# Effects of global and contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers have made great strides in conceptualizing and assessing contextualized personality—how people's personalities vary across different contexts (e.g., among friends, co-workers, and relationship partners). We investigated how global and contextualized personality traits are linked to relationship satisfaction. In Study 1, longitudinal associations between global and contextualized personality and relationship satisfaction were examined in a sample of adults in committed dating relationships. Study 2 investigated actor and partner effects of global and contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction in undergraduate couples. Study 3 used observer ratings of contextualized personality traits expressed in couples' daily Instant Messages (IMs). These results demonstrate that contextualized personality—in particular neuroticism—is linked to the quality of both current and future romantic relationships.

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## 1. Introduction

Amy and Karen are discussing Amy's relationship with her boyfriend, David. "I don't understand why you're with him," Karen tells Amy, "he's such a jerk." "I know what you mean," replies Amy, "but he's so different when we're alone." Do people really behave differently in romantic relationships than they do in general? If so, is it what people's personalities are like in general or what their personalities are like specifically in the contexts of their relationships (or both) that are most predictive of the quality of their relationships?

Researchers have long been interested in the effects of personality on romantic relationships, with roughly 500 studies dating back to the 1930s published on this topic (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). The findings from these studies have demonstrated that certain stable personality factors are associated with relationship outcomes (cf. Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Terman & Buttenwieser, 1935). While there is little doubt that enduring, stable personality traits influence how people approach and view their relationships, it remains unclear whether it is people's global personality traits—across all contexts—that drive the quality of their relationships, or whether it is how people's traits are manifested specifically in their relationships that matter most. Very few studies have examined the links between relationship outcomes and contextualized personality—for example, how neurotic a person is within the context of a particular type of relationship (for notable exceptions, see Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, & Perunovic, 2007 and Wood & Roberts, 2006).

The effects of contextualized personality may seem fairly obvious. After all, a number of theorists have suggested that with regard to measurement, greater specificity leads to greater predictive power (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Bandura, 1999; Cervone, 1999; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). However, recent findings indicate that in some instances, global personality is actually a better predictor of behaviors than is contextualized personality. For example, Wood (2007) showed that although contextualized extraversion was more strongly linked to concurrent contextualized behaviors (e.g., perceptions of peer acceptance in an organization) than global extraversion, global extraversion was a better predictor of future role experiences. Thus, it has been argued that global trait measures may better capture the causes of a person's behaviors than contextualized measures, whereas contextualized personality ratings are simply outgrowths of role experiences and behaviors, not causal forces behind them.

With this article, we extend previous research by examining how global and contextualized personality traits influence current and future romantic relationship satisfaction. Can David really be a nice guy when he is with Amy, even though he is a jerk to everyone else? And if so, how is his relationship satisfaction (and Amy's satisfaction) linked to his global, negative personality attributes and to his more sunny disposition in the context of his role as a romantic partner? Further, does David's contextualized personality merely reflect his current relationship experiences (e.g., his satisfaction with his relationship with Amy) or might it actually drive his future relationship experiences?

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A number of scholars in our field have called for a more contextualized approach to the study of personality and relationships (e.g., Heller et al., 2007; McAdams, 1995; Reis, Capobianco, & Tsai, 2002). Global measures of personality often provide a fairly accurate picture of how a person generally is across different relationship roles—for example, roles such as romantic partner, friend, and sibling (Branje, van Lieshout, & van Aken, 2004; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003; Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). However, global measures are typically less predictive of what people are like in a particular type of relationship than are contextualized measures. For example, Asendorpf and Wilpers (1998) showed that general interpersonal traits—including extraversion, sociability, and shyness—predict general patterns of social behavior but are only modestly associated with the qualities of specific relationships. Similarly, trust in a romantic partner, but not generalized trust, predicts relationship commitment and well-being (Couch & Jones, 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). A number of recent studies have examined the links between global and contextualized attachment across multiple relationships, such as ratings of attachment toward romantic partner, closest platonic friend, mother, and father (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Pierce & Lydon, 2001; Sibley & Overall, 2008). This line of research has shown, for example, that approximately 25–35% of the variance in measures of avoidance and anxiety experienced in relationships with specific others (e.g., roommate, mother, father, romantic partner) reflects between-person variation in attachment style, while much the remaining variance represents within-person variation in feelings of attachment between those different types of relationships (La Guardia et al., 2000). However, beyond studies of attachment, very few researchers have examined contextualized effects of personality on relationships.

Most personality-relationship studies have examined associations between global personality traits and relationship outcomes, particularly focusing on the traits of the Five Factor Model (FFM; McCrae & Costa, 1999)—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. In relationship studies, neuroticism has been far and away the most extensively studied of these traits (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Terman & Buttenwieser, 1935). Those who are high in neuroticism—generally characterized as anxious, irritable, and emotionally unstable—typically report being less satisfied in their romantic relationships than those who are low in neuroticism and have less stable relationships. Further, neuroticism has been shown to be prospectively linked to declines in relationship satisfaction in ongoing relationships (Caughlin et al., 2000) and lower levels of satisfaction in future romantic relationships (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005). Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness have also been linked to the quality of romantic relationships, albeit less consistently than neuroticism (e.g., Bouchard & Arseneault, 2005; Bouchard et al., 1999; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000).

