CURRENT RESEARCH IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

THE CONTENT AND FORMATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' RELATIONAL STANDARDS

Heidi A. Wayment
Northern Arizona University

ABSTRACT

College students (60 female, 33 male) were asked to describe their personal standards for romantic relationships and what types of information were important for their creation. Respondents' open-ended responses revealed an average of over six standards, the content of which closely matched a comprehensive framework of relationship standards (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Open-ended descriptions revealed that information about past relationships figured most prominently in creating relational standards, but social comparison information was also important. Attachment style, parental divorce, and past relationship abuse moderated the perceived importance of idealized forms of relationship information. Implications of these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Relational standards, or the beliefs people hold about their expectations for romantic relationships, are central to social exchange and equity theories (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), relationship quality (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959), relationship evaluation (Wayment & Campbell, 2000), and mental and physical health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). The content of individuals' most important relationship standards may influence the relationship activities and behaviors that are salient and influence other important relationship cognitions, such as attributions about partners' behaviors (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Relationship evaluation is also related to the extent to which relationship standards are being met or exceeded (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Unmet standards and unrealistic relationship standards appear to lie at the heart of a great deal of relationship troubles and dissatisfaction (Baucom et al., 1996). Given the importance of relationship standards to many important outcomes along with a growing interest among social psychologists about how individuals create these standards, surprisingly little research exists documenting the kinds of information people use to form their relationship standards.

Information Used To Create Relational Standards

Taylor and colleagues (Taylor et al., 1995; Wayment & Taylor, 1995) summarized the self-evaluation literature and described ten basic information types that may also be used to create relational standards (Wayment & Campbell, 2000). This existing framework seems well suited to undertake one of the first investigations of information use in forming relational standards. Objective information may include thinking about religious prescriptions or advice, including books and advice from relationship experts, or feedback. Previous relationship experiences, both one's own and those of others, have been argued to figure prominently into one's relational standards (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). For example, individuals may form expectations about romantic relationships from what they have witnessed from either the positive or negative aspects of their parent's relationship or the relationships of extended family or friends (e.g., social comparison information; Festinger, 1954). Or, having witnessed good communication patterns between one's parents (e.g., a form of upward social comparison information) may lead an individual to expect the same in their own relationship. Conversely, perhaps watching one's parents' marriage disintegrate due to infidelity (e.g., a form of downward social comparison information) may influence one to value trust and fidelity in their romantic relationships. Relationship standards may also be influenced from what individuals have learned from past relationships (e.g., temporal comparison information; Albert, 1977). For example, individuals who have experienced very satisfying relationships in the past will tend to expect and feel that they deserve similarly positive experiences in their current relationships. Finally, individuals may incorporate their visions of hoped-for and feared scenarios into their relational standards (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Rusbult, Onizuka, & Lipkus (1993) found college students' ideas of ideal romantic involvement were derived from social norms and media images, which are a form of idealized information.

Moderators of Information Use

Do individuals differ in their preferences for information they use to create relational standards? Such differences may help explain why some individuals develop more positive and healthy relationship models while others form more dysfunctional models (Feeney, 2004). In this study I will examine whether individual difference factors associated with negative relationship expectancies (insecure forms of attachment, parental divorce, and relationship abuse history) are differentially related to the perceived importance of information used to create relational standards. Attachment theorists argue that attachment styles (secure, anxious, and two types of avoidant attachment styles) leads to expectations for the self and others. These expectations may affect the type of information used to create relational standards. For example, an individual with an insecure attachment style may have a history of unsuccessful relationships and may incorporate more negative forms of objective, temporal, and social comparison information. On the other hand, given how insecurely attached individuals vacillate between hopefulness and hopelessness with respect to relationships, perhaps their standards are infused with extremely unrealistic information. Holmberg and Romaine (2005) recently reported that avoidant attachment is related to specific negative relational beliefs and expectations that could lead to self-fulfilling behaviors. Other kinds of personal experiences may also influence how objective, temporal and social information are molded into personal standards. For example, the literature on parental divorce suggests that divorce may have an impact on adolescents' beliefs about love and relationships (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998). A negative divorce experience may increase exposure to negative forms of relationship information, making it more important in the creation of relational standards. Research on abuse suggests that early abuse predicts the formation of disrupted cognitions, making it more likely victims will be accepting of future relationship violence and other negative relationship dynamics (Ponce, William, & Allen, 2004).

