

## **Personality and Social Network Effects on Romantic Relationships: A Dyadic Approach**

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### *Abstract*

*The quality of romantic relationships and their associations with both partners' personality traits and social networks were studied in 100 younger couples. The similarity of partners was modest with respect to personality traits, and moderate to large with respect to the perceived quality of the partner relationship and their social networks. While similarity in personality was unrelated to relationship quality, dyadic analyses showed that one's perceived quality of relationship was better predicted by one's own personality (i.e. actor effects) than by the personality of one's partner (i.e. partner effects). Moreover, relationship quality could to some extent be predicted by the quality of the social network once the personality traits of each partner were controlled. Results are discussed from a transactional view of personality and relationships. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

A romantic relationship consists of two partners, who both bring their individual personality and life histories to their relationship. This notion sounds trivial, but its conceptual and methodological implications are profound and far reaching, and this is precisely why personality psychology has recently begun to realize that relationships constitute dyads and that a dyadic perspective on relationships is strongly advocated (see e.g. Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). In the present article, we study from a dyadic perspective various qualities of romantic relationships of young adults (attachment security, dependency on partner, relationship satisfaction and other relationship characteristics) and their associations with both partners' personality traits (the big five and general self-esteem) and their network of relationships with others (parents, friends, colleagues, kin, etc.). Whereas the former perspective continues a traditional line of personality research (see e.g. Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Kelly & Conley, 1987), the

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latter is stimulated by one of the classic issues of sociologically oriented social network research pertaining to the inter-relatedness of different kinds of relationship (see e.g. Bott, 1957; Sprecher, Felmeé, Orbruch, & Willetts, 2002). We believe that the personality and the social network approaches can complement each other and provide a fruitful framework for the study of romantic relationships because the traditional individualistic view is combined with a contextual one. With this interdisciplinary perspective we hope to join a re-emerging dialogue between personality psychology and sociology, which has been recently encouraged in order to more fully understand the links between personality, dyadic relationships, and social structure (Neyer, 1999; Roberts, Robins, Caspi, & Trzesniewski, in press).

### Personality effects on relationship quality

The study of the success or failure of marital relationships can look back on a long tradition in personality psychology (see e.g. Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Terman & Bottenweiser, 1935). Since the beginning of the 1980s, however, the research focus has shifted away from the study of stable individual differences and turned toward the study of dynamic processes in dyadic interactions (see e.g. Gottman, 1994). As a result of the consistency debate, personality psychologists may have been of the opinion that stable individual differences and dynamic interaction processes are competing rather than complementing approaches to relationship science. However, the two perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as was suggested by the model of Karney and Bradbury (1995), where stable dispositions and stressful events both influence the adaptive processes shaping relationship outcomes. Research on personality and relationships has now overcome this alleged incompatibility by taking advantage of the perspective of dyadic differences, in which relationships are shaped by both partners' personalities and by dyadic effects.

Personality effects on partner relationships can be addressed by three basic questions. The first question pertains to the associations of individual personality traits with one's self-perceived relationship quality, such as satisfaction or attachment quality. In other words, who is, for example, satisfied with their relationship? The second question relates to the association of one's personality traits with the relationship quality as perceived by the partner. In other words, whose partner is satisfied with the relationship? The third question is related to the dyadic fit of partners, that is whether and how the similarity or dissimilarity of the partners' personalities is associated with relationship outcomes.

A plethora of studies have addressed the first question (i.e. *Who is satisfied with their relationship?*) using either cross-sectional or longitudinal research designs. It has consistently been shown that among the big five personality traits neuroticism is the most powerful predictor of relationship dissatisfaction and instability (see e.g. Bouchard, Lussier, & Saborin, 1999; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kurdek, 1993; Robins et al., 2000, Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), and of the quality of romantic attachment (see e.g. Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Brennan, 1992). On the other hand, the findings for other personality traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness are less consistent, and only some studies have found positive associations with relationship outcomes (e.g. Buss, 1991; Bouchard et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; McCrae, Stone, Fagan, & Costa, 1998; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Watson et al., 2000). Findings on extraversion have sometimes even been contradictory, with

positive associations with relationship satisfaction and negative associations with relationship stability (see e.g. Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Watson et al., 2000). Only a few studies have reported openness effects, with positive associations with satisfaction and negative ones with relationship stability (see e.g. Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Shaver & Brennan, 1992). This inconsistent picture may give rise to the conclusion that it is still an open question whether personality traits other than neuroticism account for significant variance in relationship outcomes, and whether any of the personality correlates are moderated by third variables. For example, it has sometimes been observed that neuroticism effects are stronger in women, and the effects of conscientiousness and agreeableness are more pronounced in short-term relationships (Bouchard et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Watson et al., 2000).

Research relating to the second question (i.e. *Whose partner is satisfied?*) has also shown that one's level of neuroticism, or negative emotionality, is substantially related to the satisfaction experienced by the partner, even after controlling for his or her own standing on this trait (see e.g. Botwin, Buss, & Shakelford, 1997; Bouchard et al., 1999; Caughlin et al., 2000; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Robins et al., 2000; Russell & Wells, 1994). Findings on other personality traits have by contrast not been consistently replicated. For example, Bouchard et al. (1999) found a husband's level of openness to be positively associated with the relationship satisfaction perceived by his wife, and Watson et al. (2000) observed for both husbands and wives a small effect of conscientiousness on each other's satisfaction. To the best of our knowledge, no personality effects on the attachment quality experienced by the partner have been reported in the literature. All in all, therefore, it appears that the effects of the partner's personality (i.e. partner effects) are less frequent and smaller than the effects of one's own personality (i.e. actor effects). This overall picture is in accord with the results from research on happiness, life-satisfaction, and well-being, which has shown that these are largely independent of environmental factors such as income, occupational status, and physical health (Myers & Diener, 1995), the personality of the partner being of course also part of a person's environment. Still, it would be inappropriate to conceive relationship satisfaction as only due to individual factors, since it has also been shown that relationship experiences are highly consistent between both relationship partners, which cannot be attributed to chance (see e.g. Neyer, 2002; Watson et al., 2000). Therefore, in the present study we investigate the relative contribution of actor effects and partner effects to relationship outcomes in a sample of romantic couples of relatively short relationship duration (2.7 years on average), where relationship issues are supposed to be still in negotiation.