Relationship researchers generally have incorporated global but not contextualized measures of the FFM into their studies. However, a number of studies have utilized contextualized measures of personality in order to elucidate the dispositional sources of satisfaction in other domains. In organizational psychology, for example, researchers have examined the links between global personality, job role personality and job satisfaction. In one study (Hunthausen, Truxillo, Bauer, & Hammer, 2003), customer service supervisors at a large US airline completed a modified version of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) in which they were asked what their personalities were like at work; additionally they completed the standard NEO-FFI. Partici-pants' levels of extraversion and openness in their roles as workers predicted job performance, while global personality did not. Other studies have shown that college students' self-ratings of conscientiousness in their roles as students predicted their grades better than global measures of conscientiousness (Lievens, De Corte, & Schollaert, 2008; Schmit, Ryan, Stierwalt, & Powell, 1995). Most relevant to this research, Heller and Watson (2005) found that when people are asked about their personalities at work and their personalities at home, personality at work is most closely related to job satisfaction, whereas personality at home is most closely related to marital satisfaction.

Knowing what people's personalities are like in the specific context of their romantic relationships may be helpful in clarifying the antecedents of important relationship outcomes. For example, assessing how neurotic a person is in his romantic relationships may provide unique predictive power about the quality of that person's relationships above and beyond how neurotic he is in general. Preliminary findings support this idea. For example, Wood and Roberts (2006) found contextualized personality to be more strongly associated with concurrent relationship satisfaction than global personality. However, it is unknown to what extent contextualized personality is predictive of romantic partners' satisfaction, or how predictive it is of more long-term outcomes, such as changes in relationship satisfaction over time or satisfaction in future relationships.

Naturally, the way in which personality is manifested in one's romantic relationships is not independent from global dispositions. Global dispositions should influence how personality is expressed in relationships and, in turn, influence relationship experiences (and be influenced by them). So, in our example, David's neuroticism when he is with Amy (moderate) would be influenced in part by his overall level of neuroticism (high) as well as other factors (e.g., previous experiences in relationships, Amy's behavior toward him, and so on).

One would predict that contextualized neuroticism should be more strongly linked to current relationship satisfaction than would global neuroticism. But would contextualized neuroticism also be expected to be more predictive of future relationship outcomes, such as the trajectory of Amy and David's relationship quality? Initial findings (Wood, 2007) have shown that global personality actually may be a better predictor of future role experiences than contextualized personality; however no studies to our knowledge have examined the links between contextualized personality and future role experiences in the domain of romantic relationships. Some might surmise that global traits should be better predictors of future role experiences than contextualized traits because global traits are more stable and less malleable by external factors than are contextualized traits. However, contextualized trait ratings have been found to have a level of stability comparable to global trait ratings, with both global and contextualized trait measures showing stabilities of approximately $r = .70$ over a six-month period (Wood & Roberts, 2006). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that personality expressed in the context of people's relationships—above and beyond global personality—might uniquely predict future relationship experiences. This should be especially true for neuroticism, which, among the FFM traits, has shown the most robust links with relationship outcomes (Bouchard et al., 1999; Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

### 1.1. Aims of our research

The major aim of this work is to examine the extent to which contextualized and global personality traits are linked to romantic relationship satisfaction. Our research also aims to extend previous work in other notable aspects. First, with few exceptions, the bulk of the research in this area has been cross-sectional, with very few studies examining the longitudinal effects of contextualized

personality. We sought to address this issue by examining the links between contextualized personality and relationship satisfaction among adults in committed dating relationships over two time points separated by 1 year (Study 1). Second, ours are the first studies we know of to examine the links to partners' satisfaction levels (Studies 2 and 3). Third, contextualized personality research typically has relied on self-report measures in which participants usually are asked to rate themselves in a particular context using the same list of adjectives or statements used in global measures of personality (e.g., Donahue & Harary, 1998; Heller & Watson, 2005; Roberts & Donahue, 1994; Wood & Roberts, 2006). This approach is straightforward, easy to administer, and has yielded compelling evidence for the predictive validity of contextualized personality. However, this approach has some limitations. For example, Heller and colleagues (2007) have noted that this approach may create demand characteristics by inducing participants to indicate different personality patterns across different roles—creating artificial variability between roles. In addition, showing that self-reports of contextualized personality predict self-reported relationship satisfaction naturally leads one to wonder about the extent of overlap between the two constructs. That is, perhaps people's self-perceptions of their role in a relationship are biased by how well the relationship is going. Thus, we sought to corroborate our findings with non-self-report measures of contextualized personality. We did this by utilizing archival data from a naturalistic study of couples' behavior to obtain observer-reports of what people's personalities are like in the specific context of their romantic relationships (Study 3).

### 1.2. Overview of studies and hypotheses

We sought to accomplish the above aims with three studies. Study 1 was a 1-year longitudinal study of adults in dating relationships. Participants were directed to a website where they completed brief FFM measures of global and contextualized personality and a measure of romantic relationship satisfaction. One year later, they were contacted to inquire whether they were still in their initial relationship and, if so, how satisfied they were in that relationship (or how satisfied they were in their new relationship if they were in a new one).

In Study 2, we investigated the effects of global and contextualized personality on self- and partner-reported relationship satisfaction in a sample of committed dating couples. In addition, whereas only brief measures of global and contextualized personality were used in Study 1, longer measures were added to Study 2.

Study 3 used archival data from a study (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006) in which dating couples submitted a week's worth of daily Instant Message (IM) conversations with each other. In this study, self-reports of global personality and relationship satisfaction were collected from both members of each couple. Independent observers reviewed couples' IMs and made assessments of contextualized personality. With this design, we could test the effects of contextualized personality on self- and partner-reported relationship satisfaction with greater experimental control than with Studies 1 and 2, allowing us to assess whether the effects of global and contextualized personality on relationship outcomes are similarly observed when an alternative, observer-based measure of contextualized personality is used.