THE PRESENT STUDY

Given the high frequency with which individuals report relying on personal standards for evaluating relationships, and the lack of empirical research documenting how such standards are formed, this study examines two questions that have received little attention in the literature: 1) What kinds of information do college students use to form relational standards? and 2) Do attachment style, parental divorce, and previous relationship abuse moderate preferences for information used to create relational standards? I expected temporal comparison information to be most used and most important source of information in creating relational standards. In a previous investigation I found that objective and social comparison information were perceived as unhelpful for evaluating romantic relationships (Wayment & Campbell, 2000). I theorized at that time that perhaps social comparison information and objective information were not frequently used in the day-to-day assessment of relationships because they had figured prominently in the development of personal standards for relationships. Thus, the second prediction is that individuals will also report using objective and social comparison information in the creation of their standards. I also expect that individuals with insecure forms of attachment, those with a negative parental divorce experience, and those who have experienced abusive relationships may use different types of information for forming their relational standards. Given the lack of research in this area, I restricted my expectations and expected that such individuals would report using more negative forms of information (i.e., downward social comparison information, negative information from past relationships) more than those without these experiences.

METHOD

Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of male (n = 33, 35%) and female (n = 60, 65%) college students who averaged 21.5 years of age (std = 6.4). The respondents were primarily Caucasian (n = 68, 78%), followed by those who identified themselves as Hispanic (n = 8, 9%), African American (n = 3, 3%), Native American (n = 3, 3%), Asian (n = 2, 2%), and Other (n = 2, 2%). Over 60% of the sample reported being currently in a dating relationship (n = 58, 62%), all heterosexual relationships. The average length of these relationships was 18 months (STD = 22.1). Of those describing a previous relationship (n = 35), the average length of the relationship had been 28.5 months (STD = 40.4).

Procedure and Measures

Ninety-three undergraduate students from the Department of Psychology subject pool participated in a study entitled "Thinking about Romantic Relationships" for course credit. Prior to participating in the study participants read and signed an informed consent form that described that the study was interested in how students construct their personal standards for a romantic relationship. Participants were asked "Are you currently in a romantic or dating relationship?" (Yes/No). If the answer was yes, they were asked the following questions, "What is the sex of your partner?" "How long have you been in this relationship" (years, months), and "What is the ethnic background of your partner?" If respondents indicated that they were not currently in a romantic relationship, they skipped ahead in the questionnaire and were asked to check a box if they "had never been in a romantic relationship" and skip ahead in the questionnaire. Otherwise, participants read "If you have been in a previous relationship, please answer the following:" "What is the sex of your most recent previous partner?" "How long ago did your most recent previous relationship end? (years, months), "How long did that relationship last?" (years, months), and "Who ended the relationship?" (could check box for "self," "partner," or "mutual decision").

Types of Relational Standards

Regardless of one's relationship status, participants then read the following paragraph:

Many people say that when deciding how happy they are in their romantic relationships, they compare the relationship to a "personal standard." This standard can be thought of as the set of requirements you have for what constitutes a worthwhile relationship.

Respondents then responded to the question "Please take a few moments to think about what your 'personal standards' are for a personal relationship. Next, please describe these standards." Respondents' descriptions of relationship standards were transcribed, categorized, and compared to a category scheme of relationship standards created by Vangelisti and Daly (1997) in their study of the effect of relationship standards on relationship satisfaction. This typology was selected because it was consistent with existing literature on relationship standards and appeared to be the most comprehensive in nature. This typology was based on an extensive review of the literature on relational quality and satisfaction and the identification of standards typically used to evaluate relationships, on nearly one hundred interviews asking adults of various ages to describe their standards, and from pilot data and debriefing interviews. On the basis of this research Vangelisti and Daly (1997) described 30 specific relational standards. Examples of these standards include freedom (respecting each other's rights), fidelity (being emotionally and physically faithful), respect (respecting each other), network integration (being accepted in each other's friends and relative's circle), and enjoyment (having fun). Based on a factor analysis of the importance ratings of the 30 specific standards, Vangelisti and Daly (1997) further categorized these 30 standards into seven higher-order relational standards. These higher-order factors (relational identity, integration, affective accessibility, trust, future orientation, role fulfillment, and flexibility) cover a wide range of partner and relationship qualities that individuals consider as important for a successful romantic relationship. Two coders familiarized themselves with the 30 standards as described by Vangelisti & Daly (1997), transcribed each respondents' response, and then assigned one or more of the Vangelisti & Daly categories to the response (see Table B in Appendix for standard frequencies). If a response did not fit one of the standard categories, they were listed separately for later categorization.   To illustrate this process, consider one male participant's description of his relational standards:

" … willing and able to come to agreement on things, possibly with compromises that are acceptable to both people. Support, emotional and physical, be able to listen to each other, and help each other when difficulty arises. A monogamous relationship where both pledge to be romantically involved with only each other. Mainly: intelligent, good sense of humor, cares about oneself."

This individual's relational standard was coded as representing eight Vangelisti & Daly standards. The phrase "willing and able to come to agreement on things, possibly with compromises acceptable to both people" was coded as synchrony (two people mesh on values and issues), adaptability (both people willing to adapt to changing needs, demands and desires of other), and other-directedness (each person attempts to please and satisfy the other). The phrase "Support, emotional and physical. Be able to listen to each other and help each other when difficulty arises" was coded as physical intimacy (will be physically intimate with each other), openness (willingness to self-disclose feelings and emotions), and coping (able to cope with problems, arguments, fights without sacrificing the relationship). The phrase "A monogamous relationship where both pledge to be romantically involved with only each other" was coded as fidelity (emotionally and physically faithful to one another), and emotional attachment (emotionally tied to each other, feel love for the other).   Because no category for the importance of personal characteristics or qualities (e.g., intelligence, good sense of humor, and cares for oneself) existed in Vangelisti & Daly (1997), an extra category, personal qualities, was created. Coders compared their coding assignments after completing 10 questionnaires and had good agreement. Inter-rater reliability was again computed after coding all of the questionnaires (Kappa = .81). Differences in coding were noted and discussed by two coders and me for resolution.

Information Used in Relational Standards

Written responses to the open-ended question ("To the best of your ability, tell us how you developed your personal standards for relationships.") were transcribed and coded for nine information types: objective information, feedback, temporal information (positive and negative), future selves information (feared and hoped for), and three types of social comparison information: upward, lateral, and downward. Two additional categories of information were added: information from the current relationship and information from past relationships in general (not specified as to whether information was positive or negative). Open-ended responses were coded by two independent raters (Kappa = .85). For example:

"I think my personal standards came from my parents. They always told me the way I should be treated. Once into high school I started looking at my friends' relationships and taking bits and pieces from them. After going through some relationships you can really decide what you are looking for."

This response was coded as containing feedback ("[parents] told me the way I should be treated)," lateral social comparison information ("looking at my friends"), and past relationships ("going through some relationships").

Importance of Information Used in Relational Standards

Respondents were asked to read and rate twelve information types on how important they were for helping them to form their personal standards for romantic relationships (1 = not at all important; 5 = extremely important). Items from this scale are listed in the Appendix (Table A).

Attachment Style

The 40-item Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) assessed five dimensions that reflect two underlying attachment dimensions anxiety (need for approval, preoccupation with relationships, and (low) confidence) and avoidance (discomfort with closeness, relationships as secondary). Higher scores on anxiety reflect more negative self-views (anxious-ambivalent and fearful avoidant attachment styles) and lower scores reflect more positive self-views (e.g., secure and dismissing avoidant attachment styles). Higher scores on avoidance reflect more negative view of others (e.g., fearful and dismissing avoidant attachment styles) and lower scores reflect more positive views of others (e.g., secure attachment). Coefficient alpha for both scales was good (anxiety: .90, avoidance: .84).

Parental Divorce

Respondents were asked if their parents had ever divorced or separated. If they answered yes, they were asked two additional questions: "How much of an impact did it have on your life?" (1 = no impact, 5 = a great deal of impact) and "Did you consider the divorce to have a positive or negative impact on your life?" (1 = negative impact, 5 = positive impact).

Relationship Abuse

All participants were asked, "Have you ever been in a relationship that was "abusive?" (Yes/No). If the answer was yes, three additional questions were asked requiring only a Yes/No answer: "Was it physically abusive?" "What it sexually abusive?" and "Was it verbally abusive?" Twenty-two percent (n = 19) of the sample reported some kind of abuse in a romantic relationship. These questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire.