The third question, whether more similar partners are more satisfied with their relationship, has been addressed by only a few studies, probably because partner similarity in personality traits is generally low (see e.g. Buss, 1984; Lykken & Tellegen, 1993). In their meta-analytic review, Karney and Bradbury (1995) reported only one study that showed a correlation between personality similarity and later relationship satisfaction ( $r = 0.30$ ). In a similar vein, Robins et al. (2000) observed a small effect of similarity in negative affectivity only for relationship dissatisfaction of men, but not of females. In addition, Eysenck and Wakefield (1981) found a small effect of similarity in neuroticism on later dissatisfaction, even when controlling for the mean trait levels of the couples. In the present study, we pick up this question again and study the possible effects of dyadic similarity on not only satisfaction, but also other relationship outcomes such as attachment security, dependency, conflict, etc.

### Effects of social networks on romantic relationship quality

Partner relationships are not romantic islands without connections to the remaining social world and this is one of the basic assumptions of the sociological perspective of partnerships. Whereas some research has indicated that when people are asked why they experience attraction or satisfaction in a relationship they are unlikely to refer to the influence of other kinds of relationship (see e.g. Berscheid, 1999), other research has convincingly shown that social networks are important in the emergence and maintenance of romantic relationships even though this may not be apparent from an individual's perspective (see e.g. Sprecher et al., 2002). The social network approach looks at the relations within groups such as families or non-kin groups in their entirety. However, in adopting this sociological approach, psychology has personalized the concept of social networks in considering various relationship types from the perspective of just one individual rather than of all network members. In other words, the psychological approach to social networks is one that considers the *knots* rather than the complete *net* of relationships (Asendorpf & van Aken, 1994; Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Neyer, 1997; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). With this so-called *egocentred* or *personal network* approach, it is possible to generate individual measures of relationship status, for example, using means of a given relationship quality such as conflict or closeness across all members of one's social network or of members of a specific type of relationship such as parents, friends, colleagues, etc. This way, the personal network approach allows relations among relationships to be studied. More specifically, it can be studied whether relationship qualities are consistent or complementary across types of relationship such as with partner, parents, or friends. Consistency would be apparent, for example, when close and positive relationships with parents are accompanied by close and positive partnerships, whereas complementarity would be expressed by conflict-ridden partner relationships being compensated by warm and harmonic relationships with one's parents.

Consistency between kinds of relationship has been suggested from the perspective of attachment theory, where adult partner attachment is assumed as being predicted by attachment experiences in childhood (see e.g. Bartholomew, 1990). However, the observed consistency of attachment quality across different types of relationship such as parents, partners, and friends is usually not very strong, suggesting a more relationship-specific view of working models (see Asendorpf, Banse, Wilpers, & Neyer, 1997; Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Complementarity between relationships has been traditionally hypothesized from the sociological perspective. For example, Bott (1957) suggested that flexibility in role differentiation in partner relationships was accompanied by loose-knit social networks, whereas in close-knit networks the role differentiation in partner relationships was more rigid. Although the Bott hypothesis has received only little empirical support, it has stimulated various empirical studies on more psychological characteristics of relationship (e.g. Blood, 1969; Burger & Milardo, 1995; Milardo & Allan, 1997; Sprecher et al., 2002). However, the results on the relation between partner relationships and parental or friendship relationships have sometimes been in accord with the consistency hypothesis, while sometimes in accord with the complementarity hypothesis.

In the present research, we studied the contribution of social network relationships to the various outcomes in romantic relationships. Due to the inconsistent findings in the literature, our expectations on the relations among relationships were not straightforward. Nonetheless, we hypothesized, first, that more actor than partner effects should be

observable, indicating that the quality of one's partner relationship is more associated with one's own social network qualities than with those of the partner. New about the present study was that we controlled the social network effects on the personality traits of the partners in order to provide stricter tests for the relations among relationships. Second, we expected that the overall characteristics of the perceived social network qualities (i.e. aggregated means across all members of one's own or partner's network relationships) would be consistently related to partner relationship outcomes, since both should be characterized by shared ways of relationship functioning. Third, based on the mixed evidence in the literature, we had no specific expectations regarding the relations between partner relationships and relationships with parents and friends, and expected to find both consistency and complementary effects.

## METHOD

### Participants

Young adult couples with a serious relationship of at least 6 months were recruited via advertisements at the university campus and in the local media. The sample consisted of 100 couples from Berlin, aged between 19 and 36 years. Mean age of participants was 24.5 years ( $SD = 3.1$ ). The duration of relationships ranged between 0.8 and 8.7 years ( $M = 2.7$  years;  $SD = 1.3$ ). Forty-five couples cohabited, and 55 couples lived apart. Most participants were unmarried (92%), and only 12 participants had children (6%). Sixty-two per cent of participants were either in professional training contexts or students (but not of psychology); and 76% had a high-school diploma.

### Measures

Participants were given questionnaires on (a) personality, (b) social networks, (c) satisfaction with partner relationship, and (d) quality of partner attachment. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires separately, and independently of each other. The questionnaires were returned to the research team by regular (prepaid) mail.

#### *Personality*

We assessed the Big Five personality factors using the German version of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993). An additional scale of five items assessed general self-esteem (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984). All items were randomly mixed and presented in a five-point agreement format rating ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely true*). As compared with the norms reported by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1993), the participants of the present study reported higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness,  $t(2310) > 2.36$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d > 0.10$ , whereas levels of neuroticism and openness were lower,  $t(2310) > 3.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d > 0.16$ . The variances of the Big Five scales, however, were comparable (mean  $SD = 0.58$  versus  $0.59$ ). As compared with the more representative sample of Neyer and Asendorpf (2001), the participants reported higher levels of general self-esteem,  $t(687) = 4.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.31$ . Consistent with the sex differences reported in other studies (e.g. Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993), female participants reported higher levels of neuroticism, openness and agreeableness,  $t(98) > 2.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d > 0.22$ . The intercorrelations of personality scales

did not significantly differ from those reported by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1993), or by Neyer and Asendorpf (2001). The internal consistencies were satisfactory to good ( $\alpha$  ranging from 0.74 to 0.84), with the exception of general self-esteem ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ) (Table 1).

