

## To Know You Is to Love You: The Implications of Global Adoration and Specific Accuracy for Marital Relationships

Lisa A. Neff  
University of Toledo

Benjamin R. Karney  
University of Florida

Despite the strong positive feelings that characterize newlyweds, many marriages end in disappointment. To understand this shift, the authors argue that although newlyweds' global relationship evaluations may be uniformly positive, not all spouses base their global adoration on an accurate perception of their partner's specific qualities. Two longitudinal studies confirmed that whereas most newlyweds enhanced their partners at the level of their global perceptions, spouses varied significantly in their perceptions of their partners' specific qualities. For wives, but not for husbands, more accurate specific perceptions were associated with their supportive behaviors, feelings of control in the marriage, and whether or not the marriage ended in divorce. Thus, love grounded in specific accuracy appears to be stronger than love absent accuracy.

*Keywords:* marriage, love, relationship cognitions, divorce

On entering marriage, virtually all couples profess a strong love for each other. Newlyweds tend to describe their partners in extremely positive terms and report being highly committed to their relationships and very optimistic about the future of their marriages (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Veroff, Douvan, Orbach, & Acitelli, 1998). Yet despite this seemingly solid foundation, marriages today are more likely to end in separation or divorce than to continue (Bumpass, 1990). For many people, the course of a marriage is characterized by a shift in marital evaluations over time, such that initially positive feelings of happiness and optimism deteriorate and transform into disillusionment (Cherlin, 1992). How is it that some couples are able to maintain their initial happiness over the course of a long-term relationship whereas other couples are not? For whom are initial feelings of love likely to be stable, and for whom are these feelings likely to deteriorate?

Research on marital change and stability has most often addressed this question by focusing on relationship interactions and processes that may gradually enhance or erode spouses' initial marital satisfaction. For instance, this research has demonstrated

that couples' communication styles affect the course of the marriage, such that destructive patterns lead to declines, and productive interactions prevent them (Noller & Feeney, 2002). The way spouses interpret negative events within the relationship also has been associated with marital outcomes, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, such that blaming partners for their transgressions predicts negative outcomes, and forgiveness predicts positive ones (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Although research on cognition and behavior has offered important insights into processes that contribute to declines in marital satisfaction, to date little research has addressed how destructive processes might arise in relationships that at the time a couple is married are characterized by almost uniformly positive feelings and evaluations. To illuminate this issue, the current article explores the idea that although newlywed couples may appear to begin their marriages nearly identical in their initial feelings for their partners, in fact newlyweds' initial feelings of love may not all be equal in kind. In addressing this idea, we follow in the footsteps of a number of researchers and scholars who have suggested that the nature of partners' initial feelings should account for the way those feelings develop over time, such that simply romantic feelings may be quick to evaporate, whereas love that is initially deeper should be more stable (Noller, 1996; Sternberg & Barnes, 1988). However, prior theories have failed to reach consensus on what exactly makes some feelings of love deeper than others (for a review, see Noller, 1996), and so little empirical evidence has been offered to suggest how a deeper love may account for the way marriages actually develop.

The goal of the current article is to evaluate a model for identifying the type of love that should promote healthier, more stable marriages among couples who uniformly profess to love one another. To accomplish this goal, the remainder of the introduction

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Lisa A. Neff, Department of Psychology, University of Toledo; Benjamin R. Karney, Department of Psychology, University of Florida.

Benjamin R. Karney is now at the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lisa A. Neff, Department of Psychology, University of Toledo, 2801 West Bancroft Street, Toledo, OH 43606. E-mail: lisa.neff@utoledo.edu

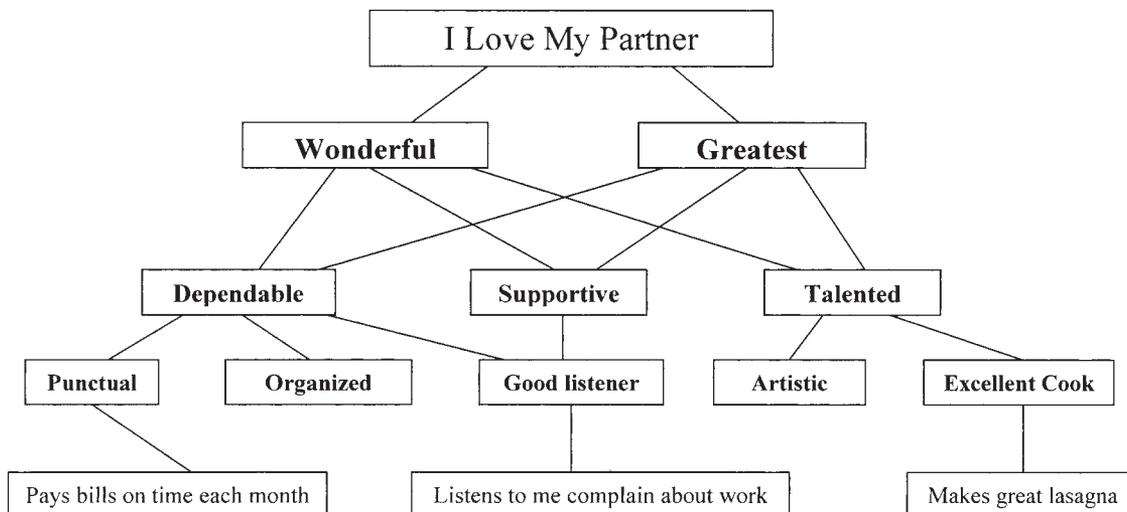


Figure 1. Cognitive representation of spouse's love for his or her partner.

is organized into three sections. The first section presents a model characterizing love as a cognitive network that combines global evaluations of a partner with specific perceptions of that partner's traits and abilities.<sup>1</sup> Distinguishing between different levels of abstraction in spouses' love representations suggests that uniformly happy newlyweds may nevertheless vary in the extent to which they accurately view their partners' specific traits and abilities. The second section addresses the implications that global love based on specific accuracy may have for marital well-being. Specifically, this section discusses how love that is based on an accurate view of the partner's specific qualities should be associated with more positive relationship interactions, greater feelings of prediction and control within the relationship, and better marital outcomes than love that lacks this foundation of specific accuracy. The remainder of the article describes two studies designed to examine these ideas empirically through analyses of longitudinal data from two independent samples of initially satisfied newlywed couples.

### Modeling Love in Early Marriage

#### *"True" Love as a Function of Global Adoration and Specific Accuracy*

The current model for distinguishing general newlywed bliss from a more lasting and satisfying love is based on two premises (for a more detailed discussion of this model, see Neff & Karney, 2002a). Similar to other perspectives on love, the first premise is that love is an attitude toward a particular individual (Noller, 1996; Rubin, 1970). Assuming that love is an attitude suggests that spouses' feelings of love are founded on a variety of perceptions and judgments of the partner. These perceptions vary meaningfully in their level of abstraction, from perceptions of the partner's specific traits and abilities (e.g., "My partner is a fabulous cook") to global evaluations of the partner as a whole (e.g., "My partner is the greatest"; Hampson, John, & Goldberg, 1986; Neff & Karney, 2002a). This collection of global and specific perceptions can be represented in a hierarchical structure, in which global perceptions serve to integrate related specific perceptions within

an organized associative network (Hampson et al., 1986; John, Hampson, & Goldberg, 1991). For instance, as seen in Figure 1, the global perception that my partner is wonderful may subsume the more specific perceptions that my partner is dependable, supportive, and talented. Though being dependable, supportive, and talented each represent one means of being wonderful, the reverse is not true (Hampson et al., 1986). In other words, global perceptions might include evaluations of the partner's general worth, whereas specific perceptions refer to the particular traits and behaviors that make up the foundation on which global evaluations are based (Pelham & Swann, 1989; M. Rosenberg, 1979). In this way, spouses' love may be conceived as a hierarchically organized collection of beliefs, feelings, and perceptions of the partner.

The second premise of the model is that spouses' ability and motivation to view their partners positively may vary at different levels of the hierarchy. As perceptions of a partner become increasingly global, they also tend to become relatively more abstract in nature (Hampson et al., 1986; John et al., 1991). Accordingly, fewer clear, objective standards exist for evaluating global attributes than for evaluating specific, and more concrete, attributes. When spouses have fewer objective standards to guide their evaluation, they also have more latitude to place their partners in a more positive light (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). That is, as perceptions of a partner become more global, it

<sup>1</sup> Describing "love" as a cognitive network comprising global and specific partner perceptions may seem slightly unusual to some readers. As we note later in the article, this approach to characterizing love is based on prior definitions of love that have emphasized a cognitive component (Noller, 1996; Rubin, 1970). On the basis of these definitions, we felt that examining the types of perceptions that underlie newlyweds' strong positive feelings for their partners could represent a type of love. Although it is true we cannot definitively claim that global adoration based on specific accuracy is true love and is not some other related construct, we do not see this point as the crux of our argument. Regardless of the name given to the construct being measured, the article still demonstrates the importance of a global adoration that is based on specific accuracy for marital well-being. Thus, calling global adoration based on specific accuracy something other than love should not diminish the significance of the results.

should become easier for a spouse to view his or her partner positively on that attribute. Whereas spouses may find it easy to support the conclusion that their partners are wonderful, for example, they may find it more difficult to support the belief that their partners are punctual, particularly if the partner frequently arrives late to engagements.

In addition, as perceptions of a partner become increasingly global, they subsume a greater number of specific perceptions and thus become more evaluative in nature (John et al., 1991). For instance, whereas the specific attribute "punctual" is relatively descriptive of one's behavior, the global attribute "wonderful" evaluates how positive or desirable one is. As a result, spouses tend to rate global perceptions of a partner as more important for their marital well-being than specific perceptions (Neff & Karney, 2002a). That is, spouses may rate the belief that one's partner is a great person as more important to general marital satisfaction than the belief that one's partner is socially skilled. This greater importance of global perceptions suggests that spouses may be more motivated to maintain positive global perceptions about their partners than to maintain positive specific perceptions (cf. Sedikides, 1993). Although spouses may be motivated to be positively biased in their global perceptions of their partners in order to protect their satisfaction, spouses may perceive their partners more or less accurately on specific attributes, because even negative perceptions at the specific level would have few consequences for marital well-being. For instance, spouses who believe their partners to be wonderful people may be willing to perceive their partners as unorganized or as poor cooks, because these negative specifics should do little to hurt spouses' satisfaction with the marriage. Overall, then, spouses may be more able and more driven to view their partners positively on global rather than on specific attributes.