RESULTS

In order to determine if responses to the variables of interest differed by gender or dating status, a 2 (Male vs. Female) by 2 (Dating vs. Not Dating) MANOVA was performed on the two measures of attachment style and the importance ratings of 12 information types used to form relational standards. Neither of the main effects nor the interaction term was significant, indicating that there were no gender or dating status differences on these variables (ME Gender: $F_{(14,78)} = 1.1$; ME Dating Status: $F_{(14,78)} = .34$; Interaction: $F_{(14,78)} = .83$). On the basis of these results the data were combined across gender and dating status.

Types of Relational Standards

Eighty-nine respondents (four individuals did not complete the open-ended questions) reported a total of 599 specific relational standards, an average of 6.44 per respondent, that were consistent with a comprehensive framework developed byVangelisti and Daly (1997). The Vangelisti & Daly (1997) categories with the greatest numbers of endorsements were frankness (67 times), synchrony (64 times), openness (43 times) and predictability (41 times). As depicted in the Appendix (Table B), one-fifth (n = 127, 21%) of the standards listed consisted of specific traits or qualities that respondents wished their partner to have. This category was not represented in the Vangelisti & Daly (1997) list. Over half of the sample indicated at least one of the higher-order standards (integration, trust, relational identity, flexibility, or affective accessibility) and listed specific partner qualities in their descriptions. When asked directly about their standards in general, 75% of the sample (n = 70) said their personal standards were extremely high or very high. Chi-square analyses revealed that women were almost twice as likely as men to list at least one standard related to relationship integration (57% vs. 30%, chi-square with 1 df = 5.94, p <.01.

Types of Information Used to Form Relational Standards

Overall, 89 participants listed 157 types of information (mean = 1.8) from which they derived their relational standards. Consistent with the prediction, temporal comparison information was the most frequently mentioned type of information for forming one's relational standards for romantic relationships (48%). Table 1 presents more a more detailed breakdown of these results.

Table 1. Open-Ended Descriptions of Information Used in Forming Relational Standards (n = 89)

Information Type	% of all Responses	f
Objective Information	21%	
Books		4
Personal/Religious Values		15
Feedback from respected others		13
Temporal Comparison Information	49%	
Good aspects of past relationships		20
Positive Upbringing Experiences		20
Negative Information from Past Relationships		10
Information from Past Relationships in General		27
Social Comparison Information	22%	
Upward Social Comparison Information		11
Friends' relationships		6
Other relationships in general		7
Downward Social Comparison Information		11
Idealized Information	8%	13

Importance Ratings of Information Use

Participants reported that temporal comparison information was the most important type of information they used in constructing their relational standards (see Table 2). All of the information types typed in bold had mean ratings above the scale midpoint indicating that they were at least moderately important for the formation of personal standards. The objective information types (e.g., feedback from others, religious teachings, fantasies about perfect relationships, the media, relationship-oriented books, and political beliefs) had means well below the scale midpoint (in italics), indicating that they, overall, were not perceived as very important at all in forming one's personal standards.

Table 2. Product Moments for Importance Ratings of Information Useful for Forming Relational Standards (n = 93)

	Mean	STD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Objective Information				
Standards from religious teachings	2.6	1.5	.46	-1.2
Relationship-oriented books	1.7	1.0	1.5	1.9
Media	2.3	1.2	.45	-.61
Political beliefs	1.9	1.1	1.1	.35
Expectations from someone important	2.7	1.4	.16	-1.3
Temporal Comparison Information				
Positive aspects of past relationships	4.2	1.1	-1.7	2.0
Negative aspects of past relationships	4.5	.94	-2.1	4.1
Social Comparison Information				
Positive aspects from parents' relationship	3.5	1.4	-.50	-1.0
Positive aspects of others' relationships	3.8	1.1	-.69	.00
Negative aspects from parents' relationship	4.2	1.1	-1.3	.91
Negative aspects of others' relationships	4.1	.94	-.99	1.0
Idealized Information				
Fantasies about the perfect relationship	2.5	1.2	.46	-.63