#### Social network inventory

The social networks of each partner were assessed using a social network inventory similar to the instrument used by Neyer & Asendorpf (2001). Partners were asked to recall those persons who played an important role in their lives, either positive or negative, and with whom they had had contact at least once during the previous 3 months. Participants were presented with a list of relationship types (partner, parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances), and were asked to assign each person to one of these relationship categories. Finally, the quality of the participant's relationship with each person was rated on five-point scales: (1) 'How often do you have contact with this person?' (0 = *less than once a month* to 5 = *every day*); (2) 'How important is this relationship for you?' (1 = *it would be better to end this relationship* to 5 = *ending this*

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, intercorrelations, and dyadic similarities of measures of personality, partner relationship quality, and overall relationship status

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>r</i> <sup>a</sup>
Personality trait										
1. Neuroticism	2.51	0.67	(0.81)	<b>-0.29</b>	0.03	0.04	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>-0.59</b>	—	0.07
2. Extraversion	3.51	0.52		(0.74)	0.05	0.13	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.42</b>	—	0.09
3. Openness	3.56	0.58			(0.75)	<b>0.20</b>	-0.10	0.11	—	<b>0.25</b>
4. Agreeableness	3.60	0.54				(0.76)	0.05	<b>0.25</b>	—	0.18
5. Conscientiousness	3.64	0.65					(0.82)	<b>0.25</b>	—	<b>0.39</b>
6. Global self-esteem	4.10	0.54						(0.66)	—	<b>0.21</b>
Overall relationship status										
1. Overall size of personal network	17.19	9.31	—	<b>-0.37</b>	<b>-0.53</b>	<b>-0.25</b>	<b>-0.38</b>	0.12	—	<b>0.63</b>
2. Mean contact frequency	2.68	0.75		—	<b>0.17</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.21</b>	-0.13	—	<b>0.28</b>
3. Mean importance of relationships	3.95	0.50			—	0.04	<b>0.64</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	—	<b>0.36</b>
4. Mean frequency of conflict	1.99	0.46				—	-0.11	<b>0.25</b>	—	<b>0.35</b>
5. Mean closeness	3.66	0.49					—	<b>-0.15</b>	—	0.19
6. Mean frequency of insecurity feelings	1.63	0.45						—	—	<b>0.28</b>
Quality of partner relationship										
1. Relationship satisfaction	4.34	0.49	(0.86)	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>-0.37</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>-0.32</b>	<b>0.55</b>
2. Attachment security	4.39	0.53		(0.72)	0.12	<b>0.23</b>	<b>-0.23</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>-0.43</b>	<b>0.31</b>
3. Dependency	3.02	0.56			(0.65)	<b>0.34</b>	-0.12	<b>0.20</b>	0.07	0.08
4. Importance of partner	4.86	0.34				—	-0.12	<b>0.42</b>	-0.05	<b>0.30</b>
5. Frequency of conflict with partner	2.50	0.77					—	<b>-0.24</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>0.51</b>
6. Closeness with partner	4.82	0.53						—	<b>0.15</b>	0.07
7. Frequency of insecurity feelings with partner	1.53	0.67							—	<b>0.24</b>

Means and standard deviations refer to the 200 participants of the study. Significant intercorrelations are typed in bold-face ( $p < 0.05$ ). Scores in the diagonals refer to the internal consistencies of the scales (i.e. coefficient alphas). Internal consistencies could not be computed with single-item measures of relationship status.

<sup>a</sup>Dyadic similarities between male and female couple members (i.e. of the 100 couples). Significant pairwise correlations are typed in boldface ( $p < 0.5$ ).



relationship would be a great strain for me); (3) 'How close do you feel to this person?' (1 = very distant to 5 = very close); (4) 'How often do you have conflict with this person?' (1 = never to 5 = nearly each time we meet); (5) 'Do you feel insecure in this person's presence?' (1 = never to 5 = always).

Of the various possible indices of relationship status, we used for the purpose of this article the overall relationship status, that is aggregate measures of relationship quality across all members of the social network. At the level of specific kinds of relationship, we used aggregates of relationship quality with partner, and across friends and parents. The mean intercorrelations of the five items of relationship quality (with conflict and insecurity inversely coded) was 0.20 for measures of cross-relationship status (i.e. means across all social network members), 0.29 for relationships with friends (i.e. means across all friends), and 0.18 for relationships with parents (i.e. means across mother and father). Thus, we refrained from aggregation, and used single-item measures of relationship status. Correspondingly, four single-item measures of partnership quality were derived from the social network questionnaire, i.e. importance, conflict, closeness, and insecurity (due to ceiling effects, we did not include frequency of contact with partners). Because of the low intercorrelations between the four items ( $\alpha = 0.44$ , with insecurity and conflict inversely coded), items were used as separate indicators of partnership quality (Table 1). The single-item measures of relationship status were assumed to be reliable, since Asendorpf and Wilpers (1998) reported relatively high retest reliabilities across three months using comparable measures ( $r$  ranging from 0.55 to 0.86).

The features of the social networks of the participants were comparable with those of the more representative sample of Neyer and Asendorpf (2001), with the exception of a larger overall network size,  $t(683) = 2.85$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.21$ , and lower rates of mean conflict,  $t(683) = 3.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.25$ , lower rates of contact with parents,  $t(683) = 4.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.38$ , and lower rates of contact with friends  $t(683) = 2.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.17$ . No sex differences appeared, with the exception of women rating their relationships with all others, and in particular with their parents, as more important,  $t(98) > 2.50$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d > 0.25$ , and closer,  $t(98) > 2.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d > 0.22$ , than men.

### Relationship satisfaction

Satisfaction with the partner relationship was assessed using the German version of the Relationship Assessment Scale by Hendrick (1988; Sander & Böcker, 1993). The seven items were presented in a five-point agreement format rating, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely true*). As compared with a German student sample assessed by Sander and Böcker (1993), our participants were much more satisfied with their ongoing relationship,  $t(276) = 3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.42$ . Men and women did not differ in relationship satisfaction.

### Attachment

Attachment quality between romantic partners was measured by two bipolar relationship-specific attachment scales, with six items measuring attachment security and eight items measuring dependency on partner (Asendorpf et al., 1997; Neyer, 2002). The items were randomly mixed and presented in a five-point agreement format rating, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely true*). The participants of the present sample were comparable in dependency, but reported higher levels of attachment security than the participants of the Asendorpf et al. study ( $n = 479$ ),  $t(677) = 2.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.17$ . There were no sex differences in attachment scales.