Based on previous findings, we hypothesized that:

(H1) Contextualized neuroticism would be negatively associated with current levels of self-reported relationship satisfaction, above and beyond global neuroticism;

(H2) Contextualized neuroticism would be predictive of declines in self-reported relationship satisfaction, above and beyond global neuroticism;

(H3) Contextualized neuroticism would be predictive of lower levels of satisfaction in future relationships, above and beyond global neuroticism; and

(H4) Contextualized neuroticism would be associated with lower levels of partner-reported relationship satisfaction, above and beyond global neuroticism.

We also investigated the links between global and contextualized personality and relationship satisfaction among the other four FFM traits—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. However, because of the inconsistent findings in previous studies, these analyses were more exploratory in nature; thus, no specific hypotheses were made about the associations between these traits and relationship satisfaction.

## 2. Study 1: longitudinal investigation of individuals in dating relationships

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Participants

Using the online classified webpage *Craig's List*, participants were recruited from 10 major US cities. Inclusion criteria were that they were at least 18 years old and were currently involved in a heterosexual dating relationship of at least 3 months in duration. Participants were assessed twice, with the second assessment 1 year after the first. The final sample was comprised of 180 participants (148 women and 32 men) who completed both phases of the study out of the 339 participants who initially signed up for the study during Phase I. Relationship lengths ranged from 3 months to 15 years ($M = 1.93$ years; $SD = 1.77$ years). The sample was comprised of 3.3% African American; 4.4% Asian; 82.8% Caucasian; 4.4% Latino; 4.4% other, and ranged in age from 18 to 60 ($M = 28.76$; $SD = 8.05$). Attrition analyses indicated that, of the variables measured during Phase I, four differed between those who participated in Phase II and those who did not. Those who participated in Phase II were significantly more agreeable in the context of their romantic relationships ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.07$) compared to those who did not ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(337) = 2.85$, $p < .05$, $d = .31$; more conscientious in the context of their romantic relationships ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.31$) compared to those who did not ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(337) = 2.21$, $p < .05$, $d = .23$; less neurotic in the context of their relationships ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.47$) compared to those who did not ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(337) = 2.79$, $p < .05$, $d = .31$, and reported higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .82$) compared to those who did not ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .81$), $t(337) = 2.93$, $p < .05$, $d = .31$. Participants were unpaid but upon completing the study were provided with basic information about whether they scored below average, about average, or above average on the five dimensions of the FFM compared to others who had previously completed the same measure.

#### 2.1.2. Procedure

Participants were directed from advertisements posted on *Craig's List* to a password-protected website at the University of Texas at Austin; previous research has demonstrated that web-based questionnaires provide valid, reliable data, and are not adversely affected by non-serious responders (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). After completing an online consent form, participants provided basic demographic information. They then completed a global FFM personality measure, a contextualized FFM personality measure, and a measure of relationship satisfaction. Presentation of all measures was counterbalanced to identify any potential order effects; no order effects were found.

One year after the initial assessment, participants were contacted via email and directed to a password-protected website for the second assessment. They were asked: (1) whether they still were dating the same person that they had been dating 1 year earlier when they first took part in the study, (2) whether they were dating someone new if the previous relationship had ended, and (3) if they were currently in a relationship, to indicate how satisfied they were in that relationship (whether it be with their initial partner or a new one).

### 2.1.3. Measures

*2.1.3.1. Personality.* The Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) was used to measure both global and contextualized personality. The standard version of the TIPI constituted our global measure of personality. The TIPI contains two items for each of the FFM dimensions, with each item rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). The TIPI shows high convergent validity with other widely-used FFM scales in self- and observer-reports. The scale was constructed to emphasize content validity considerations, such that internal consistency estimates are sometimes low; however, the scale has demonstrated very good test–retest reliability (mean *r* = .72 across traits; Gosling et al., 2003). We used the TIPI to measure both global personality and contextualized personality. In line with previous studies examining contextualized personality (e.g., Donahue & Harary, 1998; Heller & Watson, 2005; Wood & Roberts, 2006), the instructions for each of the contextualized measures were modified versions of standard global personality measure instructions. The original TIPI instructions (which were used in our global measure) read, "Below are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other," whereas the instructions for the contextualized measure read, "Here are a number of descriptions that may or may not apply to you with regard to how you act around your romantic partner. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each description below. You should rate the extent to which each pair of words applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other." The content of the actual items themselves remained the same across the global and contextualized measures. The internal consistencies of the trait scales were comparable when used as a global personality measure (αs of .72, .35, .67, .70, and .45 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively) and as a contextualized measure (αs of .62, .43, .66, .71, and .38 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively).

*2.1.3.2. Relationship satisfaction.* Romantic relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). The RAS is a widely-used and validated measure of relationship satisfaction that correlates strongly with measures of love, commitment, investment and dyadic adjustment. The RAS consists of seven items on a 5-point Likert-type scale such as, "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" The internal reliability (α) for the current sample was .89, which is typical of reliability estimates reported for this measure.

### 2.2. Results

#### 2.2.1. Correlations between global and contextualized personality

Correlations between the global and contextualized personality measures for each trait were generally strong, with *r*s of .43, .57, .68, .64, .56 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively (all *p*s < .05).

*2.2.1.1. H1: associations between personality and relationship satisfaction.* Initially, separate correlation analyses were run for men and women and tests of the differences in magnitude of correlations for men and were conducted. No gender differences emerged, thus all analyses presented here are collapsed across gender. As shown in Table 1, global neuroticism was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction; none of the other global traits was correlated with satisfaction. Contextualized personality was correlated with relationship satisfaction across all traits. In support of H1, when global and contextualized neuroticism were entered together in a regression, contextualized neuroticism was significantly associated with satisfaction ($\beta = -.52$, $p < .05$), whereas global neuroticism was not ($\beta = .17$, n.s.).