Taking the hierarchical structure of spouses' perceptions into account has two important implications for understanding love in early marriage. First, even among spouses whose global evaluations of each other are uniformly positive, there may be variability in specific perceptions. In fact, evidence suggests that spouses who believe their partners to be great people overall may still hold a variety of both positive and negative perceptions about their partners' specific qualities (Showers & Kevlyn, 1999). Second, these perceptions at the specific level may be more or less accurate reflections of the partner's self-image. In other words, even though on average spouses may be less positively biased in their specific perceptions compared with their global perceptions, for some spouses these specific perceptions of the partner may be unrealistically positive or negative compared with their partners' self-views, whereas other spouses may see their partners as their partners see themselves (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

From this perspective, among happily married couples, some spouses may view their partners very positively at the level of global evaluations while simultaneously acknowledging their partners' specific positive and negative attributes. Other spouses, in contrast, may glorify their partner globally without an accurate view of their partners' specific qualities. Put another way, whereas some spouses may hold the partner in high esteem, ignoring specific weaknesses, other spouses may hold the partner in high esteem while at the same time accepting these specific weaknesses. Arguably, by communicating that they both love the partner and recognize the partner's particular strengths and weaknesses, it is these latter individuals who may be providing their partners with "true" love.

### *Reconciling the Current Model With the Positive Illusions Literature*

On the surface, the current model of global adoration and specific accuracy may seem to contradict research highlighting the importance of positive illusions for close relationships. This research has found that intimates are happier in their marriages the more positively they view their partners, even though these positive evaluations may be largely discrepant from their partners' self-views (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). In other words, the happiest spouses enhance their partners' qualities, viewing their partners more positively than even partners view themselves. As long as intimates are able to depict their partners' qualities in the best possible light, relationship satisfaction is likely to be maintained.

A closer examination, however, reveals that the current model may complement rather than contradict this previous work. Like the positive illusions literature, a model of global adoration and specific accuracy recognizes the critical role of enhancing a partner for relationship maintenance. Also similar to the positive illusions literature, the current model suggests that this enhancement does not represent an outright denial of reality but rather is likely to be based on kernels of truth (Taylor, Collins, Skokan, & Aspinwall, 1989). That is, spouses may enhance their partners while still demonstrating a relative understanding of their partners' qualities (Murray et al., 1996b). The current model formally operationalizes this idea by limiting the role of partner enhancement to perceptions at the global level. Satisfied intimates may enhance their partners at the level of their global perceptions such that spouses will view their partners as generally warm, good, and kind individuals, regardless of how their partners view themselves, in order to maintain a positive evaluation of their relationship. At the same time, however, satisfied intimates also may be relatively accurate at the level of their specific perceptions such that spouses agree with their partners' self-perceived specific strengths and weaknesses, helping the relationship to run smoothly (Neff & Karney, 2002b).

How can spouses maintain an enhancing global view of the partner while still acknowledging, or even embracing, their partners' relative weaknesses? Spouses may have some latitude in the way they combine their more realistic perceptions of specific traits into a global impression of the partner. For instance, though spouses may hold a variety of accurate positive and negative perceptions of a partner, they may rate their positive perceptions as more important for the relationship than their negative perceptions (Neff & Karney, 2003; Pelham & Swann, 1989). In this manner, an accurate perception of a partner's specific traits and abilities would not interfere with the global belief that one's partner is a wonderful person.

### *Evidence for Global Adoration and Specific Accuracy*

Some evidence has supported the idea that accuracy and enhancement processes may operate at different levels of abstraction within the same relationship, depending on the nature of the qualities being evaluated. One study computed the discrepancy between spouses' perceptions of their partners and partners' self-perceptions on a variety of qualities in a sample of highly satisfied couples (Neff & Karney, 2002a). The association between the size of this discrepancy and the specificity of the particular attribute

being evaluated was then examined. Results revealed that spouses' perceptions of their partners tended to become more enhancing, or more positive than the partner's self-views, the more global the attribute being measured. Likewise, spouses were in greater agreement with their partners' self-views as attributes became more specific. Thus, this study demonstrated that spouses could simultaneously achieve specific accuracy and global enhancement within their relationships. The current article is designed to extend these findings by arguing that within couples who enhance one another at the global level, the degree to which spouses accurately view their partners at the level of specific attributes should have several important implications for marital well-being.

### Implications of Global Adoration and Specific Accuracy for Marital Well-Being

If global adoration based on an accurate view of the partner's specific qualities does in fact represent a love with a more solid foundation than global adoration alone, then spouses who view their partners in this manner should enjoy better marital outcomes than spouses who love their partners without specific accuracy. In general, love based on specific accuracy may be associated with marital well-being in two ways. First, in the short term, spouses who both love and accurately perceive one another may interact more positively with each other than spouses who love without specific accuracy. Second, over time, relationship dissolution may be less likely for couples whose love is based on an accurate view of each other's specific qualities.

#### *Global Adoration, Specific Accuracy, and Social Support*

The way that spouses communicate and interact with one another has been identified as a critical component of marital quality. In particular, spousal support has been shown to occupy a central role in the development of marital well-being. Support from a partner has been shown to aid both personal and relationship functioning when individuals are confronted with stressful events (Cutrona, 1996). Moreover, couples exhibiting more positive support skills report greater marital satisfaction and better future marital outcomes than do couples lacking in support abilities (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Yet little is known about the conditions that promote positive, supportive interactions. Theories of identity negotiation in relationships argue that when spouses agree with one another's self-perceived identity in the relationship, this agreement should increase the likelihood of harmonious interactions and facilitate cooperative efforts to achieve goals (Schlenker, 1984; Swann, 1984). Spouses who agree with their partners' self-views should feel secure in their ability to predict how their partner will respond to them, which is a key aspect of successful social relations (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). On the other hand, a discrepancy between spouses' views and partners' self-views may indicate that interactions will be characterized by misunderstanding, because partners' behaviors may frequently counter spouses' expectations (Swann et al., 1992). From this perspective, then, as long as spouses agree with one another's self-perceived strengths and limitations, marital interactions should proceed smoothly.

In fact, some evidence suggests that spouses' perceptions of their partners' qualities may play an important role in shaping the manner in which spouses provide support to their partners. A

common assumption within the counseling literature is that successful therapy occurs when the therapist offers a warm, supportive relationship to the client by demonstrating that the client is positively regarded (Kelly, 2000). Consistent with this idea that effective support requires unconditional positive regard, research on established marriages has found positive associations between supportive behavior and relationship satisfaction (Cutrona, 1996). However, studies of newlywed couples have revealed that despite their generally high regard for each other, newlyweds nevertheless vary considerably in their ability to provide positive support to their partners (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). This finding suggests that positive regard alone may not be sufficient for spouses to effectively support their partners.

Rather, some research has indicated that individuals may be effective in helping their partners only when they agree with the partner's self-perceived specific attributes (Swann & Predmore, 1985). In a study by Swann and Predmore (1985), individuals completed a personality test and received negative feedback concerning the results. The individuals were then given the opportunity to interact with their dating partner before completing a second measure of self-esteem. Results showed that the self-esteem of individuals whose partners accurately perceived their specific qualities was not affected by the bogus feedback. Individuals whose partners lacked this specific accuracy, however, altered their self-descriptions toward the bogus feedback. In other words, only when intimates agreed with their partners' specific self-views were partners resilient to the effects of the negative event, suggesting that specific accuracy may underlie positive support processes.

The current model extends these literatures by arguing that both global adoration and specific accuracy may be necessary components to ensure positive support interactions. Though high positive regard may allow spouses to provide the partner with loving encouragement, a relatively accurate view of a partner's specific qualities may provide spouses with insight into the specific help and advice their partners need to cope with difficulties. In this way, a love in which spouses hold each other in high esteem while simultaneously recognizing the partner's specific traits and abilities should enable spouses to provide better support than does a love in which spouses simply hold their partners in high esteem without this specific accuracy.

#### *Global Adoration, Specific Accuracy, and Divorce*

As mentioned above, despite the fact that newly married spouses uniformly profess a strong love for their partners, a large percentage of marriages end in divorce (Bumpass, 1990). Though a large literature has argued that the nature of spouses' perceptions of one another may help account for this change in marital quality, the types of perceptions associated with positive outcomes have been the source of some debate. Some theorists have argued that positively biased views of the partner are critical for protecting relationship satisfaction, whereas others have suggested that more accurate views of the partner serve to foster a sense of prediction and control in the relationship essential for long-term happiness (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b; Swann et al., 1994). The current model reconciles these positions by suggesting that love is stronger when positive global evaluations of the partner are coupled with an accurate perception of the partner's specific traits and abilities.

That is, perceiving a partner with global adoration should serve to maintain positive partner evaluations and protect the relationship from doubt (e.g., Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b). Again, however, positive regard alone may not be sufficient to ensure better marital outcomes. For instance, for spouses who believe their partners to be wonderful in every single way, loving the partner is not very difficult, making this love easy to maintain in the short term. Nevertheless, a love based on the false premise that all of the partner's traits are perfect should be fragile over time. These spouses put their partners in the uncomfortable position of having to live up to an identity that partners may be unable or unwilling to confirm (Schlenker, 1984; Swann et al., 1992). Over time, as partners inevitably fail to meet spouses' high expectations, spouses may feel insecure in their ability to predict how their partners will respond and behave within the relationship, thereby undermining spouses' confidence in the marriage (Swann et al., 1994). Thus, as their partners' specific weaknesses surface in the relationship, spouses' positive global feelings toward the partner may crumble.