## RESULTS

### Dyadic similarity

Dyadic similarity between couple members was calculated using pairwise intraclass correlations (Gonzalez & Griffin, 1997) (Table 1).

#### *Personality traits*

Couple members resembled each other modestly in openness and general self-esteem, and moderately in conscientiousness. Similarities in the other traits, neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness, were non-significant.

#### *Relationship status*

Dyadic similarity in overall relationship status was moderate, with the exception of a small similarity in mean closeness and a large similarity in overall network size. At the relationship-specific level, dyadic similarity was stronger in relationships with friends (number of friends, 0.56,  $p < 0.001$ ; contact, 0.39,  $p < 0.001$ ; importance, 0.34,  $p < 0.01$ ; conflict, 0.23,  $p < 0.05$ ; closeness, 0.16, n.s.; insecurity, 0.29,  $p < 0.01$ ) as compared with relationship with parents (contact, 0.16, n.s.; importance, 0.20, n.s.; conflict, 0.34,  $p < 0.01$ ; closeness,  $-0.07$ , n.s.; insecurity, 0.14, n.s.).

#### *Quality of partner relationships*

Dyadic similarity in perceived qualities of partner relationships was modest regarding the feelings of insecurity with partner, moderate regarding attachment security and the importance of partner, and large regarding the relationship satisfaction and the perceived frequencies of conflict. Similarity was negligible in closeness and dependency. In a study with 214 couples with a mean relationship duration of 5.6 years ( $SD = 3.4$ ), Neyer (2002) observed a substantial dyadic similarity in dependency ( $r = 0.44$ ). The small similarity in the present sample was perhaps due to shorter relationship duration.

#### *Partner similarity and relationship quality*

Using multiple hierarchical regression analyses we also addressed the question of whether similarity of partners contributed to relationship outcomes by regressing the individual experiences of partnership quality on, first, the average expression of a given personality trait across both couple members (to control for the mean level of traits that eventually could result in artificial similarity effects), and, second, on the difference score between the two partners' trait levels. Of the possible 82 effects (i.e. of the similarity in six personality traits on seven relationship outcomes in men and women, respectively), only five effects reached significance, and were thus attributed to chance (i.e. about 6% of possible effects).

### Personality effects on the quality of partner relationships

#### *Pooled effects*

Personality effects on the quality of partner relationships were analysed using the partner effect model by Kenny (1996), which estimates actor and partner effects based on within-dyad and between-dyad effects derived from pooled regression analyses.<sup>1</sup> An *actor effect* reflects the effect of a person's level of a given personality trait on his or her own level of perceived relationship quality (controlling for the personality of the partner). Conversely, a

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed description of the calculation of actor and partner effects, see Kenny (1996), or Neyer (2002).



*partner effect* reflects the effect of this person's level of the trait on his or her partner's level of perceived relationship quality (controlling for the personality of the partner) (Table 2).

In general, actor effects were more frequent and stronger than partner effects. Of the possible 42 actor effects and the corresponding possible 42 partner effects (i.e. all possible effects of six personality traits on seven relationship measures), 15 actor effects and 6 partner effects reached the level of significance. Both numbers were higher than the 2 effects that could be expected by chance (i.e. 5% of possible effects).

Self-perceived relationship satisfaction was substantially associated with one's own agreeableness and conscientiousness, but also with the partner's agreeableness and openness. Self-perceived attachment security was significantly related to each of one's big five personality traits, that is higher attachment security was related to one's higher levels of emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. With the exception of feelings of insecurity, the single-item measures of relationship quality were mostly not predictable from personality traits.

Agreeableness and neuroticism yielded significant actor and partner effects on other relationship outcomes. More specifically, agreeableness showed actor effects on attachment security, dependency, and perceived importance of partner. A partner effect of agreeableness was observed with regard to the frequency of insecurity feelings in the presence of the partner. Self-perceived attachment security and dependency were predicted by one's own neuroticism, but not by the neuroticism of the partner. The frequency of feeling insecure in the presence of the partner, however, was predicted by actor *and* partner effects, that is, by higher levels of one's own neuroticism *and* the neuroticism of one's partner. In a similar vein, an individual's general self-esteem was related to his or her own and the partner's perceived level of attachment security, as well as the frequency of insecurity feelings in each other's presence.

### *Sex differences*

We also tested whether actor and partner effects of personality traits were related to sex differences. Because the partner effect model pools the effects across male and female partners, we computed additional multiple regression analyses where each relationship outcome was simultaneously predicted by the personality traits of both partners resulting in four regression coefficients for each combination of a personality trait and a relationship outcome. These beta weights can be interpreted in terms of actor and partner effects (i.e. 84 possible actor effects, and 84 possible partner effects).

Sex differences were observed for effects on relationship satisfaction and attachment security. For reasons of comparison, Table 3 presents the standardized beta weights. The average of the corresponding non-standardized beta weights would be approximately equivalent to the effects estimated by the partner effect model (with a deviance of 0.2 at maximum). The effects were more pronounced and significant for women, while for men they did not reach significance (with few exceptions). In particular, the women's actor effects of neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness on attachment security were stronger than the actor effects of their male partners. Moreover, it appeared that actor and partner effects of self-esteem on attachment security were both stronger in women than in men, highlighting that attachment security perceived by women was predictable from their own *and* their partner's self-esteem (but this was not true for men's attachment security). Regarding relationship satisfaction, it appeared that women's self-perceived satisfaction was more determined by the openness of men, whereas men's self-perceived satisfaction

Table 2. Actor and partner effects of personality traits on measures of partnership quality

	Neuroticism		Extraversion		Openness		Agreeableness		Conscientiousness		Self-esteem	
	Actor	Partner	Actor	Partner	Actor	Partner	Actor	Partner	Actor	Partner	Actor	Partner
Relationship satisfaction	0.00	-0.05	0.11	-0.01	0.11	0.13*	0.24***	0.15*	0.18***	-0.01	0.08	0.07
Attachment security	-0.16**	-0.10	0.30***	0.00	0.19**	0.02	0.27***	0.12	0.14*	0.09	0.25***	0.14*
Dependency	0.16**	-0.02	-0.03	0.06	-0.08	-0.09	0.17*	0.01	0.05	0.01	-0.13	0.05
Importance of partner	0.10*	0.01	-0.06	0.00	-0.07	0.03	0.14*	0.00	-0.03	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03
Conflict with partner	0.08	0.00	0.10	0.03	-0.01	-0.14	-0.19	-0.19	-0.12	-0.09	0.08	0.11
Closeness with partner	0.00	-0.11	-0.01	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.14	-0.02	0.08	0.08	0.13	0.06
Insecurity with partner	0.29***	0.20**	-0.19*	0.09	-0.10	-0.04	0.02	-0.21*	-0.15	-0.06	-0.20*	-0.24**

Non-standardized effects were estimated using the Partner Effect Model by Kenny (1996).