*2.2.1.2. H2: predicting changes in relationship satisfaction for those in intact relationships.* We next examined the extent to which global and contextualized personality were predictive of changes in relationship satisfaction for those in intact relationships at the 1-year follow-up. At the follow-up assessment, 110 (61.5%) participants were still dating the same person. Relationship satisfaction at baseline was strongly correlated with satisfaction at follow-up ($r = .67$, $p < .05$). As shown in Table 2, higher global conscientiousness and lower global neuroticism were associated with relative increases in relationship satisfaction one year later (controlling for baseline relationship satisfaction). Higher contextualized agreeableness and lower contextualized neuroticism were also associated with relative increases in satisfaction. In support of H2, after entering both the global and contextualized traits into a regression, contextualized neuroticism—but not global neuroticism—predicted relative declines in satisfaction (contextualized $\beta = -.47$, $p < .05$; global $\beta = -.15$, n.s.). None of the other traits significantly predicted residualized changes in satisfaction above and beyond contextualized neuroticism.

*2.2.1.3. H3: predicting relationship satisfaction for those in new relationships.* We next examined the extent to which global and contextualized personality were predictive of relationship satisfaction for those in new relationships at the 1-year follow-up; 37 participants (20.5%) were dating someone new after having broken up with their initial dating partner. Relationship satisfaction in the previous relationship at baseline was unrelated to satisfaction in the new relationship ($r = .24$, n.s.). However, as shown in Table 3, contextualized neuroticism significantly predicted lower levels of satisfaction in people's new relationships (H3), while contextualized extraversion predicted higher levels of satisfaction (with *r*s of −.48 and .37, respectively); none of the global traits predicted satisfaction in new relationships. Further, the association between contextualized neuroticism and satisfaction in one's new relationship held when controlling for satisfaction in the previous relationship (partial $r = -.43$, $p < .05$).

*2.2.1.3.1. Summary of Study 1 Findings.* Study 1 first replicated previous findings (e.g., Wood & Roberts, 2006) showing that contextualized neuroticism is more strongly associated with current relationship satisfaction than global neuroticism (H1). For those

**Table 1**
Correlations between personality and relationship satisfaction – Study 1.

| Trait | Global personality | Contextualized personality |
|---|---|---|
| Extraversion | .03 | .42[*] |
| Agreeableness | .07 | .44[*] |
| Conscientiousness | .13 | .23[*] |
| Neuroticism | −.16[*] | −.41[*] |
| Openness | .14 | .43[*] |

*Note: N* = 180 (148 females and 32 males). Zero-order correlations are shown.
[*] *p* < .05, two-tailed.

**Table 2**
Personality predictors of changes in relationship satisfaction for those in intact relationships at 1-year follow-up – Study 1.

| Trait | Global personality | Contextualized personality |
|---|---|---|
| Extraversion | .02 | .14 |
| Agreeableness | .11 | .20[*] |
| Conscientiousness | .21[*] | .13 |
| Neuroticism | −.34[*] | −.40[*] |
| Openness | .04 | .02 |

*Note*: $N = 110$ (93 females and 17 males). Values are semi-partial correlations, controlling for initial relationship satisfaction.
[*] $p < .05$, two-tailed.

**Table 3**
Personality predictors of relationship satisfaction for those in new relationships at 1-year follow-up – Study 1.

| Trait | Global personality | Contextualized personality |
|---|---|---|
| Extraversion | .10 | .37[*] |
| Agreeableness | −.24 | −.05 |
| Conscientiousness | .10 | .28 |
| Neuroticism | −.22 | −.48[*] |
| Openness | −.08 | .21 |

*Note*: $N = 37$ (31 females and 6 males). Zero-order correlations are shown.
[*] $p < .05$, two-tailed.

still dating the same person, contextualized neuroticism predicted declines in relationship satisfaction even after controlling for the effects of global neuroticism (H2); for those dating someone else, contextualized neuroticism—but not global neuroticism—was predictive of lower levels of satisfaction in that new relationship (H3).

## 3. Study 2: effects of global and contextualized personality on self- and partner-reported satisfaction

With Study 2, we sought to extend the findings from Study 1 and investigate the links between contextualized personality traits and partners' satisfaction levels by collecting personality and satisfaction measures from both members of couples. Additionally, we sought to assess contextualized personality using a longer, well-validated FFM measure, compared to the very brief 10 item measure used in Study 1; we had couple members report on their global and contextualized personality traits using both the TIPI and the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999).

### 3.1. Participants

Sixty couples in dating relationships were recruited from the Austin, TX metropolitan area via flyers and advertisements posted on the websites *Craig's List* and *Facebook* on the basis that they were in a long-term romantic relationship (>1 year) and unmarried. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 26 ($M = 20.83$, $SD = 1.73$). The ethnic make-up of the sample was 62.5% White/ Caucasian, 16.7% Asian, 14.2% Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% Black/African American, and 5% indicating other ethnicity. Couples had been dating from 1 to 5 years ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.05$) and indicated that they either were in a serious dating relationship (85.8%) or life partnership (14.2%). Each couple was paid $20 for participating in the study.

### 3.2. Procedure

After getting informed consent from participants, an experimenter led each couple member to one of two separate rooms to complete global and contextualized personality questionnaires and the RAS. All measures were counterbalanced to prevent order

effects; no order effects were found. Couples then were paid for their participation in the study and dismissed from the lab.

### 3.3. Measures

#### 3.3.1. Personality
Two different measures of global and contextualized personality were used in this study. The first was the same used in Study 1, the TIPI (Gosling et al., 2003). Alpha reliabilities for the global TIPI in this sample were .84, .50, .46, .72, and .46 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively. Alpha reliabilities for the contextualized TIPI in this sample were .64, .46, .35, .75, and .50 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively.