In contrast, spouses whose initial feelings of love are based on a relatively accurate view of the partners' specific qualities begin the marriage accepting their partners as people despite recognizing their partners' limitations. These spouses should hold more realistic expectations of the partner, thereby increasing their feelings of prediction and control within the relationship (Swann et al., 1992). In other words, these spouses should not be surprised by their partners' negative qualities and thus should be less likely to respond poorly in the face of their partners' weaknesses. Consequently, global adoration that is founded on an accurate view of a partner's specific attributes may be associated with a lower likelihood of relationship dissolution.

### Overview of the Current Studies

The current article presents two studies designed to evaluate a model for distinguishing the marital happiness professed by virtually all newlywed couples from the type of love that is associated with better, more stable marriages. These studies were designed to address two general questions. First, do newlywed spouses, who tend to be uniformly happy with their partner and the marriage, nevertheless vary in the extent to which they accurately perceive their partners' specific attributes and abilities? Second, does this variability in accuracy have implications for marital well-being? Examining these questions within fairly homogeneous samples of newlywed couples provided several advantages. First, selecting newlyweds ensured that all couples were at a similar marital duration and that the motivation to evaluate a partner positively should be strong and fairly uniform across spouses. In this way, the use of newlyweds allowed us to study differences in specific accuracy within a sample that should look virtually identical in their global evaluations of the marriage and the partner. Second, newlywed couples are an appropriate sample in which to examine issues of relationship change and dissolution. Compared with those in more established marriages, newlyweds experience more dramatic changes in relationship quality and are at elevated risk of marital disruption (Cherlin, 1992).

Evaluating a model of global adoration and specific accuracy requires attention to two important methodological issues. First, perceptions of the partner must be measured at varying levels of abstraction. Thus, the current studies asked spouses to evaluate their partners' specific traits and abilities, their partners' global

worth, and their overall global satisfaction with the marriage. Second, evaluation of the model requires a clearly delineated criterion of accuracy. Researchers have long argued over what the gold standard is for determining the accuracy of personality judgments (e.g., Funder & Drobth, 1987). Given current lack of consensus, in the present article, partners' self-perceptions were used as the standard of accuracy. In this way, *specific accuracy* was defined as the extent to which spouses' perceptions of their partners agreed with partners' own self-views (e.g., Murray et al., 1996a; Swann et al., 1994).

It should be noted that a prior article of ours has examined spouses' global and specific perceptions of their partners within the same sample used in Study 1 of the current article (Neff & Karney, 2002a). However, the sole goal of this prior work was to demonstrate that enhancement and accuracy may operate simultaneously with the same relationships, depending on the nature of the attribute being evaluated. As mentioned above, it was shown that on average, spouses tended to be more accurate when evaluating their partners' more specific traits and more enhancing when evaluating their partners' more global attributes. In contrast, the current article extends this work by examining the behavioral and longitudinal consequences of viewing a partner with global adoration and specific accuracy. To ensure that the findings were not tied to a particular sample or set of measures, all hypotheses addressed in Study 1 were examined again in a larger, independent sample using a different set of specific attributes in Study 2.

### Overview of Study 1

The first study examined spouses' global and specific perceptions of their partners as well as their observed supportive behaviors assessed during a laboratory interaction task in a sample of 82 first-married newlywed couples. Analyses of these data addressed three specific questions. First, within a sample of happily married, newlywed couples, do spouses vary in the accuracy with which they view their partners' specific attributes and abilities? Though these spouses' perceptions of their partners have been evaluated in prior work (Neff & Karney, 2002a), in order to address potential implications, the nature of spouses' perceptions of their partners first must be established. Rather than examining whether the discrepancy between spouses' views and partners' self-views was associated with attribute specificity (i.e., Neff & Karney, 2002a), the current article addresses a somewhat different issue by investigating the relative agreement between spouses' perceptions and partners' self-perceptions across several specific attributes. On the basis of our prior work, it was expected that although virtually all newlyweds would report strongly positive global impressions of their partners, some spouses would demonstrate a more accurate view of their partners' self-perceived specific qualities than others, indicating variability in spouses' appraisals even among recently married couples. In this way, only a subset of spouses were expected to link their global adoration of their partner with specific accuracy.

Second, is specific accuracy associated with the way spouses provide each other with support in the marriage? It was predicted that specific accuracy would be positively related to supportive behaviors, such that among these happily married couples, spouses who perceived their partners' qualities more accurately should provide more positive support.

Finally, is specific accuracy associated with a lower likelihood of marital dissolution? It was predicted that among these happily married couples, spouses who began the marriage with a more accurate view of their partners' specific qualities would be less likely to divorce during the subsequent 4 years.

### Method

#### Participants

Couples were recruited for this study using two methods. First, advertisements were placed in community newspapers and bridal shops. Second, letters were sent to couples who had applied for marriage licenses in Alachua County, Florida. Couples responding to either method of solicitation were screened in a telephone interview to determine whether they met the following criteria: (a) This was the first marriage for each partner, (b) the couple had been married less than 6 months, and (c) neither partner had children. The final sample consisted of 82 couples. Analyses revealed no significant differences in age or education between couples recruited through each type of solicitation.

On average, husbands were 25.1 ( $SD = 3.3$ ) years old and had received 16.3 ( $SD = 2.4$ ) years of education. Forty percent were employed full time, and 54% were full-time students. Wives were an average of 23.7 ( $SD = 2.8$ ) years old and had received 16.3 ( $SD = 1.2$ ) years of education. Thirty-nine percent were employed full time, and 50% were full-time students. Slightly over 70% of the sample was Christian, and 83% of husbands and 89% of wives were White. The average combined income of couples was less than \$20,000 per year.

#### Procedure

Couples meeting eligibility requirements were scheduled to attend a 3-hr laboratory session. Before the session, they were mailed a packet of questionnaires to complete at home and bring with them to their appointment. This packet included self-report measures of spouses' global and specific perceptions of the partner and the relationship as well as a letter instructing couples to complete all questionnaires independently of one another.

During the laboratory session, couples completed some additional questionnaires regarding their perceptions of their own specific traits and abilities and interacted with one another in a series of dyadic tasks. One of these tasks was the social support interaction task. Each couple engaged in two 10-min discussions designed to assess behaviors when offering and soliciting social support. In the first of the two discussions, one spouse was randomly selected to identify a personal problem or something about him- or herself that he or she would like to change. Spouses were specifically instructed to choose a topic that was strictly a personal issue and not a marital issue. Typical topics mentioned were exercising more, changing a bad habit, or enriching one's spiritual life. Spouses were asked to discuss this topic with their partner for 10 min, during which time the partner was told to respond in whatever way he or she felt was appropriate. After the first discussion, the roles were reversed such that the remaining spouse was asked to choose the topic for the next discussion. Spouses were encouraged not to choose the same issues. Thus, each spouse had the opportunity to play the role of the support provider. Couples were paid \$50 for participating in this part of the study. Couples were then contacted every 6 months over the next 4 years to obtain information regarding the status of the marriage (i.e., still married or divorced). Over the 4-year period, 17 (21%) of the 82 couples divorced. This divorce rate is consistent with other longitudinal studies of marriage using similar samples (Veroff et al., 1998).

#### Materials

*Global marital satisfaction.* Many frequently administered measures of relationship satisfaction (e.g., the Marital Adjustment Test; Locke &

Wallace, 1959) include items that assess global relationship evaluations as well as items assessing perceptions of specific aspects of the relationship (e.g., communication skills). To ensure that global evaluations and specific perceptions were not confounded in the present study and to increase confidence that results were not idiosyncratic to a particular measure of the dependent variable, marital satisfaction was assessed at each time point using two measures that focus on global relationship evaluations exclusively. First, spouses completed a 15-item version of the Semantic Differential (SMD; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). Spouses were asked to indicate their current feelings about their marriage on 7-point scales between two opposing adjectives (e.g., *satisfied*–*dissatisfied*, *pleasant*–*unpleasant*). Scores on the measure can range from 15 to 105, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. The internal consistency of the measure was high (coefficient  $\alpha = .92$  for husbands and  $.95$  for wives).

Second, spouses completed the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). This measure asks spouses to indicate the extent to which they agree with six relationship statements, such as "We have a good marriage" and "Our marriage is strong." Scores on the measure can range from 6 to 45, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Internal consistency of this measure also was high (coefficient  $\alpha = .94$  for both spouses).

*Global evaluations of the partner.* To assess spouses' global evaluations of their partners, a revision of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire was used (RSE; S. Rosenberg, 1965). This scale included the same items of the original scale, reworded such that spouses completed it with regard to the esteem in which they held their partners. Example items include "I feel that my spouse has a number of good qualities," "I feel that my spouse is a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others," and "I feel positively about my spouse." Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency of the 10 items was adequate for husbands' views of their wives (coefficient  $\alpha = .77$ ) and low for wives' views of their husbands (coefficient  $\alpha = .52$ ). Closer examination of wives' responses on the scale revealed that the lower alpha for wives' ratings of their partners was likely due to the lower variability in responses across wives. For instance, all 82 wives in the study strongly agreed with the statement indicating that their partner possessed a number of good qualities. Composite scores for these scales could range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher regard for the partner.