(\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ).

was more determined by the agreeableness of women. Finally, women's actor effect of conscientiousness was stronger than the corresponding effect of men.

### Effects of social network relationships on partner relationship quality

To estimate the effects of each partner's social network relationships on the quality of romantic relationships, we applied multiple hierarchical regression analyses where each relationship outcome was regressed in a first step on personality measures of both partners, in a second step on the actor's relationship status, and in a third step on the partner's relationship status. All single-item measures (i.e. contact, importance, closeness, conflict, insecurity, and, in the case of friendships, the number of friends) were entered

Table 3. Sex differences in actor and partner effects of personality traits on relationship satisfaction and attachment security

	Relationship satisfaction		Attachment security	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Neuroticism				
Actor	0.11	-0.12	0.05	-0.42***
Partner	-0.15	-0.06	-0.14	-0.07
Extraversion				
Actor	0.06	0.18	0.27**	0.32**
Partner	-0.11	0.09	-0.10	0.11
Openness				
Actor	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.30**
Partner	0.12	0.21*	0.16	-0.10
Agreeableness				
Actor	0.28**	0.22*	0.28**	0.26*
Partner	0.25*	0.08	0.15	0.10
Conscientiousness				
Actor	0.15	0.33**	0.10	0.23*
Partner	0.09	-0.12	0.15	0.07
Self-esteem				
Actor	0.09	0.10	0.14	0.34***
Partner	0.04	0.10	0.08	0.21*

Effects refer to standardized  $\beta$  from multiple regression analyses of an individual perceived relationship quality on a personality trait of both partners.

(\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ).

simultaneously into the regression equation. By this procedure, we aimed to identify the unique actor and partner effects of social network properties that were independent of each other whilst controlling for personality effects.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we checked the zero-order correlations between predictor and criterion variables. We then examined the standardized beta weights for the significant items of relationship status, and the incremental variances of both partners' relationship status. To rule out a suppressor effect we considered only significant beta weights as meaningful if the corresponding zero-order correlations were larger than 0.10. We first report the cross-relationship effects, and then turn to the relationship-specific effects of parental and friendship relationships.

*Cross-relationship effects*

We found six significant actor effects, and one significant partner effect. The partner effect could be attributed to chance, whereas actor effects were above chance levels, if 28 tests for cross-relationship effects are considered (i.e. seven actor and seven partner effects for men and women, respectively). The observed effects were in line with the consistency assumption. Table 4 shows the zero-order correlations and the standardized beta weights (indicating actor and partner effects) as well as the changes in explained variances.

Table 4. Actor and partner effects of cross-relationship status on quality of partner relationship controlling for personality traits of dyad members

Criterion (quality of partner relationship)	Predictor (Cross-relationship status)	Men			Women		
		r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> c	r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> c
Dependency	Actor's relationships			0.10			0.11
	Importance	0.19	0.13		0.19	0.30*	
	Insecurity	-0.08	-0.05		0.21	0.29*	
Importance	Partner's relationships			0.06			0.06
	Actor's relationships			0.06			0.08
	Partner's relationships			0.09			0.02
Conflict	Actor's relationships			0.07			0.16
	Contact	-0.15	-0.27*		-0.02	-0.05	
	Conflict	0.26	0.26		0.45	0.32**	
Closeness	Partner's relationships			0.04			0.03
	Actor's relationships			0.08			0.38
	Closeness	0.06	0.11		0.43	0.85***	
Insecurity	Partner's relationships			0.04			0.03
	Actor's relationships			0.23			0.15
	Insecurity	0.48	0.41**		0.44	0.42***	
	Partner's relationships			0.07			0.06
	Insecurity	0.29	0.26*		-0.01	-0.10	

Actor's relationships refer to effects of one's own cross-relationship status (actor effects), partner's relationships refer to effects of the partner's cross-relationship status (partner effects). Because no significant actor or partner effects were observed regarding relationship satisfaction and attachment security, results on these relationship outcomes are not displayed.

<sup>a</sup>Zero-order correlations between criterion and predictor variables.

<sup>b</sup>Standardized β from multiple hierarchical regression analyses. Only significant effects and the corresponding β of the opposite sex are presented (\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05).

<sup>c</sup>R<sup>2</sup> change from hierarchical regression analyses of cross-relationship status on partnership outcome (step 2) controlling for personality traits of both couple members (step 1).

<sup>2</sup>We did not use the partner effect model for the tests of social network effects, because the model does not allow control for third variables (i.e. personality traits).

For women's cross-relationship status, actor effects were found for dependency, indicating that women were more dependent on their partner the more important and the more insecure they felt about their other social network relationships. Women's closeness toward their partner was higher the closer they felt with others. Moreover, women's conflict with their partner was predicted by conflict with others, and their insecurity in their partner's presence was predicted by insecurity with others.

Two actor effects as well as one partner effect occurred for men's cross-relationship status. First, men's conflict with their partner was negatively correlated with mean contact frequency in their social networks. Second, men's insecurity in the presence of their partner was higher the more the men themselves felt insecure in other relationships *and* the more their partners experienced insecurity in general.

#### *Relationship-specific effects*

The effects of relationships with parents and friends were analysed in a comparable manner, that is, by multiple hierarchical regression analyses predicting partnership outcomes by other relationships whilst controlling for the personality traits of both partners. Seven actor effects and one partner effect were observed for parent relationships, and seven actor effects and two partner effects were found for friendship relationships (which were all above chance levels, with the exception of one partner effect of parent relationships). The effects of parent relationships supported the consistency hypothesis, whilst the effects of friendship relationships were consistent with both the consistency and the compensatory hypothesis.