Couples also completed global and contextualized personality ratings using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999), a scale with high convergent validity with other measures of the FFM. BFI items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Similar to the TIPI, the instructions on the contextualized BFI were altered so that participants were instructed to make ratings based on what they were like specifically in the context of their romantic relationship. Alpha reliabilities for the global BFI in this sample were .89, .80, .78, .76, and .82 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively. Alpha reliabilities for the contextualized BFI in this sample were .76, .78, .70, .83, and .83 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively.

#### 3.3.2. Relationship satisfaction
As with Study 1, relationship satisfaction was measured using the RAS (Hendrick, 1988). In the present sample, alpha reliability was .79.

### 3.4. Results

#### 3.4.1. Convergence between TIPI and BFI
There was strong convergence between the TIPI and BFI across traits, both when used as a global measure and as a contextualized measure. Convergence correlations between the global TIPI and BFI were .88, .69, .77, .79, and .66 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively (all $ps < .05$). Convergence correlations between the contextualized TIPI and BFI were .80, .78, .74, .74, and .65 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively (all $ps < .05$). For the sake of parsimony—and because of the strong convergence between the TIPI and the BFI for both the global and contextualized personality measures—all analyses below are based solely on the BFI measures. We chose the BFI over the TIPI as it is the more reliable of the two measures; the results from analyses using the TIPI were virtually identical to those reported below using the BFI.

#### 3.4.2. Correlations between global and contextualized personality
The contextualized BFI was strongly correlated with the global BFI. Correlations between the global and contextualized BFI were .60, .68, .71, .69, and .86 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively (all $ps < .05$).

#### 3.4.3. Associations between global and contextualized personality and self- and partner-reported relationship satisfaction
##### 3.4.3.1. Overview of data analytic strategy: the actor-partner interdependence model. A unique characteristic of dyadic data is that the data from two couple members are not independent. For example, people who are satisfied in their romantic relationship tend to have romantic partners who also are satisfied; people who are optimistic

tend to have optimistic romantic partners, and so on. To account for this interdependence in statistical analyses, relationship researchers have begun to frame their analyses in the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, 1996).

The APIM is a technique designed to address interdependence in dyadic analysis. This technique allows researchers to estimate, for example, the influence of one person's personality (e.g., levels of neuroticism) on her own relationship satisfaction—called *actor* effects—as well as the effects of her personality on her partner's relationship satisfaction—called *partner* effects. Estimation of actor and partner effects can conveniently be accomplished using structural equation modeling (SEM) and other commonly used statistical methods.

We conducted APIM analyses using SEM to examine associations between global and contextualized personality traits and relationship satisfaction. Because all of our dyads were heterosexual dating couples, we initially distinguished the members of the dyads based on gender. This basic APIM model is just identified or saturated (for illustrative examples see Kashy and Kenny (2000), Kenny and Acitelli (2001)). As such, it has zero degrees of freedom (see Kline (2005) for a full explanation of identification within structural equation modeling). However, actor and partner effects can still be estimated.

*3.4.3.2. Gender differences.* In the APIM analyses conducted below, we first allowed the paths of males and females to vary from each other; we then ran analyses in which we constrained men's and women's paths to be equal to each other in each model. Significant gender differences are indicated when constraining these paths to be equal results in significantly worse-fitting models (compared to the saturated, unconstrained basic APIM models). In none of these analyses were the fits of the respective models significantly worsened by constraining men's and women's paths to be equal. Accordingly, based on recommendations described in Olsen and Kenny (2006) for statistically interchangeable dyads, the APIM results presented below constrain male and female paths to be equal.

*3.4.3.3. (H1) Actor and (H4) partner effects of global and contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction.* As shown in Table 4, participants' relationship satisfaction was positively associated with their own contextualized agreeableness and negatively associated with their own contextualized neuroticism (H1). Additionally, participants' relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with partners' global neuroticism and contextualized neuroticism (H4), and positively associated with partners' contextualized agreeableness and conscientiousness.

### 3.4.4. Unique effects of global and contextualized personality on satisfaction

We next tested whether contextualized neuroticism remained a significant predictor of satisfaction when controlling for global

**Table 4**
APIM associations between personality and relationship satisfaction – Study 2.

| Trait | Global personality | | Contextualized personality | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Self satisfaction | Partner satisfaction | Self satisfaction | Partner satisfaction |
| Extraversion | .06 | .00 | .08 | .05 |
| Agreeableness | .16 | .12 | .32* | .25* |
| Conscientiousness | .10 | .01 | .10 | .24* |
| Neuroticism | −.18 | −.25* | −.33* | −.29* |
| Openness | .12 | .15 | .11 | .12 |

*Note*: N = 60 couples (60 males and 60 females). Standardized path coefficients from APIM model are reported. Global and contextualized personality regressions were run separately.
\* p < .05, two-tailed.

neuroticism. As hypothesized, we found that when contextualized and global neuroticism were entered together, contextualized neuroticism predicted people's own satisfaction ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .05$) as well as their partners' satisfaction ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$); global neuroticism did not predict people's own satisfaction ($\beta = .07$, n.s.) but it marginally predicted partners' satisfaction ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .052$). Thus, we found support for H1 (actor effects of contextualized neuroticism after controlling for global neuroticism) and H4 (partner effects of contextualized neuroticism after controlling for global neuroticism).

### 3.4.5. Summary of Study 2 findings

The results of Study 2 indicated strong convergence between brief (TIPI) and relatively longer (BFI) contextualized personality measures. Results of APIM analyses incorporating both global and contextualized personality measures showed contextualized measures to be better predictors of self- and partner-reported satisfaction for neuroticism and agreeableness as well as a better predictor of partner-reported satisfaction for conscientiousness. For no traits was global personality a better predictor of relationship satisfaction then contextualized personality.