*Specific perceptions of the self and partner.* Spouses' specific perceptions of both themselves and their partners were assessed with a version of the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ; Swann et al., 1994). The SAQ asks spouses to rate themselves and their partners on six relatively specific qualities: intellectual capability, physical attractiveness, athletic ability, social skills, organization, and tidiness. Though this measure includes attributes that seemingly vary in their specificity, the SAQ nevertheless represents a measure that is more specific in nature than the measures of global marital satisfaction or the RSE. For each attribute, participants rated themselves and their partners relative to other people of the same age and gender on graduated interval scales ranging from 1 (*the bottom 5%*) to 19 (*the top 5%*). Though there was little reason to expect the six independent attributes to hang together (i.e., being socially skilled does not imply the person will be athletic as well), the internal consistency of the ratings was adequate for ratings of self (coefficient  $\alpha = .77$  for husbands and  $.74$  for wives) and lower for ratings of partner (coefficient  $\alpha = .53$  for husbands and  $.67$  for wives). The primary analyses of interest examined the items separately rather than as a sum. However, a summed composite score, with a possible range of 6 to 114, was created for some preliminary analyses investigating the distributions of spouses' perceptions of their partners.

*Behavioral observation coding.* The Social Support Interaction Coding System (SSICS; Pasch, Bradbury, & Sullivan, 1997) was used to assess the support provision behaviors spouses displayed during the support interaction tasks. Each 10-min interaction was divided into speaking turns, and each speaking turn was then coded. Using the SSICS, each support provider speaking turn may receive one of six codes: positive emotional, positive instrumental, positive other, negative, neutral, or off-task. Positive emotional is assigned to behaviors that reassure, console or otherwise

encourage the support solicitor, letting the solicitor know that he or she is loved (e.g., "I'm proud of the progress you have made, you have gotten much better about exercising."). Positive instrumental is given to behaviors that offer the solicitor specific suggestions on how to reach desired goals or otherwise assist the solicitor in developing a course of action for solving the problem (e.g., "Next time you see your boss, what are you going to ask him?"). Positive other includes all positive statements that do not fall within the previous two categories. Statements providing insight into the cause of the problem or encouraging further discussion of the problem would receive this code (e.g., "Why do you think that?"). Negative includes behaviors such as criticizing or blaming the solicitor or offering inconsiderate advice (e.g., "You just need to figure this out and stop complaining about it"). Neutral was given to behaviors that are related to the problem but are more factual in nature (e.g., "What time is your appointment tomorrow?"). Finally, off-task was given to all behaviors not relevant to the issue (e.g., "By the way, did you feed the dog this morning?").

Four research assistants were trained to independently code the interactions using the SSICS. Interrater reliability, which was assessed by having randomly selected pairs of observers code a randomly selected 25% of the interactions, was generally quite high (intraclass correlation coefficients = .83 for positive emotional, .88 for positive instrumental, .64 for positive other, .86 for negative, .60 for neutral, and .97 for off-task). To analyze the codes in subsequent analyses, the number of times each code was assigned to each spouse was divided by the total number of speaking turns of that spouse. Thus, each code was analyzed as a proportion of the total speaking turns in order to control for variation across spouses in the number of speaking turns.

*Individual difference variables.* Spouses also were asked to complete a number of individual difference measures to examine whether personality factors or differences in personal histories may influence the manner in which spouses view their partners. Neuroticism, a key indicator of negative affectivity, was assessed with the Neuroticism scale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978). This 23-item measure asks spouses to answer yes or no questions about their negative affectivity (e.g., "Are you a worrier?"; "Does your mood go up and down often?"). Internal consistency was high for husbands and wives (coefficient  $\alpha$ s = .88 and .85, respectively).

To measure spouses' depression, spouses completed the widely used Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). Each of the 21 items included in this measure presents spouses with a list of four statements and asks them to choose the statement that best describes their feelings. For instance, one item presents spouses with the following four options: "I do not feel disappointed in myself," "I am disappointed in myself," "I am disgusted with myself," and "I hate myself." Coefficient alphas on this measure were .80 for both husbands and wives.

Finally, spouses were asked about several aspects of their relationship history. Specifically, spouses were asked how long they knew their partner before getting married, whether or not they cohabitated prior to marriage, and whether they had received premarital counseling.

### Data Analysis

Examination of the hypotheses derived from a model of global adoration and specific accuracy required both within-couple and between-couples analyses. A within-couple approach allowed us to examine variability in the degree to which spouses' perceptions of their partners' specific qualities agreed with partners' self-perceptions, controlling for spouses' idiosyncratic tendency to view the partner more or less favorably across the attributes. The between-couples approach allowed us to evaluate whether the extent of spouses' agreement with their partners' self-perceived specific qualities was associated with better support provision behaviors and better marital outcomes. To address both the within-couple and between-couple hypotheses, data were examined with hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992), implemented using the HLM/2L computer program (Bryk, Raudenbush, & Congdon, 1994). This approach

was adopted for several reasons. First, HLM provides reliable estimates of within-subject associations even when sample sizes are relatively small. Second, HLM provides maximally efficient estimates of these associations by weighting individual parameter estimates by their precision, according to empirical Bayes's theorem. For instance, the parameters of individuals who provide data at every wave of assessment will be estimated more reliably than those with missing data. HLM therefore weights the parameter estimates for these individuals more heavily than the parameter estimates for individuals who provide less data. Thus, the final estimate relies heavily on the individual data only when the associations for an individual can be estimated precisely. When these associations cannot be estimated precisely for an individual, the final estimate relies more heavily on the mean of the sample. Because the most precise estimates therefore contribute more to the final estimated variance of the sample, variances estimated in this way tend to be smaller and more conservative than those obtained through traditional ordinary least squares methods. Parameters describing husbands' and wives' data were estimated in separate models to control for the nonindependence of couple data.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for husbands' and wives' support provision behaviors. Given that the proportions of positive emotional and positive instrumental behaviors displayed in the interactions were low (positive emotional was .06 for both husbands and wives; positive instrumental was .08 and .10 for husbands and wives, respectively), all positive support codes were collapsed into a single variable. Overall, spouses tended to exhibit fairly positive support provision behaviors during the interactions. Despite the fact that spouses were fairly positive on average, however, the standard deviations for each of the codes were rather large, indicating that there was a wide range of behavioral abilities even within this sample of happy newlywed couples. Positive and negative support behaviors were significantly negatively associated for both husbands and wives,  $r(81) = -.49, p < .001$ , and  $r(81) = -.61, p < .001$ , respectively. Not surprisingly, then, spouses who provided more positive support also tended to provide less negative support. Given that positive and negative behaviors were strongly negatively correlated, a composite variable representing the total positivity of spouses' support behaviors (positive behavior minus negative behavior) was created in order to simplify analyses.

The total positivity of spouses' support provision behaviors was not significantly associated with their global marital satisfaction,

Table 1  
*Means for Support Behaviors Displayed During Support Interaction Tasks in Study 1*

	Proportion of behavior			
	Husbands		Wives	
Support provision behavior	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive	.28	.19	.36	.20
Negative	.12	.15	.08	.12
Neutral	.51	.17	.46	.14
Off-task	.09	.11	.09	.13
Overall positivity <sup>a</sup>	.16	.29	.28	.29

<sup>a</sup> Indicates positive behavior minus negative behavior.

$r(81) = -.02, p = .84$ , and  $r(81) = .14, p = .22$  for husbands and wives, respectively, for the SMD;  $r(81) = -.01, p = .66$ , and  $r(81) = .05, p = .65$ , for husbands and wives, respectively, on the QMI; or with their perceptions of their partners' global worth,  $r(81) = .10, p = .38$ , and  $r(81) = .05, p = .69$ , for husbands and wives, respectively. These correlations seem to confirm the idea that the positivity of spouses' global feelings for their partners does not help account for variability in spouses' social support abilities. Finally, spouses' global marital satisfaction was significantly associated with their perceptions of their partners' global worth, such that spouses who were happier in the marriage also held their partner in higher regard,  $r(81) = .48, p < .001$ , and  $r(81) = .43, p < .001$ , for husbands and wives, respectively, for the SMD;  $r(81) = .36, p = .001$  and  $r(81) = .21, p = .05$ , for husbands and wives, respectively, on the QMI. Thus, all measures behaved generally as expected.

### *Are Spouses Uniformly Happy With Their Partner and the Relationship?*

The hypotheses posed in this study are based on the premise that virtually all newlywed couples begin the marriage extremely happy with their partner and the relationship. The first goal of these analyses, then, was to assess the validity of this assumption. To do this, spouses' reports of their global marital satisfaction and their perceptions of their partners' global worth were examined. As seen in Table 2, the average level of husbands' and wives' initial marital satisfaction was quite high on both the SMD and the QMI. Perhaps more notable, however, is the fact that modal response on each of the satisfaction measures was the highest possible score on the measure for both husbands and wives (105 for the SMD and 45 for the QMI). Furthermore, about 50% of husbands and wives had a score above 100 on the SMD and above 44 on the QMI. These descriptive statistics indicate that the vast majority of spouses reported being highly satisfied with their marriages.

Turning to perceptions of the partner's global worth, Table 2 also shows that spouses' mean level of positive regard for their partners was quite high. As with reports of marital satisfaction, the

modal response of both husbands and wives was the highest possible score on the scale. In fact, 46% of husbands and 53% of wives gave their partners the highest possible rating. Thus, the majority of spouses also reported holding their partners in very high global esteem.

However, spouses were not so uniformly positive in their reports of their partners' specific attributes (see Table 2). Descriptive statistics on spouses' composite views across the attributes revealed that these scores were fairly normally distributed. In fact, only about 20% of husbands and wives reported a score of 100 or higher (out of 114) on the measure of specific attributes. Overall, then, although most of these newlywed spouses seemed to be very positively biased in their global views of the partner and the relationship, initial evidence indicates that they were not so biased (i.e., there was more variability) in their perceptions of their partners' specific qualities.

