = 12.75$ ).

The BPD classification was determined from the cut-off score (i.e., seven) on the McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (Zanarini et al., 2003). This cut-off sorts participants into one of two BPD groups. The majority (89.4%,  $n = 294$ ) were

classified as having minimal BPD features (coded as 0); the remainder (10.6%,  $n = 35$ ) were classified as having elevated BPD features (coded as 1).

## MEASURES

*Demographics.* A demographic questionnaire assessed respondents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, relationship status, and length of time involved in the present committed romantic relationship.

*Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).* The McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (Zanarini et al., 2003) was used to determine the presence of BPD features. In the present study, this measure demonstrated adequate internal consistency (KR-20 = .76), which is similar to values reported in previous studies (e.g., Gardner & Qualter, 2009; Zanarini et al., 2003).

*Preference for Negative Feedback (PNF).* PNF was assessed using a version of the Feedback Seeking Questionnaire designed by Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, and Pelham (1992), as modified by Valentiner et al. (2011). The questionnaire includes three domains (i.e., affection, friendship, intimacy). Respondents are asked to choose the two out of six questions from each domain that they would like their partner to answer about the respondent. Half of the questions are positively framed, and half are negatively framed. A positively framed affection item is: "What about [your name here] makes you think it is easy to have warm feelings for him or her?" A negatively framed affection item is: "What about [your name here] makes you think it is not easy to have warm feelings for him or her?" As demonstrated by Valentiner et al. (2011), PNF scores are positively correlated with scores from the original version developed by Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham (1992;  $r = .82$ ) and negatively correlated with general self-esteem ( $r = -.21$ ) and social self-esteem ( $r = -.24$ ).

For the present study, participants were asked to rank each of the six items within a single domain (i.e., social), with a ranking of 1 indicating that the participant would most like their partner to answer that item. The feedback-seeking score was determined by adding up the number of negatively-framed items that were ranked as either 1 or 2. This scoring method for the PNF demonstrated adequate internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .81. This value is consistent with that the value reported by Valentiner et al. (2011).

*Social Self-Concept.* Participants' self-perceptions were assessed using the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (SSC; Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). On a 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very much characteristics of me) scale respondents were asked to indicate their responses to 16 different questions related to their level of social competence. An example item is: "I feel secure in social situations." In the present study, this measure demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .90. This value is similar to internal consistency values reported in previous studies (e.g., De La Ronde & Swann, 1998).

## RESULTS

Preliminary analyses indicated there were no significant group differences in age, gender, or race/ethnicity. Hence, these were ignored in subsequent analyses.

Given the directional nature of the hypotheses, one-tailed tests were used. Alpha was set to .05.

*Bivariate Correlations.* Results of correlation analyses yielded several significant results: BPD classification was significantly and negatively related to the SSC score,  $r(329) = -.25, p < .01$ ; relationship status was significantly and positively related to the SSC score,  $r(329) = .17, p < .01$ , and those with high SSC scores evinced low PNF scores,  $r(329) = -.13, p < .05$ . In comparison, the BPD classification was not significantly correlated with relationship status,  $r(329) = -.02, ns$ , nor was it correlated with PNF scores,  $r(329) = .07, ns$ . Moreover, relationship status was not correlated with PNF scores,  $r(329) = -.06, ns$ .

*Self-Verification Strivings Hypothesis.* We hypothesized that the social self-concept would be negatively associated with the tendency to seek negative feedback (i.e., the self-verification strivings hypothesis). A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine this hypothesis. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1. The criterion variable in this analysis was the PNF score variable. On Step 1 of the analysis, SSC scores (standardized) were entered as a predictor, and they accounted for significant variance in PNF scores. This finding provides support for the self-verification strivings hypothesis.

TABLE 1. Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Testing Study Hypotheses

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3		Step 4		Step 5				
	$\beta$	SEB	$\beta$	SEB	$\beta$	SEB	$\beta$	SEB	$\beta$	SEB			
<b>Step 1 (self-verification strivings hypothesis)</b>													
Social Self Concept	-.20	.09	-.13*	.09	-.12*	.09	-.08	.12	-.07	.12	-.15	.12	-.10
<b>Step 2 (control variables)</b>													
BPD			.22	.29	.04	-.12	.34	-.32	.38	-.06	-.16	.39	-.03
<b>Step 3 (BPD self-verification strivings hypothesis)</b>													
Social Self Concept $\times$ BPD					-.54	.29	-.13*	-.50	.30	-.12*	-.18	.35	-.05
<b>Step 4 (control variables)</b>													
Relationship Status							-.24	.19	-.08	-.26	.19	-.08	
Social Self Concept $\times$ Relationship Status							.04	.19	.02	.14	.20		
<b>Step 5 (self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis)</b>													
Social Self Concept $\times$ BPD $\times$ Relationship Status							.65	.62	.08	-.30	.83		
$R^2$	.02		.00		.01		.01		.01		1.16	.67	-.19*
F for change in $R^2$	5.36*		0.61		3.35*		0.69		3.06*				

Note.  $N = 329$ . BPD = Borderline Personality Disorder; coded as 0 = absent; 1 = present. Relationship Status coded as 0 = no; 1 = yes. \*one-tailed  $p < .05$ .