## 4. Study 3: contextualized personality in couples' daily instant messages

Personality expressed in the context of people's romantic relationships was uniquely predictive of current and future relationship satisfaction for individuals in Study 1 and predictive of self- and partner-reported satisfaction in Study 2. However, one could reasonably argue that the having participants complete global and contextualized personality measures back to back artificially increases the difference between the two measures. In other words, while people may say that their personality varies somewhat between how they are in their romantic relationships and how they are in general, this variance may simply be a methodological artifact, the result of demand characteristics. In addition, one could argue that the association between contextualized personality and relationship satisfaction is due to the method overlap between the two measures. That is, people's perceptions of what they are like in their relationship may be based on the same information as their reports of their satisfaction in that relationship. Obtaining a non-self-report measure of contextualized personality would address both of these issues. Thus, in Study 3, we sought to investigate whether similar associations between global and contextualized personality and relationship satisfaction would emerge when an alternative, non-self-report measure of contextualized personality is used.

### 4.1. Method

Study 3 involved two phases of data collection. In the first phase, both members of dating couples completed global measures of personality and relationship satisfaction and submitted 7 days of daily IM conversations with each other. In the second phase, ratings of contextualized personality were obtained based on observers' review of the couples' IMs.

### 4.1.2. Participants

As part of a larger study (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006)[1], undergraduate couples at the University of Texas at Austin were recruited through an online computer sign-up system on the basis that they:

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[1] In this study, couples' IMs originally were collected to identify subtle social mediators of an expressive writing intervention. The present use of these data was made possible by the study having serendipitously included the TIPI and the RAS.

(1) were in a "committed heterosexual romantic relationship," and (2) that they typically IMed with each other every day. Sixty-eight couples (136 participants: 68 women, 68 men; mean age 19.04, SD = 1.39) participated in the study; couples received course credit in exchange for their participation. Couples had been dating an average of 1.44 years (SD = 1.25).

### 4.1.3. Procedure

*4.1.3.1. Phase I.* During an introductory session with an experimenter, couples provided informed consent and were instructed how to forward their daily IMs with each other for 7 days to a secure email address. Considerable effort was taken by the experimenter during the introductory session to ensure that participants and their partners felt at ease about forwarding their IMs. Couples were told that their IMs were completely confidential and that no one outside of our research team would have access to them without their explicit permission. They also were strongly encouraged to contact the first author if they had any concerns about the study. Upon receipt by the experimenter, all IMs were saved as text files in a password-protected secure location accessible only to the experimenter and all personally identifiable information was removed. The mean length of couples' IM conversations over the 7 days of monitoring was 2243 words (SD = 2129); length of IM conversations was unrelated to all measures. Self-report questionnaires were completed by both members of each couple online from home after the introductory session with the experimenter on Day 1 of the study; the importance of completing these questionnaires privately and confidentially was emphasized by the experimenter during the introductory session.

*4.1.3.2. Phase II.* Five independent observers rated the contextualized personality of each couple member based on examination of their IMs. The observers were undergraduate students working on the project as research assistants. They were unacquainted with the participants and were instructed not to discuss their ratings with one another or with others outside of the project. The order in which observers rated the IMs was randomly generated for each observer. Observers completed their personality ratings after reading the complete transcripts of the IMs for each couple. They were instructed to read through each IM twice, the first time focusing on one couple member and then rating that couple member on his or her personality traits, and then the second time focusing on and rating the other couple member; the order of rating of each couple member (male or female) was fully randomized across both couples and raters.

### 4.1.4. Measures

*4.1.4.1. Personality.* The global measure of personality used in this study was the TIPI (Gosling et al., 2003); the TIPI also was used for our rater-based contextualized personality measure so that both the global and contextualized personality measures were in the same metric. The $\alpha$ reliabilities for the global TIPI in this sample were .70, .45, .49, .58, and .43 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively. As with Studies 1 and 2, the directions on this contextualized measure were altered from the original TIPI so that observers indicated what they thought each participant's personality was like specifically in the context of the romantic relationship. The alpha reliabilities for the contextualized TIPI in this sample were .69, .75, .74, .94 and .73 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively. Inter-observer agreement (ICC[2,K]) for the contextualized TIPI was .78, .82, .56, .80 and .49 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively.

*4.1.4.2. Relationship satisfaction.* As with Studies 1 and 2, relationship satisfaction was measured using the RAS (Hendrick, 1988). In the present sample, alpha reliability was .79.

### 4.2. Results

#### 4.2.1. Correlations between global and rater-based contextualized personality

As expected, the magnitude of the correlations between global personality and the rater-based contextualized personality measure were substantially smaller than the correlations in Studies 1 and 2, in which self-report contextualized personality measures were used. Correlations between these measures in Study 3 were .16, .38, .00, .33, and .16 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, respectively ($rs > .16$ are statistically significant at $p < .05$). It is likely that these smaller correlations are due in part to the lack of shared method variance compared to the measures used in Studies 1 and 2.

#### 4.2.2. Associations between global and contextualized personality and self- and partner-reported relationship satisfaction

*4.2.2.1. Gender differences.* As with Study 2, results were analyzed using the APIM. Once again, we allowed the paths of males and females to vary from each other in the initial APIM analyses. We subsequently tested gender differences by constraining men's and women's paths to be equal to each other in each model. In none of these analyses were the fits of the respective models significantly worsened by constraining men's and women's paths to be equal, indicating no statistically significant gender differences in any of the actor or partner effects of global or contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction. Accordingly, the APIM results presented below constrain male and female paths to be equal.