### *Do These Happy Spouses Vary in Their Perceptions of Their Partners' Specific Attributes?*

Given that spouses reported strongly positive global impressions of their marriages and their partners, the second goal of these analyses was to examine whether, within this sample of uniformly happy couples, spouses varied in the accuracy with which they viewed their partners' specific traits and abilities. To do this, the within-couple association between a spouse's perceptions of the partner's specific attributes and the partner's self-perceptions on these attributes was examined. It was predicted that although on average spouses would tend to agree with their partners' self-perceptions, there would nonetheless be significant variability in the extent of this agreement across spouses. This hypothesis was modeled using HLM according to the following equation:

$$\text{Spouse's perception of partner} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{partner's self-perception}) + \text{error}, \quad (1)$$

where the partner's self-perceptions were centered within persons. In this equation,  $\beta_{0j}$  represents an estimate of the average positivity

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Global and Specific Perceptions in Study 1*

Measure	Husbands				Wives			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode
Marital satisfaction								
SMD	96.6	8.7	99.0	105.0	97.9	10.6	101.0	105.0
QMI	42.3	3.9	44.0	45.0	42.2	5.2	44.0	45.0
Global perceptions of partner								
RSE	38.1	2.9	39.0	40.0	38.8	1.7	40.0	40.0
Specific perceptions of partner								
SAQ	89.3	10.9	90.0	89.0	88.3	13.7	90.0	92.0
Specific perceptions of self								
SAQ	84.6	14.3	87.0	86.0	84.9	13.5	87.0	89.0

*Note.* Scores on the SMD can range from 15 to 105. Scores on the QMI can range from 6 to 45. Scores on the RSE can range from 10 to 40. Scores on the SAQ can range from 6 to 114. For all measures, higher scores indicate more positive evaluations. SMD = Semantic Differential; QMI = Quality of Marriage Index; RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire; SAQ = Self-Attributes Questionnaire.

of a spouse's perceptions of the partner across the specific attributes, and  $\beta_{1j}$  captures the within-couple association between spouses' perceptions of the partner and partners' self-perceptions across the attributes for a given individual, controlling for spouses' tendency to view the partner more or less favorably on the attributes. Therefore,  $\beta_{1j}$  represents an index of relative accuracy. A positive  $\beta_{1j}$  would indicate that spouses' perceptions of their partners tend to agree with partners' self-perceptions. This equation was estimated for each spouse, and the significance of the average  $\beta_1$  term across spouses was investigated.

Results revealed that on average, both husbands and wives were demonstrating a relatively accurate view of their partners' self-perceived traits and abilities (see Table 3). However, as seen in the last column of Table 3, results also revealed that there was notable variability across spouses in the extent of this accuracy. Again, among these spouses who were very happy in their marriage and with their partner, some spouses were demonstrating a more accurate perception of their partners' specific qualities than were others. Further analyses revealed that spouses' personality did not seem to moderate their view of their partners' qualities, because neither neuroticism nor depression was significantly associated with the extent of spouses' accuracy. Moreover, the length of time spouses had known one another, whether the couple had lived together prior to marriage, and whether the couple received premarital counseling did not moderate spouses' view of their partners in that none of these variables was significantly associated with the extent of spouses' accuracy.

*Is Variability in Specific Accuracy Associated With Marital Well-Being?*

Given that results indicated variability in spouses' agreement with their partners' specific self-perceptions, the next goal was to examine the implications of this agreement for marital well-being. Specifically, it was predicted that a more accurate view of a partner's specific qualities may be associated with the manner in which spouses interact with their partners as well as with marital outcomes.

*Is specific accuracy associated with support provision?* The third goal of these analyses was to examine whether a relatively accurate view of a partner's specific qualities was associated with the ability to provide support to a partner. It was predicted that, controlling for spouses' marital satisfaction and the overall positivity of their specific perceptions, spouses with a more accurate perception of their partners' qualities would provide better social support. To test this hypothesis, spouses' support provision behaviors and their marital satisfaction were entered into the between-

couples level of the HLM analysis according to the following model:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} (\text{support provision}) + \gamma_{12} (\text{satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}, \quad (2)$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21} (\text{support provision}) + \gamma_{22} (\text{satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}, \quad (3)$$

where support provision and satisfaction scores were centered around the mean of the sample. In Equation 2,  $\beta_{0j}$  represents the intercept calculated for each spouse in Equation 1. In other words,  $\beta_{0j}$  captures the positivity of spouses' perceptions of their partners, and  $\gamma_{11}$  then captures the association between spouses' general tendency to view their partners more or less favorably on the attributes and their support provision behaviors, such that a positive  $\gamma_{11}$  would indicate that spouses with more positive perceptions about their partner also provide their partner with more positive social support, controlling for marital satisfaction. In Equation 3,  $\beta_{1j}$  represents the slope calculated for each spouse in Equation 1. In other words,  $\beta_{1j}$  captures the extent to which spouses' perceptions of their partners agree with their partners' self-perceptions, and  $\gamma_{21}$  then captures the association between spouses' specific accuracy and their supportive behaviors, such that a positive  $\gamma_{21}$  would indicate that spouses who agree with their partners' self-perceived attributes provide their partners with more positive support, controlling for marital satisfaction. By estimating these two equations simultaneously, the HLM program estimates the association between spouses' accuracy and their support provision while controlling for the association between the positivity of their perceptions and their support provision.

As seen in Table 4, the general positivity of spouses' perceptions was not significantly associated with supportive behaviors for husbands or for wives. In other words, in the context of these generally happy marriages, viewing a partner's specific attributes favorably was not associated with an increased ability to provide the partner with support. However, spouses' agreement with their partners' self-views was marginally associated with support provision for wives, though not for husbands. Controlling for both their global marital satisfaction and the positivity of their specific perceptions, there was a trend for wives who displayed a more accurate view of their husbands' specific qualities to exhibit better support provision behaviors during the interaction than wives with a less accurate perception of their husbands' qualities.

*Is specific accuracy associated with relationship dissolution?* The fourth goal of these analyses was to examine whether a relatively accurate perception of a partner's specific qualities was associated with a lower likelihood of divorce over time. It was predicted that spouses who agree with their partners' self-perceived specific qualities would be less likely to divorce during the first 4 years of marriage. To examine this hypothesis, the following equations were estimated again at the between-couples level of the HLM analysis:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} (\text{divorce}) + \gamma_{12} (\text{satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}; \quad (4)$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21} (\text{divorce}) + \gamma_{22} (\text{satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}, \quad (5)$$

where satisfaction scores were centered around the mean of the sample. In Equation 4,  $\beta_{0j}$  again indicates the intercept calculated for each spouse in Equation 1. In other words,  $\beta_{0j}$  captures the positivity of spouses' perceptions of their partners, and  $\gamma_{11}$  then captures the association between spouses' general tendency to view their partners more or less favorably on the attributes and

Table 3  
*Within-Couple Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of the Partner and Partners' Self-Perceptions Across the Specific Attributes (Study 1)*

Gender	$\beta$	SE	t(81)	Effect size r	$\chi^2$ test of variability (81, N = 81)
Husbands	.66	.06	10.9***	.78	107.4*
Wives	.73	.06	12.3***	.82	94.3†

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

whether or not the couple divorced during the first 4 years of marriage, controlling for initial marital satisfaction. A negative  $\gamma_{11}$  would indicate that spouses with more positive perceptions about their partner were less likely to divorce. In Equation 5,  $\beta_{1j}$  indicates the slope calculated for each spouse in Equation 1. In other words,  $\beta_{1j}$  captures the extent to which spouses' perceptions agreed with their partners' self-perceptions, and  $\gamma_{21}$  captures the association between spouses' accuracy and whether or not the couple divorced, controlling for initial marital satisfaction. A negative  $\gamma_{21}$  would indicate that spouses with a more accurate view of their partners' attributes were less likely to divorce. By estimating these two equations simultaneously, the HLM program estimates the association between spouses' accuracy and their marital outcomes, controlling for the association between the positivity of their perceptions and their marital outcomes.

As seen in Table 5, the general positivity of spouses' perceptions was not significantly associated with marital outcomes for husbands or for wives. Among these globally happy couples, viewing a partner's specific attributes favorably was not associated with whether or not the couple divorced during the first years of marriage. However, spouses' agreement with their partners' self-views was associated with marital outcomes for wives, though not for husbands. Controlling for initial satisfaction and the positivity of specific perceptions, when wives displayed a more accurate perception of their husbands' self-views on the specific attributes, the couple was significantly less likely to divorce during the 4-year period. Further analyses were conducted to determine whether wives' supportive behaviors may mediate the association between wives' accuracy and marital dissolution. However, evidence for mediation was not found in the current study.

### Discussion of Study 1

In line with prior research on newly married couples, the majority of couples in the current study indicated that they were extremely happy with the marriage and that they held their partner in the highest regard.<sup>2</sup> On average, these spouses also displayed a relatively accurate view of their partners' self-perceived traits and abilities. However, results reveal significant variability in the extent of this accuracy across partners, such that some spouses agreed with their partners' self-perceived specific qualities more than others. Thus, though couples were almost uniformly happy with each other at the level of their global perceptions, this positive global view of the partner was not grounded in an accurate view of

Table 4  
*Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of Their Partners' Attributes and Their Support Provision (Study 1)*

Gender	$\gamma$	SE	$t(79)$	Effect size $r$
Associations between the positivity of spouses' perceptions and support				
Husbands	-.76	.66	-1.15	.13
Wives	-.69	.92	-0.75	.09
Associations between spouses' specific accuracy and support				
Husbands	.08	.22	0.36	.04
Wives	.31	.19	1.81 <sup>†</sup>	.20

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

Table 5  
*Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of Their Partners' Attributes and Their Marital Outcomes Over 4 Years (Study 1)*

Gender	$\gamma$	SE	$t(79)$	Effect size $r$
Associations between the positivity of spouses' perceptions and divorce				
Husbands	-.66	.51	-1.32	.15
Wives	.05	.62	-0.08	.01
Associations between spouses' specific accuracy and divorce				
Husbands	.07	.15	0.47	.05
Wives	-.29	.12	-2.92*	.32

\*  $p < .05$ .

the partner's specific attributes for all couples. For wives, specific accuracy had implications for marriage even when controlling for the positivity of their specific perceptions. Among these highly satisfied wives, there was a marginal tendency for wives who agreed with their partners' self-perceived traits and abilities to provide their partners with better quality support as judged by independent observers, providing some initial evidence that both love and accuracy may be necessary for positive support provision. Also, when wives had a more accurate view of their husbands' specific qualities, the couple was less likely to divorce during the first 4 years of marriage, indicating that love at the global level may be even more lasting when based on accuracy at the specific level.