Moderators of the Importance of Evaluative Information

In order to reduce the number of information types examined into meaningful categories, I subjected the importance ratings of the 12 information types to a Principal Components Analysis. I found a four-factor solution (Eigenvalues over 1.0), accounting for 62% of the total variance, capturing the categories of information use as outlined by Wayment and Taylor (1995). The first component is called "social comparison information" (22% variance) and consists of positive and negative information from others and negative information from parents (alpha = .66). The second component is called "objective information" (16% variance) and consists of positive information from parents, religious teachings, expert opinion from books, and advice from an important other (alpha = .63). The third component is called "idealized information" (13% variance) and consists of visions of the perfect relationship and information about relationships as depicted in the media ($r = .45$, $p < .0001$). The fourth component is called "temporal comparison information" (11% variance) and consists of positive and negative information from past relationships ($r = .44$, $p < .0001$). Inter-factor correlations indicated that only social comparison information and objective information were significantly correlated ($r = .48$, $p < .0001$). The remaining non-significant correlations ranged between .03 and .17 (see Table 3).

Attachment Style Dimensions

In order to examine if attachment style dimensions were differentially associated with preferences for information used to create relational standards, I computed Pearson correlations, controlling for gender and relationship status (see Table 3). Individuals higher on the negative view of others dimension (i.e., avoidant attachment) reported that idealized information was more important than those scoring lower on the negative view of others dimension (i.e., secure attachment).

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Attachment Styles and Information Importance Factors (n = 93)

	Negative Self-View (anxious)	Negative Views of Others (avoidant)	Social Comparison	Objective Information	Idealized Information	Temporal Comparison Information
Negative Self-Views	3.19 (.77)					
Negative Views of Others	.36***	3.39 (.97)				
Social Comparison	-.04	.03	3.81 (.81)			
Objective Information	-.09	.06	.48***	2.61 (.91)		
Idealized Information	.17	.29**	.03	.17	2.41 (.99)	
Temporal Comparison Information	-.02	.07	.14	.07	-.10	4.43 (.81)

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

Parental Divorce

Forty-six percent of the sample indicated that their parents had divorced (n = 43). The perceived impact of the divorce was uncorrelated with perceived negativity or positivity of the divorce (r = -.16, n.s.). I conducted a MANOVA with parental divorce (yes, no) as a between-subjects factor with both attachment scales and four information importance factors as outcome variables. Results indicated no differences on any of the variables (Omnibus F (6,76) = 1.44, n.s.). The importance ratings of the four information type factors were then correlated with participants' perceptions of how positive or negative the impact of their parents' divorce was on them, controlling for gender and dating status (n = 40). Respondents who rated the divorce impact more negatively reported placing a greater importance on idealized information (r = -.40, p < .001).

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Affective Impact of Divorce and Information Importance Factors (n = 40)

	Affective Impact of Divorce	Social Comparison Information	Objective Information	Idealized Information	Temporal Comparison Information
Affective Impact of Divorce	2.55 (1.4)				
Social Comparison Information	.02	3.81 (.81)			
Objective Information	-.08	.48***	2.61 (.91)		
Idealized Information	-.44***	.03	.17	2.41 (.99)	
Temporal Comparison Information	.19	.14	.07	-.10	4.43 (.81)

*** p < .001

Past Relationship Abuse

Eighteen percent of the sample (n = 17) reported that they had experienced some form of abuse in a previous relationship. Of these seventeen individuals, 14 reported physical abuse (82%), nine reported sexual abuse (53%), and 14 reported verbal abuse (82%). Compared to those who reported no previous abuse, those who reported past relationship abuse had higher scores on negative self-views (3.56 std = .79 compared to 3.05, std = .73; t (73) = -2.43, p < .02) but not negative view of others. Next, I conducted a one-way MANOVA with abuse (yes, no) as the between-subjects variable and the four information factor importance ratings as outcome variables. The omnibus F for abuse was significant (F (4,71) = 5.16, p < .001). Univariate tests revealed that respondents who reported abuse rated idealized information (F (1,71) = 11.30, p < .0001) as less important (mean: 1.74, std = .73) than those who reported no abuse (mean: 2.59, std = .97).

DISCUSSION

Given the importance of personal standards to the evaluation of romantic relationships, this study sought to better understand what kinds of information are used to form these standards. College students had no difficulty in describing their relational standards and described honesty and trustworthiness most often. Although the personal standards varied considerably among the respondents, two types of standards emerged more often than others.