*BPD Self-Verification Hypothesis.* We hypothesized that participants with elevated BPD features would evince stronger self-verification strivings than participants with minimal BPD features (i.e., the BPD self-verification strivings hypothesis). The critical test of the self-verification strivings hypothesis comes from examination of the SSC  $\times$  BPD interaction. As a necessary preliminary step, prior to testing this interaction BPD was entered as a predictor of PNF scores on Step 2 of the regression analysis. The results showed that the BPD classification did not account for significant additional variance in PNF scores over and above the variance accounted for by the SSC scores.

The SSC  $\times$  BPD interaction was entered on Step 3 of the analysis. The interaction accounted for significant additional variance in PNF scores over and above that accounted for by the SSC main effect and the BPD main effect. This finding is consistent with the BPD self-verification hypothesis. Further support for the hypothesis comes from the results of simple slope analyses. These revealed that the correlation between SSC scores and PNF scores was not significant for participants without BPD,  $r(294) = -.08$ , *ns*, but was significant for participants with BPD,  $r(35) = -.38$ ,  $p < .05$ .

*Self-Verification in BPD Relationships Hypothesis.* We hypothesized that self-verification strivings would be especially apparent for participants with elevated BPD features who were involved in a committed romantic relationship (i.e., the self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis). As a preliminary step toward testing this idea, on Step 4 of the regression analysis, three control variables (relationship status, the SSC  $\times$  Relationship status interaction, and the BPD  $\times$  Relationship status interaction) were entered as predictors and were found to not account for significant variance in PNF scores. The critical test of the self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis comes from Step 5 of the regression, in which the SSC  $\times$  BPD  $\times$  Relationship Status interaction was entered into the analysis. Consistent with the self-verification in BPD relationships hypothesis, the interaction accounted for significant additional variance in PNF scores.

The pattern of the data for this significant three-way interaction is illustrated in Figure 1, which graphs the relation between PNF and SSC scores for each of the four groups in this study. These data show that self-verification strivings (i.e., a negative slope in the figure) are particularly strong for participants with elevated BPD features in a

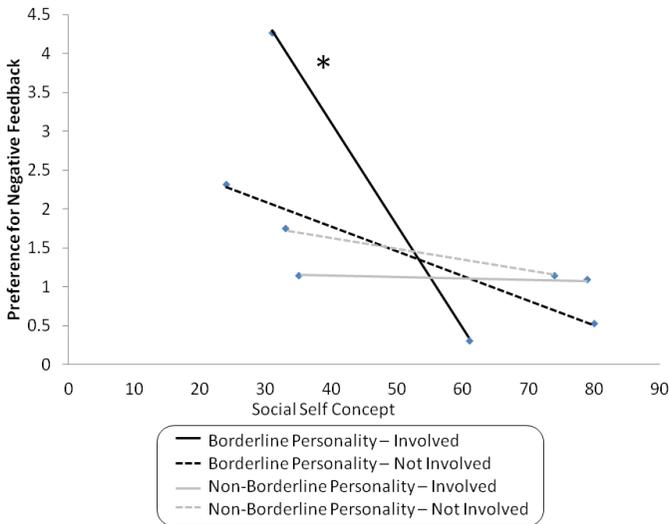


FIGURE 1. Preference for Negative Feedback score as a function of the observed range of social self concept scores, presented separately those with versus without Borderline Personality Disorder involved versus not involved in a Committed Relationship.

committed relationship, but not for participants in the other three groups. Simple slope analyses revealed a significant correlation between social self concept scores and PNF scores for participants with elevated BPD features in a committed relationship,  $r(12) = -.69$ ,  $p < .05$ , but not for participants with elevated BPD features who were not in a committed relationship,  $r(22) = -.21$ ,  $ns$ , participants with minimal BPD features in a committed relationship,  $r(118) = -.01$ ,  $ns$ , or participants with minimal BPD features not in a committed relationship,  $r(176) = -.10$ ,  $ns$ .

## DISCUSSION

This study provided a test of several hypotheses related to self-verification theory, borderline personality disorder, and committed romantic relationships. Replicating prior research examining self-verification theory (Pettit & Joiner, 2001; Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992; Valentiner et al., 2011), this study found evidence that the preference for negative feedback was negatively associated with social self concept. Moreover, our data show that this association was moderated by the presence of

elevated BPD features, with evidence of stronger self-verification strivings among those with BPD features than among those without significant features of BPD.