Several factors, however, limit interpretations of the current findings. First, the current study did not directly examine the processes through which specific accuracy may influence relationship outcomes. For instance, as mentioned, theories of identity

<sup>2</sup> To ensure that it is accuracy at the specific level and not just accuracy in general that is associated with better outcomes, it is necessary to examine spouses' agreement with their partners' self-views on the measure of global worth as well. However, the degree of skewness in the measure of global worth may lead to difficulties in interpreting the results. Nearly all spouses rated their partners extremely positively on the global measure. Similarly, most spouses rated themselves highly on the measure as well. Thus, whether spouses were accurate in their perceptions of their partners was tied to how positively partners rate their own self-esteem. Whereas a spouse with high self-esteem would have an accurate partner, a spouse with low self-esteem would have an inaccurate partner. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether the partner's accuracy or the spouse's own level of self-esteem may be driving any effect. Nevertheless, for the interested reader, we did examine the within-couple association between spouses' perceptions of the partner and partners' self-perceptions across the 10 items of the measure of global worth (see Equation 1). Then, parallel to the analyses using the measure of specific attributes, spouses' support provision (see Equations 2 and 3) and whether the couple divorced (see Equations 4 and 5) were entered at the between-subjects level of the analyses. Results indicate that for both husbands and wives, having a more accurate view of the partner's global worth was not associated with spouses' support provision during the interactions,  $\gamma = -.12$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t(77) = -0.80$ ,  $ns$ , and  $\gamma = -.08$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(77) = -0.57$ ,  $ns$ , respectively, or with the couple's likelihood of divorce,  $\gamma = -.16$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t(77) = -1.6$ ,  $ns$ , and  $\gamma = .15$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t(77) = 1.9$ ,  $ns$ , respectively. Consistent with a model of global adoration and specific accuracy, initial evidence suggests the importance of accuracy for marital well-being may be confined to the level of spouses' specific perceptions.

negotiation in relationships argue that although less biased specific perceptions may not always reflect favorably on the partner, they nevertheless should be rewarding because they serve to reinforce spouses' sense of understanding regarding their marriage. In other words, specific accuracy might lead to positive outcomes by enhancing spouses' feelings of prediction and control within the relationship (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). However, this hypothesis was not tested. Second, the study assessed only a small number of traits and abilities. It is possible that the traits measured in this study may not have been equally important or meaningful for husbands and wives. Measuring perceptions on a different set of qualities may indicate that husbands' views of their wives also are associated with marital well-being. Finally, although the sample size of the current study compared favorably with other longitudinal studies of marriage, a larger sample size would have provided greater power to detect possible associations. To address these limitations of the first study, a second study was conducted.

### Overview of Study 2

The second study had two primary goals: first, to replicate the findings of the first study in a larger, independent sample of couples using a different set of specific qualities, and second, to extend these findings by examining whether the degree of accuracy in spouses' perceptions of their partners may influence future feelings of control within the relationship. Namely, spouses who begin the marriage with an accurate perception of their partners' self-views should feel secure in their ability to predict how their partner will respond to them, leading them to experience greater feelings of control within the relationship and better relationship outcomes (Schlenker, 1984; Swann, 1984; Swann et al., 1992). To accomplish these goals, the second study examined spouses' global and specific perceptions of their partners, their feelings of marital control, and their observed supportive behaviors assessed during a lab interaction task in an independent sample of 169 first-married newlywed couples. As in Study 1, it was predicted that although virtually all of these newlyweds would report strongly positive global impressions of their partners, some spouses would demonstrate a more accurate perception of their partners' self-perceived specific qualities than others. This variability in specific accuracy was predicted to influence marital well-being in three ways. First, specific accuracy was expected to be positively related to supportive behaviors, such that among these happily married couples, spouses who viewed their partners' qualities with greater accuracy should provide more positive support. Second, spouses entering the marriage with a more accurate perception of their partners' qualities were expected to exhibit greater feelings of control within the marriage over time, controlling for their initial feelings of marital control. Finally, spouses with a more accurate view of their partners' specific qualities also were expected to be less likely to divorce during the early years of marriage.

### Method

#### Participants

Couples were recruited for a larger study on marital development using two methods. First, advertisements were placed in community newspapers and bridal shops. Second, letters were sent to couples who had applied for marriage licenses in Alachua County, Florida. Couples responding to either

method of solicitation were screened in a telephone interview to determine whether they met the criteria outlined in Study 1. The final sample consisted of 169 couples.

On average, husbands were 25.6 ( $SD = 4.1$ ) years old and had received 16.3 ( $SD = 2.4$ ) years of education. Fifty-nine percent were employed full time, and 34% were full-time students. Wives were an average of 23.4 ( $SD = 3.6$ ) years old and had received 16.2 ( $SD = 2.0$ ) years of education. Forty-five percent were employed full time, and 45% were full-time students. Slightly over 65% of the sample was Christian, and 94% of husbands and 86% of wives were White. Overall, then, the demographics of this sample were similar to the sample used in Study 1.

#### Procedure

Within the first 6 months of their marriage, couples meeting eligibility requirements were scheduled to attend a 3-hr laboratory session and asked to complete a packet of questionnaires. The procedure for completing the self-report questionnaires as well as for engaging in the support interactions was identical to the procedure described in Study 1. Following the lab session, couples were then contacted every 6 months over the next 2 years and asked to complete additional questionnaires as well as to report on the status of the marriage (i.e., still married or divorced). Unless otherwise stated, all measures described below were given to couples at Time 1 of the study. During the first 2 years of marriage, 11 couples (7%) reported they had divorced.

#### Materials

*Global marital satisfaction.* Relationship satisfaction again was measured using both a version of the SMD (Osgood et al., 1957) and the QMI (Norton, 1983). The internal consistency of both measures was high (coefficient  $\alpha = .95$  for husbands and  $.93$  for wives on the SMD and  $.92$  for husbands and  $.93$  for wives on the QMI).

*Global evaluations of the partner.* To assess spouses' global evaluations of both themselves and their partners, the RSE was again used (S. Rosenberg, 1965). The internal consistency of the 10 items was adequate for spouses' self-evaluations (coefficient  $\alpha = .87$  for husbands and  $.89$  for wives) and for spouses' evaluations of their partners (coefficient  $\alpha = .72$  for wives' views of their husbands and  $.59$  for husbands' views of their wives). Similar to Study 1, closer examination of husbands' evaluations of their wives revealed that the lower alpha for husbands' ratings of their partners was likely due to the lower variability in responses across husbands. For instance, all 169 husbands in the study strongly disagreed with the statement indicating that they felt their partner was a failure.

*Specific perceptions of the self and partner.* To assess the extent to which spouses agreed with their partners' self-perceptions of their specific traits, a version of the Big Five Personality Inventory was used (Goldberg, 1999). This measure asks individuals to rate themselves and their partners on 50 items designed to assess five personality traits: Extraversion (e.g., "I enjoy being the center of attention," "I have little to say"), Agreeableness (e.g., "I take time out for others," "I feel little concern for others"), Conscientiousness (e.g., "I am always prepared," "I shirk my duties"), Neuroticism (e.g., "I get upset easily," "I am relaxed most of the time") and Openness (e.g., "I am quick to understand things," "I do not have a good imagination"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). A composite score for each personality trait was created by summing the 10 items related to that trait. Composite scores could range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating a more positive evaluation (e.g., more Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion and less Neuroticism). The internal consistency of the ratings was high for ratings of self (coefficient  $\alpha = .91, .84, .84, .88,$  and  $.79$  for husbands and  $.88, .76, .85, .88,$  and  $.81$  for wives on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, respectively) and for ratings of partner (coefficient  $\alpha = .86, .86, .82, .91,$  and  $.78$  for husbands' view of partner and  $.92, .86, .84, .86,$  and  $.81$  for wives' view of

partner). For all analyses of interest, the five traits were examined separately rather than as a composite personality score.

**Behavioral observation coding.** As in Study 1, the SSICS (Pasch et al., 1997) was used to assess the support provision behaviors displayed during the lab interaction tasks. Five research assistants (none of whom coded the interactions from Study 1) were trained to independently code the interactions using the SSICS. Interrater reliability, which was assessed by having randomly selected pairs of observers code a randomly selected 25% of the interactions, was generally quite high (intraclass correlation coefficients = .55 for positive emotional, .82 for positive instrumental, .72 for positive other, .84 for negative, .87 for neutral, and .99 for off-task). To analyze the codes, the number of times each code was assigned to each spouse was divided by the total number of speaking turns of that spouse. Thus, each code was analyzed as a proportion of the total speaking turns to control for variation across spouses in the number of speaking turns.

**Marital locus of control.** To assess spouses' feelings of control within the marriage, the Miller Marital Locus of Control Scale was used (Miller, Lefcourt, & Ware, 1983). To determine whether specific accuracy may influence future feelings of control, spouses were asked to complete this measure both when couples were first married (Time 1) and again 6 months later (Time 2). This measure asks spouses to rate their agreement with seven statements related to their perceptions of helplessness and control within the relationship. For instance, spouses indicate the amount of control they feel when coping with problems that arise in the marriage and when resolving conflicts with the partner. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Composite scores could range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating lower feelings of control. The internal consistency of the measure was adequate for husbands and wives at both time points (coefficient  $\alpha$ s = .83 and .76, respectively, at Time 1 and .84 and .90, respectively, at Time 2). At Time 2, 155 couples (92%) completed the questionnaire. Analyses revealed no differences between those couples who completed a Time 2 questionnaire and those who did not on any of the variables of interest in the study.