*Actor (H1) and partner (H4) effects of global and contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction.* APIM analyses were conducted to examine actor and partner effects of global personality and contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction. As shown in Table 5, the pattern of actor effects in Study 3 generally paralleled those from Study 2. Relationship satisfaction was positively associated with participants' own global and contextualized agreeableness and their own contextualized conscientiousness and negatively associated with their own global and contextualized neuroticism. The findings regarding the links between contextualized agreeableness and neuroticism and self-reported satisfaction replicated those from Studies 1 and 2. However, in contrast with Study 2, no partner effects emerged for either global or contextualized traits. Thus, the partner effects of contextualized neuroticism (H4) did not replicate when assessing contextualized personality from couples' IMs.

**Table 5**
APIM associations between personality and relationship satisfaction – Study 3.

| Trait | Global personality | | Contextualized personality | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Self satisfaction | Partner satisfaction | Self satisfaction | Partner satisfaction |
| Extraversion | .12 | .02 | .11 | .15 |
| Agreeableness | .33* | .07 | .43* | −.07 |
| Conscientiousness | .15 | .06 | .19* | .06 |
| Neuroticism | −.26* | −.08 | −.22* | −.07 |
| Openness | .09 | .08 | −.03 | .02 |

*Note*: N = 68 couples (68 males and 68 females). Standardized path coefficients from APIM model are reported. Global and contextualized personality regressions were run separately.
\* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

### 4.2.3. Unique effects of global and contextualized personality on satisfaction

We next tested whether contextualized personality remained a significant predictor of satisfaction when controlling for global personality (in the cases of agreeableness and neuroticism, which both had significant APIM associations with satisfaction). Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, and in support of H1, when global and contextualized neuroticism were entered together, contextualized neuroticism was negatively associated with participants' own satisfaction ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .05$); global neuroticism also remained a significant predictor of participants' own satisfaction ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$). In addition, global and contextualized agreeableness both remained significant predictors of people's own satisfaction when entered together ($\beta$s of .24 and .35, respectively; $p$s < .05).

### 4.2.4. Summary of Study 3 findings

In Study 3, we sought to test whether the actor and partner effects of contextualized personality on relationship satisfaction found in Study 2 would replicate using observer ratings of contextualized personality. The pattern of findings for actor effects was quite consistent across Studies 2 and 3. In particular, people's contextualized neuroticism predicted their own relationship satisfaction, even after controlling for their global neuroticism. However, the partner effects found in Study 2 did not replicate using the observer-based measure in Study 3.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate the links between global personality, contextualized personality (personality expressed in the specific context of people's romantic relationships) and relationship satisfaction. The results from the studies presented here suggest that contextualized personality is—above and beyond global personality—associated with one's own relationship satisfaction and, perhaps, one's partner's satisfaction. Further, these findings show that compared to global personality, contextualized personality is a stronger predictor of future satisfaction in both intact and new relationships.

### 5.1. Associations with relationship satisfaction

Personality expressed in the context of people's romantic relationships—as measured by self-reports (Studies 1 and 2) and observer-reports (Study 3)—was strongly correlated with one's own relationship satisfaction. Across all three studies, associations between contextualized personality and satisfaction were generally strongest for neuroticism and agreeableness.

Longitudinal data from the 1-year follow-up assessment in Study 1 showed that, for those people still in the same relationship, contextualized neuroticism predicted declines in relationship satisfaction, more so than any other global or contextualized personality trait. Further, both contextualized extraversion and contextualized neuroticism were predictive of satisfaction in future relationships for those who were with new romantic partners at follow-up; no global personality traits significantly predicted satisfaction in future relationships. Although the number of people in new relationships was quite small ($n = 37$), these data, along with the longitudinal data from those in intact relationships ($n = 110$) suggest that—contrary to evidence from non-romantic relationship domains (e.g., Wood, 2007)—contextualized traits may in fact be better predictors of future romantic relationship experiences than global traits.

There are several potential explanations for the differences between our findings and those of Wood (2007). One possibility is that the specific trait focused on in Wood's study—extraversion—

has not typically been found to be strongly linked to romantic relationship satisfaction in previous research; neuroticism, which, among the FFM traits, has been found to have the greatest have relevance for relationships, was not examined in Wood's study. A second possibility is that the links between global and contextualized traits and changes in satisfaction in social organization roles—the outcome of interest in Wood's study—may differ somewhat from the ways in which global and contextualized traits are linked to changes in satisfaction in romantic relationships. Future studies that assess the longitudinal associations between contextualized personality traits and outcomes across multiple domains (e.g., in romantic relationships and in social organizations) are needed to better clarify the divergence in these findings.

Study 2 showed that contextualized personality was also linked to partners' satisfaction for neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Further, the effects of global personality on partners' satisfaction disappeared when controlling for contextualized personality. It is unclear why the partner effects for neuroticism found in Study 2 did not replicate in Study 3 (although the path coefficients were in the expected direction). It may be that the partner effects in Study 3 were too small to be detected with the statistical power in this sample (with only 38% power to detect an effect of $r = .20$). This possibility seems especially likely given that partner effects were not found for either contextualized or global neuroticism—suggesting that these null findings are not simply a consequence of the observational method used to assess contextualized neuroticism in Study 3.