Men's satisfaction, conflict, and insecurity with their partner were significantly predicted by their relationships with parents. The more time men spent with their parents and the more secure they felt in their presence the less frequently they reported conflict and feelings of insecurity, and the more satisfied they were with their current partnership. Women's experience of conflict, closeness, and insecurity with partner were predicted by their relationship with their parents, especially by closeness, conflict, and insecurity with parents. One single partner effect predicting dependency of women from the men's insecurity with parents can be attributed to chance (Table 5).

The qualities of friendship relationships were unrelated to relationship satisfaction and attachment security, but men's dependency was related to the importance of their friends. The importance of partner was negatively related to closeness and the number of friends in men, but the reverse pattern was observed for women: lower conflict and higher closeness with their partner were associated with higher closeness with friends. Thus, whereas for men the perceived closeness with partner and friends was complementary, it was consistent in women. Partner effects were exclusively found for women: men's closeness and conflict with friends were inversely related to women's perceived closeness with partner. Moreover, women felt more insecure the less frequently their partners contacted their friends (Table 6).

## DISCUSSION

The present investigation studied romantic relationships from a dyadic perspective and attempted to disentangle the contribution of each partner's personality and social network relationships. It can be generally concluded that how an individual experiences his or her partner relationship is more characterized by his or her own personality than by the personality of the partner, and also more in accord with his or her own social network

Table 5. Actor and partner effects of relationship quality with parents on quality of partner relationships controlling for personality traits of dyad members

Criterion (quality of partner relationship)	Predictor (relationship with parents)	Men			Women		
		r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> <sup>c</sup>	r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> <sup>c</sup>
Relationship satisfaction	Actor's relationships with parents			0.11			0.01
	Contact	0.34	0.27*		-0.04	-0.04	
	Insecurity	-0.36	-0.30*		-0.06	0.08	
Dependency	Partner's relationships with parents			0.03			0.05
	Actor's relationships with parents			0.07			0.01
	Partner's relationships with parents			0.03			0.09
Conflict	Insecurity	-0.13	-0.12		0.23	0.39**	
	Actor's relationships with parents			0.14			0.16
	Contact	-0.41	-0.38**		-0.07	-0.01	
	Conflict	0.11	0.00		0.45	0.35**	
Closeness	Closeness	-0.05	0.11		-0.28	-0.29*	
	Partner's relationships with parents			0.04			0.03
	Actor's relationships with parents			0.07			0.21
	Closeness	0.18	0.01		0.33	0.46**	
Insecurity	Partner's relationships with parents			0.00			0.02
	Actor's relationships with parents			0.24			0.12
	Closeness	-0.08	-0.02		0.05	0.21*	
	Insecurity	0.40	0.48***		0.31	0.32**	
	Partner's relationships with parents			0.09			0.05

Actor's relationships with parents refer to actor effects; partner's relationships with parents refer to partner effects. Because no significant actor or partner effects were observed regarding attachment security and the perceived importance of partner, results on these relationship outcomes are not displayed.

<sup>a</sup>Zero-order correlations between criterion and predictor variables.

<sup>b</sup>Standardized β from multiple hierarchical regression analyses. Only significant effects and the corresponding β of the opposite sex are presented (\*\*\**p* < 0.001; \*\**p* < 0.01; \**p* < 0.05).

<sup>c</sup>R<sup>2</sup> change from hierarchical regression analyses of relationship quality with parents on partnership outcome (step 2) controlling for personality traits of both couple members (step 1).

relationships than with those of the partner. Nevertheless, these findings do not mean that a dyadic perspective in research on the personality–relationship fit can be abandoned, rather that the unique actor and partner effects contributing to this fit should be more precisely identified.

Before we discuss our results in more detail, three caveats need to be considered. First, our study was cross-sectional and therefore strong inferences about the causal ordering of effects cannot be made. Second, we relied on self-report data and cannot rule out the possible effects of social desirability and differential response sets. Third, our sample was not representative of the general population of young German adults. Despite the

Table 6. Actor and partner effects of relationship quality with friends on quality of partner relationships controlling for personality traits of dyad members

Criterion (quality of partner relationship)	Predictor (relationship with friends)	Men			Women		
		r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> <sup>c</sup>	r <sup>a</sup>	β <sup>b</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup> <sup>c</sup>
Dependency	Actor's relationships with friends			0.09			0.05
	Importance	0.18	0.28*		0.27	0.24	
Importance	Partner's relationships with friends			0.07			0.04
	Actor's relationships with friends			0.11			0.16
	Conflict	0.00	-0.15		0.25	0.40**	
	Closeness	-0.17	-0.28*		-0.12	0.23	
Conflict	Number of friends	-0.10	-0.30*		0.04	0.15	
	Partner's relationships with friends			0.09			0.04
	Actor's relationships with friends			0.05			0.13
	Closeness	-0.02	-0.14		-0.15	-0.35**	
Closeness	Partner's relationships with friends			0.03			0.05
	Actor's relationships with friends			0.07			0.38
	Closeness	-0.19	-0.27		0.41	0.69***	
	Insecurity	0.06	0.26		0.10	0.25*	
Insecurity	Partner's relationships with friends			0.05			0.12
	Conflict	-0.09	-0.18		-0.34	-0.37**	
	Closeness	-0.06	-0.29		-0.15	-0.27*	
	Actor's relationships with friends			0.17			0.09
Insecurity	Insecurity	0.43	0.26*		0.29	0.24*	
	Partner's relationships with friends			0.07			0.10
	Contact	0.16	0.18		-0.20	-0.26*	

Actor's relationships with friends refer to actor effects; partner's relationships with friends refer to partner effects. Because no significant actor or partner effects were observed regarding relationship satisfaction and attachment security, results on these relationship outcomes are not displayed.

<sup>a</sup>Zero-order correlations between criterion and predictor variables.

<sup>b</sup>Standardized β from multiple hierarchical regression analyses. Only significant effects and the corresponding β of the opposite sex are presented (\*\*\**p* < 0.001; \*\**p* < 0.01; \**p* < 0.05).

<sup>c</sup>R<sup>2</sup> change from hierarchical regression analyses of relationship quality with friends on partnership outcome (step 2) controlling for personality traits of both couple members (step 1).

cross-sectional nature of the data, however, we believe that our conceptualization of the personality–relationship link is consistent with findings from recent longitudinal studies (e.g. Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001), showing that personality is an enduring (albeit not unchangeable) property of the individual person, whereas dyadic relationships depend, among other things, on both partners' personalities and are therefore less stable, more prone to external influences, and also deliberately terminable. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that we use the term personality effect in a statistical sense rather than a conceptual one that would imply causality, and future research is encouraged to examine simultaneous or sequential changes in both partners' personality traits, views of partner relationships, and social networks. Regarding the use of self-reports and our non-representative sampling, the findings are clearly limited to the self-presentation of a well educated, urban sample of romantic couples with relatively short relationship duration.