This study also examined the extent to which participation in committed romantic relationships was related to self-verification strivings. We did not find overall evidence that committed romantic relationships serve a self-verification function. However, the association between BPD features and self-verification strivings appeared to be significantly stronger for participants who reported being in a committed romantic relationship than for those who did not. In this regard, this study is the first to demonstrate that self-verification theory might be useful for understanding the relationship dysfunctions often associated with BPD. We also note that other researchers have speculated about the applicability of self-verification theory to other aspects of BPD (e.g., nonsuicidal self-injury; Chapman, Gratz, & Brown, 2006).

However, contrary to our expectations, this study failed to find significant evidence that self-verification strivings were smaller for individuals without BPD features who are in a relationship than for individuals without BPD features who were not in a relationship. Results obtained were in the hypothesized direction, but small in magnitude. Thus, this null finding might be due in part to low power associated with a small sample size. Moreover, although this study found evidence that self-verification strivings are stronger for individuals with elevated features of BPD in committed relationships than for other individuals, the absence of such an effect for individuals without BPD features creates an interpretational ambiguity: It is not clear if the data for participants with elevated BPD features represents a failure of relationships to mitigate self-verification strivings, or if being in a relationship intensifies the self-verification strivings of individuals with BPD features. In addition, this study did not examine whether the self-verification that takes place in the relationships of individuals without BPD features also takes place in the relationships of individuals with BPD. Such an examination might clarify the current study's findings, and also would be helpful in developing a better understanding of the relationship dysfunction associated with BPD.

One limitation of this study is that it used a small sample. The use of one-tailed significance tests provided a partial solution to the problem of low power. Indeed, the study's power was sufficient to detect a difference in self-verification strivings between participants

with features of BPD and those without, a difference that appeared to be large in both this study and a prior study (Hiraoka & Valentin, 2009). However, it should be noted that while the use of such a strategy is perfectly justifiable both logically and statistically, it also increased the probability that a Type I error could have emerged in our study. Moreover, the low power left several important issues unresolved. For example, this study failed to find evidence of the mitigation of self-verification strivings among non-BPD individuals who were involved in committed romantic relationships. This study also failed to find evidence of self-verification strivings for individuals (both with BPD features and without BPD features) who were not involved in committed romantic relationships.

A second important limitation of this study was that it employed a convenience sample of college students. Romantic relationships during this developmental period are likely to be different from romantic relationships during other periods. Nonetheless, it is not clear whether results obtained in our study will generalize to other populations, particularly clinical BPD populations. The strategy of using an established cut-off partially addresses this concern. In this regard, we note that the prevalence of individuals with elevated BPD features in this study (i.e., 10.6%) is comparable to rates found in epidemiological studies with older adolescents (Bernstein et al., 1993). Indeed, although the use of a self-report survey for classifying participants as having or not having clinically elevated levels of BPD might raise some concerns, the method used in this study has been shown to have excellent sensitivity and specificity, particularly with adolescents and young adults (Zanarini et al., 2003). Still, the use of this dichotomous classification approach may itself raise some concerns. The conceptualization of BPD as categorical versus dimensional is beyond the scope of this study. However, we can acknowledge the existence of arguments on both sides of this issue. For example, one might question the dichotomization approach given there is increasing evidence that borderline personality disorder is dimensional (i.e., nontaxonic) in nature (Arntz et al., 2009). Others have argued that dichotomization may be appropriate when a dimension contains a clinically meaningful cut-off (DeCoster, Iselin, & Gallucci, 2009).

Another important limitation of this study was its reliance on the correlation between the PNF and a measure of the self-concept to assess self-verification strivings. PNF scores can be influenced by other processes (e.g., self-improvement motives), and hence, may not

provide an optimal means to assess the action of the self-verification motive. It is true that the negative correlation between PNF scores and the measure of the social self concept can potentially point to the action of the self-verification motive. If the self-improvement motive were influencing PNF scores, one would expect a positive relation between social self concept scores and the PNF score, not a negative relation. Still, convergent validity is always a worthy goal, so future research using other methods of assessing the extent to which PNF scores reflect the action of the self-verification motive is desirable.

Despite these concerns, the results of this study suggest that self-verification processes are a promising avenue that can be used to understand BPD and the relationship dysfunction associated with this disorder. If BPD involves a high degree of epistemological insecurity, relationships might not address, or might only partially address, the self-verification needs associated with BPD. Alternatively, committed romantic relationships might intensify the self-verification needs for individuals with BPD. This second possibility is consistent with the congruence between characterization of early environmental experiences associated with BPD as invalidating (Linehan, 1993) and the examination of committed relationships in the current study. Future research that examines these and other hypotheses might help guide the development of a more comprehensive application of self-verification theory to the problem of BPD relationship dysfunction.

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