### 5.2. Toward a conceptual model of contextualized personality and relationships

Predicting relationship outcomes from global and contextualized traits is a useful endeavor in and of itself—in particular for those specifically interested in the nature and trajectory of relationship satisfaction. In addition, we believe this work helps advance our understanding of contextualized personality and its role in romantic relationships. Further understanding of this phenomenon, however, will require careful descriptions of the causal directions of the associations between global personality, contextualized personality, and relationship behaviors/experiences. An excellent example of this type of theoretical work is Wood and Roberts' Personality and Role Identity Structural Model (PRISM; Wood, 2007; Wood & Roberts, 2006), which depicts contextualized personality as being simultaneously driven by both global personality and role experiences. This model proposes that, although contextualized trait ratings tend to be more highly correlated with role experiences than are global trait ratings, global traits *cause* role experiences while contextualized traits are mostly a function of them. However, it may be—and in fact the data presented here suggest—that contextualized personality partially drives future role experiences. Indeed, the longitudinal data reported in Study 1 showing Time 1 contextualized neuroticism to be linked to Time 2 satisfaction, controlling for Time 1 satisfaction, yields support of a causal link from a contextualized trait to a role experience. Nevertheless, empirical evidence for the direction of the links between contextualized personality and role experiences is so far mixed.

In examining personality within the domain of close relationships, what are especially needed are large longitudinal studies assessing global personality, contextualized personality and relationship outcomes simultaneously over several time points and across multiple relationships. Such studies would clarify the direction of these associations, and, in turn, how we think of contextualized personality. A key question that could be answered by these kinds of studies is how stable contextualized personality traits are over the long-term within a particular domain (e.g., romantic rela-

tionships). Although contextualized personality appears quite stable over several months (Wood & Roberts, 2006), it is unknown to what extent contextualized personality is stable over longer periods of time. It would also be useful to ask respondents both how neurotic they are in their *current* relationship and how neurotic they generally tend to be *across their romantic relationships* (current and past). The fact that contextualized personality in one romantic relationship predicts satisfaction in a future relationship indicates that contextualized personality may tap into how a person tends to be from one romantic relationship to the next, not only how he or she is in one specific relationship.

### 5.3. Limitations and strengths

There are some important limitations of this research. Most important is that although the longitudinal data presented in Study 1 suggest that contextualized personality is partially responsible for changes in relationship experiences over time, it is still unclear how relationship experiences may, in turn, lead to changes in contextualized personality. Evidence from studies examining global personality-romantic relationship transactions has been somewhat inconclusive. For example, in an 18-month longitudinal study in which personality predicted relationship outcomes, no evidence was found for relationships changing personalities (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998). In another study (Robins et al., 2000), participants completed relationship outcome measures three years after completing a measure of personality. Personality traits were found to influence relationship functioning, and because only 15% of the 720 participants in that study had been in their relationship with their partner at Time 1, it is very unlikely that the causal direction went from relationship functioning to personality. Nevertheless, other studies have found evidence for relationship effects on personality, both over time and across different types of relationships (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Robins et al., 2002). A key to studying the links between global and contextualized personality and romantic relationship experiences is conducting longitudinal research with larger samples of extended periods of time (and over multiple relationships) that will allow for the directional effects of these variables to be more clearly understood.

A second limitation is that our samples, particularly in Studies 2 and 3, were made up of mostly young heterosexual dating couples. It is possible that our results do not generalize to all types of romantic relationships. Indeed, cross-sectional studies have found that associations between personality traits and relationship quality may differ across different types of samples, in particular with dating couples compared to married couples (Watson et al., 2000).

Third, our measure of contextualized personality used in Study 3 obviously does not encompass the full range of behaviors in romantic relationships. It may be difficult, for example, to judge solely from a person's IMs how open to new experiences that person is in his relationship. Additionally, the IMs collected in our study captured only how couples behaved with each other when they were in isolation of others. It is likely that the way people act around their partners when others are present (e.g., friends, family) may differ from the way people act with their partners when others are not present; experience sampling data from couples supports this idea (Larson & Bradney, 1988). The limitations of the method used in Study 3 may explain the differing findings for partner effects compared to Study 2. Because of the archival nature of the data used in Study 3, we unfortunately were unable to have couples complete a self-reported contextualized measure to make direct within-person comparisons with our observer-based measure. Future studies that incorporate both of these methods for assessing contextualized personality are needed to better understand whether such alternative methods tap into differing or overlapping aspects of personality in comparison to traditional self-reports.

Although there are notable limitations to this research, there are also a number of important strengths. This is this first study to our knowledge to examine the links between contextualized personality and partners' relationship experiences (e.g., satisfaction)—accounting for the interdependence in couple members' data—and the first to examine the links between contextualized personality and changes in relationship satisfaction over time. With these studies we have shown contextualized personality to be uniquely associated with one's own relationship satisfaction and, possibly, one's partner's satisfaction, and to be associated with changes in relationship satisfaction over time and satisfaction in future relationships. Importantly, all of the effects that were found held when controlling for the effects of global personality.

Another strength is that the observer-based method of assessing contextualized personality in Study 3 offers a novel way of examining personality traits in various types of relationship contexts (e.g., with romantic partners, friends or co-workers). Using this method, personality ratings can be formed from a clearly defined and relatively narrow set of information without creating artificial variability between contextualized and global personality—a potential pitfall when using self-reports. This also has the advantage of eliminating shared method variance between the contextualized personality measure and the outcome measure (e.g., relationship satisfaction). Although a number of researchers (e.g., Heller et al., 2007; Wood, 2007) have suggested using alternative methods of measuring contextualized personality, few have yet put this suggestion into practice.

### 5.4. Conclusions

Returning to Amy and David's relationship, we now know that David's personality indeed may be somewhat different when he is with Amy than he is in general and that his contextualized personality is linked to both his own and perhaps Amy's satisfaction. Furthermore, David's satisfaction in his relationship with Amy—and in his future relationships—will be uniquely predicted by his contextualized personality, above and beyond his global personality. How David and Amy are in general and how they are in their roles as romantic partners may shape not only the quality of their relationship with each other but the quality of their future relationships as well.

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