### **Dyadic similarity is stronger in perceived relationship quality than in personality traits**

Our study replicated the findings of prior studies that romantic partners usually do not resemble each other very much in their personality traits, with a notable exception being openness to experience (see e.g. Buss, 1984; Botwin et al., 1997; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Lykken & Tellegen, 1993; McCrae, 1996; Watson et al., 2000). Unlike these other studies, however, we also found substantial similarity in conscientiousness. We examined whether the couples that were similar in their personality traits were also happier with their relationship and failed to find a consistent pattern of effects. This is consistent with other research indicating that similarity effects, if any, are at the most to be found in the area of attitudes and values rather than for basic personality traits (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

In contrast to the low similarity in personality traits, partners were much more consistent in how they experienced their quality of relationship, which is also in line with other research findings. Although similarity between partners reflects that relationship qualities are, to some extent, genuine dyadic features of relationships, it is also important to realize that similarity levels were moderate, indicating that at the same time partners have unique experiences that they do not share with each other. In addition, partners were also moderately similar in how they experienced their social network relationships. Two possible reasons may account for the latter observation. First, the social networks of the partners may have already existed before the partners started their relationship, whereby the similarity in social network properties could be due to assortment or compositional effects. Assortment effects could be due to both partners staying in the same social contexts in which they met, such as university, subculture, and friendship networks. Indeed, the similarity of friendship relationships was stronger than similarity in relationships with parents. Alternatively, it can be argued that during the course of their relationship both partners' social networks may have become more and more similar as their social networks increasingly overlapped.

### **More actor than partner effects account for the personality–relationship fit**

We studied the contribution of each partner's personality traits to the relationship experiences using the partner effect model by Kenny (1996). From the observed 15 actor effects and 6 partner effects it may be generally concluded that how the participants viewed their relationships was much more in accord with their own personality traits than with the personality of the partner. However, it cannot be ruled out that shared method variance resulting from using self-reports for both personality as well as relationship measures resulted in a slight overestimation of actor effects as compared with partner effects, which are not prone to shared method effects. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect that a comparable pattern of results would be observed with data from multiple informants, and future research should continue using knowledgeable informants in judgments of personality and relationship outcomes in order to control for method variances (see Neyer, in press). Therefore, we agree with a recent conclusion of Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt (2002) that it is not so much who you are with but who you are that constitutes relationship outcomes. However, unlike Robins et al., who based their conclusion on the consistency of subsequent partner relationships, we contend from a dyadic perspective that relationship quality is not only a matter of the individual personality, but also, albeit in the second place, of the personality of the partner. Earlier

studies have arrived at a similar conclusion when applying a dyadic perspective, even though these studies used different concepts of personality, such as positive and negative emotionality, constraint, and trait anxiety (see e.g. Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney and Bradbury, 1997; Robins et al., 2000).

Our study adds to the literature that agreeableness is an important personality trait shaping romantic relationships. Among the big five traits and self-esteem, agreeableness yielded the most consistent effects on relationship outcomes. Agreeableness predicted self-perceived relationship satisfaction, attachment security, and the dependency and importance of partner. At the same time, self-perceived relationship satisfaction and felt insecurity were predicted by the agreeableness of the partner. As an enduring trait, agreeableness is related to the willingness to cooperate, to solve conflicts, and to negotiate compromises. Because the vicious circle of conflict escalation is one of the most powerful predictors of both relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution (Gottman, 1994), it seems reasonable to expect that both partners are sensitive for each other's agreeableness, especially in the early stages of relationship, where they get a deeper knowledge of each other's personality and negotiate basic relationship issues.

The effects of neuroticism were smaller and less frequent than we had expected based on past research. On the one hand, this was perhaps related to ceiling effects (our participants were noticeably low in neuroticism and high in relationship satisfaction). On the other hand, this might have been due to the short duration of the relationships in the present sample, and stable neuroticism could have different short-term and long-term effects. Nevertheless, the observed actor effects on self-perceived attachment security and dependency were in the expected direction, and insecurity in the partner's presence was associated with both partners' levels of neuroticism. Moreover, these effects were consistent with the effects of general self-esteem, a trait highly related to neuroticism but usually conceived of as a more statelike feature of personality, or as a more environmentally contingent adaptation (although recent research suggests that self-esteem is a personality trait with a temporal stability approaching the levels of the big five, see Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003).

Some actor effects, but no partner effects (with one exception), were also observed for the remaining traits, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness. Extraversion was positively related to self-perceived attachment security (and negatively to self-perceived insecurity in the presence of the partner)—which possibly reflects that extraverted people generally feel comfortable in social relationships. For example, Asendorpf et al. (1997) found that extraversion was not only positively associated with attachment security toward the partner, but also positively correlated with attachment security toward same-sex and opposite-sex peers. Conscientiousness was related to self-perceived relationship satisfaction and attachment security, but not to the corresponding relationship qualities experienced by the partner. In line with the results of Karney and Bradbury (1995) and Watson et al. (2000), openness to experience was only weakly related to relationship outcomes. However, one partner effect showed that higher openness was associated with higher relationship satisfaction experienced by the partner (especially by female partners). This partner effect replicated findings of Bouchard et al. (1999) and Botwin et al. (1997), who observed that particularly women appreciated the openness of their male partners, and were in turn more satisfied with their relationships. Since openness is not only related to open-mindedness, unconventionality, and tolerance, but also associated with intelligence, brightness, and creativity, the openness of a male partner could be a sign of social status,

and thus, at least from an evolutionary point of view, increases his attractiveness and thereby his partner's satisfaction.