First, respondents were very likely to state that honesty and trustworthiness were important in a romantic relationship. Second, respondents felt that it was important for romantic partners to hold similar values and be similar on important self-aspects, supporting earlier research (Botwin, Buss, & Schackelford, 1997; Tesser et al., 1998). Respondents were also likely to mention that it was important for partners to be able and willing to disclose thoughts and feelings. Along with the importance placed on honesty and trustworthiness, these findings add further evidence of the importance of honest self-disclosure in relationships (Reis & Patrick, 1996). To summarize, the higher-order standards of integration and trust accounted for two-thirds of all listed qualities desired in a romantic relationship. Integration standards describe the idea that one favors a relationship where each partner is accepted and respected for who they are, feels comfortable with being "themselves," has similar values, and is treated equally. Trust standards describe issues related to honesty and trustworthiness in the relationship.

The remaining 40% of the standards were evenly divided between the higher-order standards of relational identity (paying attention to one another, being a "couple"), flexibility (having a sense of freedom and fun), affective accessibility (able to share feelings and affection), and future orientation (predictability and sharing goals). The least endorsed category was role-fulfillment (5%), a standard referring to physical intimacy and reliability. The low reported importance of physical intimacy suggests that there may have been social desirability concerns among the respondents, who may have reduced the stated importance of this aspect of romantic relationships. Respondents' answers were easily coded using the Vangelisti and Daly (1997) coding scheme and all but three of the 30 standards in the scheme were endorsed at least once. The seven higher-order personal standards outlined by Vangelisti & Daly (1997) were clearly evident in respondents' descriptions of their relational standards with the only exception that Vangelisti & Daly's (1997) categorization scheme omitted the importance of specific partner traits and the importance of perceived equality in the relationship.

Information Used to Create Relational Standards

Information from the past, both in terms of one's upbringing and past romantic relationships, was the most frequently cited kind of information used to create relational standards, accounting for nearly half of all the responses and supporting Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) early theorizing on this issue. Future research might examine the subjective nature of temporal comparison information. For example, an individual may be extremely motivated to see his or her upbringing in a positive light or reinterpret past experiences in a positive or negative light (Greenwald, 1980). Two types of objective information were frequently listed, accounting for nearly a fifth of the responses: religious values and receiving direct feedback, most often in the form of advice from one's mother. As one respondent said, "My mother taught me about the kinds of things a good relationship should have." Unlike the information gleaned from one's past experiences, specific information about what relationships should be like from respected sources may be less susceptible to interpretation or revision.

However, such sources of information were not rated as very important in the questionnaire data. It may be that not all individuals may have access to such information (e.g., a good relationship with a wise parent) or willingly pursue this kind of information (e.g., church or religious teachings). Or, some kinds of "objective" information may be more enhancing or attainable than other types of objective information. Future research might examine the extent to which individuals are exposed to, seek out, or avoid, more "objective" information about how a relationship should be.

Finally, all forms of social comparison information were important contributors to relationship standards, and represented just fewer than 25% of the responses. It was striking how many respondents referred to their parents' troubled relationships as the impetus for setting specific standards for their own relationships. Future research examining the affective and motivational consequences of upward and downward social comparisons in the formation of relational standards will aid our understanding what aspects of social comparison information are most easily assimilated into one's personal standards.

Preferences for Information Use

I examined whether insecure attachment, parental divorce, and abusive relationship experiences affected the importance of evaluative information for forming relational standards. Although my predictions regarding downward social comparison and negative temporal information was not supported, it appeared that idealized relationship information had higher importance ratings among those who perceived their parents' divorce negatively and those who did not experience abuse in past dating relationships. Idealized relationship information consisted on one's ideas about the "perfect relationship" and media portrayals of relationships. While not rated as the most important source of information by any of the participants, these findings may provide important clues about how individuals compose their relational standards. For example, media images that focus on extremely positive and idealistic images of the 'perfect relationship' may seem an attractive source of information to those who experienced a negative parental divorce, but a source of information that may lead to ultimate disappointment. Similarly, if avoidant individuals incorporate unrealistic images into their relational standards, their expectations that others are unreliable will likely be met. Interestingly, the pattern of results was reversed for individuals who had experience with abusive relationships. In this case, such individuals were less likely to rate idealized images of relationships as important. However, those who had been abused also reported higher scores on negative self-views (i.e., anxious attachment) than those who had not been abused. Perhaps idealized images of relationships are more important and useful to individuals with positive self-views. Results from this study may be helpful in counseling or therapy settings. A better understanding of the specific kinds of information individuals use for forming their relational standards may improve mental health professionals' ability to help individuals form healthier or more realistic relational standards.