**Individual difference variables.** Spouses completed questionnaires identical to those used in Study 1 on their neuroticism, depression, and personal relationship history. Internal consistency on the measure of neuroticism was high for both husbands and wives (coefficient  $\alpha$ s = .85 and .82, respectively). Internal consistency also was high on the measure of depression (coefficient  $\alpha$ s = .84 and .82 for husbands and wives, respectively).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 6 presents descriptive statistics for husbands' and wives' support provision behaviors. Because the proportions of positive emotional and positive instrumental behaviors displayed in the

interactions were low (positive emotional was .01 for both husbands and wives; positive instrumental was .09 and .11 for husbands and wives, respectively), all positive support provider codes were collapsed into a single variable. Overall, spouses tended to exhibit fairly positive support provision behaviors during the interactions. As in Study 1, however, the standard deviations for the codes were rather large, indicating that there was a wide range of behavioral abilities even within this sample of happy newlywed couples. Positive and negative support behaviors were significantly negatively associated for both husbands and wives,  $r(168) = -.19, p < .001$ , and  $r(168) = -.28, p < .001$ , respectively, such that spouses who provided more positive support also tended to provide less negative support. Consistent with Study 1, a composite variable representing the total positivity of spouses' support behaviors (positive behavior minus negative behavior) was created to simplify analyses.

The total positivity of spouses' support provision behaviors was significantly associated with their global marital satisfaction for wives but not for husbands,  $r(168) = .21, p = .006$ , and  $r(168) = .17, p = .03$ , for wives on the SMD and QMI, respectively;  $r(168) = -.05, p = .48$ , and  $r(168) = .02, p = .83$ , for husbands on the SMD and QMI, respectively. Thus, wives who provided better support to their partners also tended to be more satisfied with their marriages. Spouses' supportive behaviors were not significantly associated with their perceptions of their partners' global worth,  $r(168) = .01, p = .87$ , and  $r(168) = .11, p = .14$ , for husbands and wives, respectively. Though these correlations provide some evidence that global satisfaction is related to support abilities, they nevertheless indicate that global evaluations of the marriage and partner do not fully account for variability in supportive behaviors. Finally, spouses' global marital satisfaction was significantly associated with their perceptions of their partners' global worth, such that spouses who were happier in the marriage also held their partner in higher regard,  $r(168) = .59, p < .001$ , and  $r(168) = .49, p < .001$ , for husbands and wives, respectively, for the SMD;  $r(168) = .59, p < .001$ , and  $r(168) = .48, p < .001$ , for husbands and wives, respectively, on the QMI. Overall, then, results of these preliminary analyses were similar to those of Study 1.

### Are Spouses Uniformly Happy With Their Partner and the Relationship?

The first goal of these analyses was to assess whether these newlywed spouses were uniformly happy with their partner and the marriage. To do this, spouses' reports of their global marital satisfaction and their perceptions of their partners' global worth were examined. As seen in Table 7, the average level of husbands' and wives' initial marital satisfaction was quite high on both the SMD and the QMI. Moreover, replicating Study 1, the modal response on each of the satisfaction measures was the highest possible score on the measure for both husbands and wives (105 for the SMD and 45 for the QMI). Furthermore, about 50% of husbands and wives had a score above 100 on the SMD and above 43 on the QMI. Thus, as in Study 1, these descriptive statistics indicate that the vast majority of spouses reported being highly satisfied with their marriages.

Turning to perceptions of the partner's global worth, Table 7 also shows that spouses' mean level of positive regard for their partners was quite high. The modal response of both husbands and

Table 6  
Means for Support Behaviors Displayed During Support Interaction Tasks in Study 2

Support provision behavior	Proportion of behavior			
	Husbands		Wives	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive	.48	.20	.48	.22
Negative	.02	.05	.01	.06
Neutral	.41	.17	.38	.19
Off-task	.08	.12	.11	.16
Overall positivity <sup>a</sup>	.46	.22	.47	.25

<sup>a</sup> Indicates positive behavior minus negative behavior.

Table 7  
*Descriptive Statistics for Global and Specific Perceptions in Study 2*

Measure	Husbands				Wives			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode
Marital satisfaction								
SMD	95.6	10.3	98.0	105.0	97.6	9.5	101.0	105.0
QMI	41.7	4.6	44.0	45.0	42.2	4.4	44.0	45.0
Global perceptions of partner								
RSE	38.2	2.1	39.0	40.0	38.3	2.7	40.0	40.0

*Note.* Scores on the SMD can range from 15 to 105. Scores on the QMI can range from 6 to 45. Scores on the RSE can range from 10 to 40. SMD = Semantic Differential; QMI = Quality of Marriage Index; RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire.

wives was the highest possible score on the scale. In fact, 39% of husbands and 50% of wives gave their partners the highest possible rating. Thus, the vast majority of spouses also reported holding their partners in very high global esteem, similar to Study 1. Moreover, when comparing spouses' evaluations of their partners to their partners' self-view, the average difference between husbands' evaluations of their wives and wives' self-appraisals was 4.7 ( $SD = 5.8$ ), and the average difference between wives' evaluations of their husbands and husbands' self-appraisals was 3.7 ( $SD = 5.0$ ). One-sample  $t$  tests indicated that each of these average difference scores were significantly greater than zero: For husbands' view of wives,  $t(168) = 10.6, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.6$ ; for wives' view of husbands,  $t(168) = 9.7, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.5$ . These results indicate that on average, spouses were significantly enhancing in their perceptions of their partners' global worth, viewing their partners as more worthwhile than partners viewed themselves.

#### *Do These Happy Spouses Vary in Their Perceptions of Their Partners' Specific Attributes?*

Given that spouses reported strongly positive global impressions of their marriages and their partners, the second goal of these analyses was to examine whether, within this sample of uniformly happy couples, spouses varied in the accuracy with which they viewed their partners' specific traits. To do this, the within-couple association between a spouse's perceptions of the partner's specific traits and the partner's self-perceptions on these traits was modeled using HLM (see Equation 1 from Study 1).

Results reveal that on average, both husbands and wives tended to agree with their partners' self-views on the specific traits (see Table 8). However, as seen in the last column of Table 8, these results also reveal that there was notable variability across spouses in the extent of this agreement. Replicating Study 1, among these spouses who were very happy in their marriage and with their partner, some spouses were demonstrating a more accurate view of their partners' specific qualities than were others.

Further analyses indicated that spouses' own personality, such as their neuroticism or depression, was not significantly associated with the extent to which they agreed with their partners' self-perceived traits. In addition, the length of time spouses had known one another and whether the couple had received premarital counseling were not significantly associated with spouses' accuracy. However, whether the couple had lived together prior to marriage was significantly associated with wives' accuracy, such that wives

who lived with their husbands prior to marriage had a more accurate view of their husbands' traits ( $\beta = .10, SE = .05$ ),  $t(164) = 2.1, p = .04$ . Controlling for premarital cohabitation in each of the following analyses did not alter any of the results presented.

#### *Is Specific Accuracy Associated With Support Provision?*

The second goal of these analyses was to examine whether a relatively accurate perception of a partner's specific traits was associated with the ability to provide support to a partner. As in Study 1, it was predicted that, controlling for spouses' marital satisfaction and the positivity of their specific perceptions, spouses who agreed with their partners' self-perceived qualities would provide better social support. To test this hypothesis, spouses' support provision behaviors and their marital satisfaction were entered into the between-couples level of the HLM analysis (see Equations 2 and 3 from Study 1).

As shown in Table 9, the general positivity of spouses' perceptions was not significantly associated with supportive behavior for husbands or for wives. Similar to Study 1, viewing a partner's specific traits favorably was not associated with an increased ability to provide the partner with support. However, building on the marginal association found in Study 1, spouses' specific accuracy was significantly associated with support provision for wives, though not for husbands. Controlling for both their global marital satisfaction and the positivity of their specific perceptions, wives who agreed with their husbands' self-views on the specific traits provided their partners with more positive support during the interaction than wives with a less accurate view of their husbands' qualities.

Table 8  
*Within-Couple Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of the Partner and Partners' Self-Perceptions Across the Specific Attributes (Study 2)*

Gender	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	$t(168)$	Effect size $r$	$\chi^2$ test of variability (168, $N = 169$ )
Husbands	.60	.03	18.7***	.82	245.5***
Wives	.83	.02	33.5***	.93	189.9†

†  $p < .10$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 9  
Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of Their Partners' Attributes and Their Support Provision (Study 2)

Gender	$\gamma$	SE	$t(166)$	Effect size $r$
Associations between the positivity of spouses' perceptions and support				
Husbands	0.67	1.07	0.63	.05
Wives	1.22	0.98	1.24	.10
Associations between spouses' specific accuracy and support				
Husbands	0.13	0.18	0.70	.05
Wives	0.22	0.10	2.21*	.16

\*  $p < .05$ .

*Is Specific Accuracy Associated With Future Feelings of Marital Control?*

The third goal of these analyses was to examine whether a relatively accurate perception of a partner's specific traits at the beginning of the marriage was associated with spouses' later feelings of control in the relationship. The association between spouses' initial accuracy and their future feelings of control was estimated at the between-couples level of the HLM analysis, according to the following model:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} (\text{Time 1 feelings of control}) + \gamma_{12} (\text{Time 2 feelings of control}) + \gamma_{13} (\text{initial satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}; \quad (6)$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21} (\text{Time 1 feelings of control}) + \gamma_{22} (\text{Time 2 feelings of control}) + \gamma_{23} (\text{initial satisfaction}) + \mu_{1j}, \quad (7)$$

where feelings of control and satisfaction scores were centered around the mean of the sample. In Equation 6,  $\beta_{0j}$  represents the positivity of spouses' perceptions of their partners (see Equation 1), and  $\gamma_{12}$  then captures the association between spouses' initial tendency to view their partners more or less favorably on the attributes and their future feelings of marital control, such that a negative  $\gamma_{12}$  would indicate that spouses with more positive perceptions about their partner also report greater feelings of control, controlling for their initial marital satisfaction and feelings of control. In Equation 7,  $\beta_{1j}$  captures the extent to which spouses' perceptions of their partners agree with their partners' self-perceptions (see Equation 1), and  $\gamma_{22}$  then captures the association between spouses' specific accuracy and their future marital control, such that a negative  $\gamma_{22}$  would indicate that spouses who agree with their partners' self-perceived attributes report greater feelings of control in the marriage, controlling for initial marital satisfaction and feelings of control. By estimating these two equations simultaneously, the HLM program estimated the association between spouses' accuracy and their marital control while controlling for the association between the positivity of their perceptions and their marital control.