### **Social network relationships count beyond personality**

Partner relationships do not exist in a social vacuum. Partners not only bring their personalities and biographies, but also their current relationships with others as well as earlier relationship experiences to their partner relationship. In the present research, we studied the associations of the concurrent relationship experiences in social networks with partner relationships once the effects of personality traits of each partner were controlled. We controlled for personality associations for two reasons. First, because social network experiences were also likely to be affected by personality traits, we wanted to perform a strict test of the social network experiences that were independent of both partners' personality traits. Second, the statistical control of personality effects allowed us to at least partly avoid effects that were due to shared method variance. We studied three kinds of effect, cross-relationship effects, and specific effects of relationship with parents and friends, and obtained two general results. First, as expected we once again found a clear superiority of actor over partner effects. Second, whereas the observed cross-relationship effects and effects of parent relationships were in accord with the consistency hypothesis, friendship relationships were characterized by both consistency and complementary effects. Thus, all in all, the way young adults experienced their partner relationship was more consistent with their own social network relationships than with those of their partners.

The cross-relationship effects can be viewed as a kind of disposition toward the regulation of relationships, because these effects are based on relationship experiences aggregated across a variety of one's own and the partner's social network relationships, respectively. Therefore, it was not surprising to find more actor than partner effects, and more consistency than complementary effects. This pattern was slightly different for men and women. For example, only actor effects were observed for women, indicating that women's experiences of partnership were completely independent of the social networks of their male partners, whereas actor effects and one partner effect were observed for men: the insecurity in the partner's presence was consistent with the general insecurity experienced in social networks of the partner. It should also be acknowledged, however, that the observed effects sizes were small (in terms of incremental variances); that is, there seems to be no strong consistency between the individually perceived quality of partner relationships and the general way of relating with others, suggesting no broad relationship disposition that would generalize across different kinds of relationship (see also Asendorpf et al., 1997; Baldwin et al., 1996).

Consistency was also observed between one's relationships with parents and partner relationships. This general finding was surprising because based on sociological research (e.g. Blood, 1969; Burger & Milardo, 1995) one might have expected complementarity, for example, between closeness with parents and partners. This kind of complementarity at the very beginning of partner relationships has been sometimes called the *Romeo and Juliet effect*, especially when parental interference was associated with increased romantic love for the dating couple (Driscoll, Davis, & Lipetz, 1972). The parent relationships experienced by the partner, however, were completely unrelated to the partner relationship quality, which seems to reflect that the families of origin were still independent systems that had not begun to have an influence during the first few years of partner relationship.

This interpretation is additionally supported by the low dyadic correlations between the parent relationship qualities of both partners, indicating that romantic partners in the present sample were not matched, or assorted, by their relationships with their family of origin.

A somewhat different picture emerged from the effect of friendship relationships. Both partners were not only moderately similar in how they perceived their friendships, but their friendship networks also appeared to influence each other's experience of their partner relationship. Although these findings are preliminary (because they are not consistent with findings reported in the literature), and replication by future longitudinal studies is very much required, we see two conclusions from this study. First, the associations of friendship relationships with partner relationships are closer than between parent and partner relationships. This result once again reflects that social relationships of young adults are more peer legitimated than kinship legitimated (Milardo & Lewis, 1985). It is therefore possible that young adult partners are matched for their friendship networks; that is, friendship relationships not only provide the opportunity to introduce potential partners, but also may serve as role models for romantic relationships. Consistent with this speculation are findings by Furman, Simon, Shaffer, and Bouchee (2002), who found in a study with adolescents aged from 16 to 19 years that attachment working models of partner and friendship relationships were more consistent than the attachment working models of partner and parent relationships. The second conclusion pertains to the mix of consistency and complementary effects: because of the proximity between friendship and romantic relationships, it could be argued that in some instances friendships serve as models of romantic relationships leading to consistency effects, whereas in other instances friendships may serve as counter-models, thus leading to compensatory, or complementary effects. For example, whereas in men the closeness with partner and friends was complementary, the closeness with friends and partner was consistent in women.

## **General discussion**

Our study has addressed the dyadic relations between personality and partner relationship quality, and the relations between social networks and partner relationships. Whereas the latter perspective may stimulate a dialogue between personality psychology and sociology, the former has implications for the concept of personality–relationship transaction. Our finding that from a dyadic perspective it is more one's personality, rather than that of the partner, that influences the relationship experience is consistent with recent longitudinal studies on personality–relationship transaction in young adulthood. These studies have shown from an individual perspective that in general personality effects on relationships are more frequent and more profound than vice versa (see e.g. Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Robins et al., 2002). This view of the personality–relationship transaction joins in an emerging story, based on growing evidence that in adulthood personality traits show remarkable levels of continuity despite one's varied experiences in life. At the same time, however, research has also shown that personality traits undergo important and systematic changes that are connected to particular meaningful life experiences. For example, it has been observed that becoming involved in a stable partner relationship for the first time enhances the maturity of young adults by increasing emotional stability and conscientiousness (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). Both the influence of personality on relationships *and* the sensitivity of personality to new, profound

relationship experiences can be integrated by two basic rules on personality–relationship transaction that have been recently proposed by Neyer (2004).

First, by the onset of adulthood individual differences in personality have become fairly stable, thereby exerting long-term and accumulative effects on relationships, and thus people react to social experiences due to their individual dispositions. Relationship experiences, in contrast, have only short-term effects, because they are interpreted in a way that suits the individual personality, thereby deepening rather than changing the individual personality. Second, it can nevertheless be assumed that new relationships may have the potential of bringing about personality change, especially when they accompany age-graded life transitions. New relationships with partners, for example, may offer turning points for personality change, leading the individual person to accomplish new social tasks. It may be, but remains to be tested empirically, that other expected and age-graded life transitions in adulthood (e.g. becoming a parent, divorce in midlife, emptying of the nest, widowhood) may also have the potential to ‘catalyse’ change in personality. Although such life transitions are age graded and thus reflect normative developmental paths, individuals may differ very much in when and how they accomplish these tasks, which is why this perspective is of interest from a transactional view of personality.

The present research, in an exemplary manner, combined the personality perspective and the social network perspective. We see several advantages of this interdisciplinary approach. First, it reminds personality psychologists that personality does not exist in a social vacuum but unfolds in contexts of relationships with others. Second, it reminds social scientists such as social network researchers that social structure is by no means just a distal factor exerting tremendous effects on individuals. It is also actively created by virtue of the enduring characteristics of individuals *in* relationships. Both advantages can potentially stimulate the re-emerging dialogue between personality psychology and sociology regarding the relationships between social structure and personality. This dialogue may lead to a more profound understanding that personality and social environments (with relationships as its most important constituents) are reciprocally rather than unilaterally related.

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