Limitations

In comparison to older adults, it might be argued that the college-aged respondents lack relationship experience. Thus, future studies investigating the construction of relational standards would benefit from samples of individuals with more relationship experience. A second limitation concerns the measurement of information. Although the measurement of information types was based on previous self-evaluation research, future studies might explore different kinds of information that people use to form their standards and investigate in more detail the processes by which such information is transformed into standards. Finally, although my intention was to get a "snapshot" of individuals' relational standards, cross-sectional data are limited in their utility. Future research using a longitudinal design will be better able to assess how personal standards change over time, how they may influence feelings of relationship satisfaction and commitment, and when such standards are created or modified.

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APPENDIX A. QUESTIONS ASSESSING IMPORTANCE OF 12 SOURCES OF EVALUATIVE INFORMATION

Read each statement and indicate how important each of these types of information are for forming your Personal Standards for Relationships. 1 = not at all important; 5 = extremely important
1. I think about the positive things I saw from my parents' relationship and incorporate them into my standard of what I want from a relationship.
2. I think about the negative things I saw from my parents' relationship and know that these are things I do NOT want in a relationship.
3. I incorporate positive things that I see from the relationships of other people I know (besides my parents) into my standard of what I want in a relationship.
4. I learn from the negative things that I see from the relationships of other people I know (besides my parents) and know that these are things that I do not want in a relationship.
5. I think about the positive things I've learned from past relationships and incorporate them into my standard of what I want from a relationship.
6. I think about the negative things I've learned from past relationships and know that these are things that I do NOT want in a relationship.
7. I think about absolute standards about what a relationship should be like from my religious teachings (e.g., the Bible, Koran, Book of Mormon, the Church, etc.)
8. I have been taught by someone important to me about what I should and should not expect in a relationship.
9. I have learned about what a relationship should be like for me from relationship-oriented books (e.g., what experts or those who know about relationships have to say).
10. I find things in the media (e.g., movies, fiction, non-fiction) that help me figure out what I would like (and not like) in a relationship.
11. I incorporate my political beliefs into my standards of how a relationship should be.
12. I rely upon my fantasies about how the perfect relationship should be.

APPENDIX B. REPORTED FREQUENCIES FOR 33 SPECIFIC TYPES OF RELATIONAL STANDARDS AND SEVEN HIGHER-ORDER CATEGORIES (n=89)

Relational Standard	f	N
Relational Identity (11% of total responses)		
Network Integration	9	9
Presence	8	8
Acquisition	0	0
Other-directedness	28	19
Emotional attachment	18	17
Recognition	1	1
Relational centrality	1	1
Uniqueness	0	0
Integration (20% of total responses)		
Acceptance	7	7
Coping	8	8
Respect	21	21
Relaxation	10	10
Synchrony	64	43
Equality*	11	11
Affective Accessibility (10% of total responses)		
Openness	43	40
Affection demonstration	14	14
Impact	2	2
Trust (15% of total responses)		
Fidelity	14	14
Commitment	6	6
Privacy	1	1
Frankness	67	52
Future Orientation (9% of total responses)		
Contracts	1	1
Predictability	41	24
Goal Sharing	8	7
Role Fulfillment (5% of total responses)		
Physical Intimacy	14	12
Twosome	2	2
Differentiation	0	0
Reliability	11	8
Flexibility (8% of total responses)		
Adaptability	7	7
Freedom	16	14
Enjoyment	29	26
Specific Qualities* (21% of total responses)	127	127

*Category was added to capture participants' responses

AUTHOR'S NOTE

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Heidi A. Wayment, Ph.D. (UCLA, 1992) is an associate professor of social psychology at Northern Arizona University. Her research interests include collective consequences of loss, stress and coping, and self- and relationship-evaluation processes. Heidi.Wayment@nau.edu.