As seen in Table 10, the general positivity of spouses'

Table 10  
Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of Their Partners' Attributes and Their Feelings of Marital Control 6 Months Later (Study 2)

Gender	$\gamma$	SE	$t(142)$	Effect size $r$
Associations between the positivity of spouses' perceptions and future marital control				
Husbands	.14	.09	1.69	.14
Wives	.04	.10	0.39	.03
Associations between spouses' specific accuracy and future marital control				
Husbands	-.01	.01	-0.60	.05
Wives	-.02	.01	-3.13**	.25

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

perceptions was not significantly associated with later feelings of marital control for husbands or for wives. However, spouses' agreement with their partners' self-views was associated with future feelings of control for wives, though not for husbands. Controlling for global marital satisfaction, the positivity of their specific perceptions, and their initial feelings of control, wives who displayed a more accurate view of their husbands' specific qualities at the beginning of the marriage reported greater feelings of control within the marriage 6 months later.

*Is Specific Accuracy Associated With Relationship Dissolution?*

The fourth goal of these analyses was to examine whether a relatively accurate view of a partner's specific traits was associated with a lower likelihood of divorce over time. The association between spouses' accuracy and whether the couple divorced over the first 2 years of marriage was estimated at the between-couples level of the HLM analysis (see Equations 4 and 5 from Study 1). As seen in Table 11, the general positivity of spouses' perceptions was not significantly associated with marital outcomes for husbands or for wives. As in Study 1, among these globally happy couples, viewing a partner's specific traits favorably was not associated with whether or not the couple divorced during the

Table 11  
Associations Between Spouses' Perceptions of Their Partners' Attributes and Their Marital Outcomes Over 2 Years (Study 2)

Gender	$\gamma$	SE	$t(166)$	Effect size $r$
Associations between the positivity of spouses' perceptions and divorce				
Husbands	0.06	0.81	0.07	.01
Wives	0.68	1.30	0.52	.04
Associations between spouses' specific accuracy and divorce				
Husbands	0.14	0.11	1.28	.10
Wives	-0.24	0.09	-2.85**	.22

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

first years of marriage. However, replicating Study 1, spouses' accuracy was associated with marital outcomes for wives, though not for husbands. Controlling for initial satisfaction and the positivity of specific perceptions, when wives agreed with their husbands' self-views on the specific traits, the couple was significantly less likely to divorce over the 2-year period. Further analyses were conducted to determine whether wives' supportive behaviors or their feelings of control may have mediated this association between wives' accuracy and marital dissolution. However, evidence for mediation was not found in the current study.

### *Discussion of Study 2*

Overall, these results replicate and extend the findings of Study 1. The majority of spouses reported that they were extremely happy with the marriage and that they held their partner in the highest regard.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, even though couples were almost uniformly happy with each other at the level of their global perceptions, spouses varied significantly in the extent to which they agreed with their partners' self-perceived specific traits. As in the first study, this variability in specific accuracy was associated with marital well-being for wives, though not for husbands. Even when controlling for the positivity of specific perceptions, wives who had a more accurate view of their partners' specific traits provided their partners with more positive social support, reported greater feelings of marital control 6 months later, and were less likely to divorce during the first 2 years of marriage. Notably, the association between accuracy and divorce replicated in this study even though a relatively small number of couples divorced over the 2-year period, attesting to the robustness of this association.

## General Discussion

### *Rationale and Summary of Results*

At the beginning of a marriage, virtually all spouses profess a strong love for each other. Despite these promising beginnings, however, a large number of marriages nevertheless end in unhappiness and disillusionment (Bumpass, 1990). To understand this shift in relationship evaluations, the current article evaluates a model for identifying the type of love that should foster greater marital quality and stability. It was expected that although newlyweds may appear nearly identical in their global evaluations of their partners, only some spouses would base this global adoration on a relatively accurate perception of their partners' specific traits and abilities, which should serve to enhance relationship outcomes. Results of two separate studies of newly married couples confirmed that whereas spouses were indeed almost uniformly happy with each other at the level of their global evaluations, not all spouses grounded this adoration in specific accuracy. Moreover, the extent to which spouses agreed with their partners' self-perceived traits and abilities had several important implications for marital well-being. Among these highly satisfied couples, wives who displayed a more accurate perception of their partners' specific traits were rated by independent observers as providing more positive support to their husbands, indicating that positive regard alone may not be sufficient for positive social support. Rather, these results are consistent with the idea that a love in which spouses hold each other in high esteem while also recog-

nizing one another's specific qualities may allow spouses to give both the loving encouragement and the specific information necessary to effectively support a partner. In addition, when wives entered the marriage with a more accurate view of their husbands' specific qualities, they reported greater feelings of control within the marriage 6 months later. In line with theories of identity negotiation in relationships (Swann et al., 1994), it seems that specific accuracy may serve to bolster spouses' feelings of prediction and marital control over time. Finally, when these highly satisfied wives displayed a more accurate view of their partners' specific traits, the couple was less likely to divorce over the early years of marriage. These findings argue that love at the global level may be even more powerful when based on specific accuracy. It is important to note that the results held even when controlling for the positivity of wives' specific perceptions. In other words, it was accurately perceiving a partner's traits, not viewing the partner's specific traits positively, that was associated with marital well-being.

In the current studies, supportive behaviors and feelings of control were not found to mediate the association between specific accuracy and marital stability. However, the larger pattern of results is consistent with the general theory that global adoration grounded in specific accuracy serves to enhance adaptive processes in marriage by bolstering the effectiveness of marital interactions and increasing feelings of control, which ultimately should make the relationship more resilient to problems over time. In other words, specific accuracy seems to equip spouses with the tools necessary to help sustain their marital happiness over time. The failure to find direct evidence for mediation may have resulted from low power to detect such associations. For instance, in Study 2 in particular, a relatively low number of couples divorced over the course of the study. Similarly, Study 2 described data only from couples' first 2 years of marriage. Perhaps a longer time interval would have allowed for mediating processes to emerge. Additionally, it may simply be unrealistic to expect a single set of lab interactions or a single measure of feelings of control to mediate long-term relationship outcomes. That is, over the course of several years, these brief measures represent only a small sample of each couple's typical thoughts and behaviors. Thus, additional data may be necessary to demonstrate the processes through which specific accuracy may lead to marital stability.

Why did marriages only seem to benefit when wives agreed with their husbands' self-perceived specific qualities? Husbands

<sup>3</sup> To again examine whether it is specific accuracy or accuracy in general that is associated with better marital well-being, spouses' agreement with their partners' self-views on the measure of global worth was examined. For both husbands and wives, having a more accurate view of the partner's global worth was not associated with whether the couple divorced:  $\gamma = -.25$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(164) = -1.7$ , *ns*, and  $\gamma = .11$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(164) = 0.87$ , *ns*, respectively. Wives' agreement with their husbands' self-perceptions was not associated with their support provision,  $\gamma = .06$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(164) = 0.73$ , *ns*. However, husbands who agreed with their wives' global self-perceptions were rated as providing better social support,  $\gamma = .17$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(164) = 2.0$ ,  $p = .05$ . Nevertheless, when controlling for wives' level of self-esteem (to ensure that it was husbands' accuracy and not wives' poor self-esteem that was driving the results—see Footnote 2), this association was no longer significant. Again, in contrast to the findings for specific perceptions, greater accuracy at the global level did not seem to contribute to marital quality beyond global positivity biases.

did vary significantly in their specific perceptions of their wives, such that some husbands were more accurate in their perceptions than were others. However, husbands' accuracy was not associated with their support abilities, feelings of control, or with couples' likelihood of divorce. Prior research has found that wives tend to think more often and with more complexity about relationship issues than do their husbands (Acitelli & Young, 1996). Furthermore, women may be more likely than men to actively work on improving the relationship (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). If women are more responsible for engaging in the relationship work, this suggests it may be more important for them to accurately perceive their husbands' specific qualities in order to foster a sense of prediction and control within the relationship than it is for husbands to view their wives' qualities accurately. In fact, the current findings are consistent with some other studies of accuracy and understanding in marriage. Acitelli, Douvan, and Veroff (1993) found that although wives' understanding of their husbands' conflict styles predicted marital well-being, husbands' understanding of their wives was not associated with marital quality. Additionally, though data on who initiated the divorce were not available in the current studies, the finding that wives' perceptions mattered more than husbands' perceptions for marital stability is consistent with prior research indicating a sex difference in the decision to separate, with both men and women reporting that the decision had been the woman's (Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980). Thus, the current studies seem to complement converging evidence suggesting that women's relational processes may be particularly important for marital stability.

However, a second reason for this apparent gender difference in the results may be that husbands' accuracy influences the marriage in different ways. For instance, though specific accuracy would be predicted to affect the nature of spouses' expectations for their partners' behaviors, partner expectations were not measured in these studies. Husbands with less accurate perceptions of their partners' qualities may have highly unrealistic expectations of their partners, which could contribute to marital instability over time. Further research is needed to clarify the influence that husbands' specific accuracy may have on marital processes.

### *Integrating the Proposed Model With Alternative Theories of Satisfaction and Love*

Overall, a model of global adoration and specific accuracy seems to tie together recent research and theory on the types of marital evaluations associated with more lasting, satisfying relationships. Relationship researchers have long debated over whether positively biased or relatively accurate perceptions of a partner are associated with better relationship quality (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b; Swann et al., 1994). Though researchers on each side of the debate have suggested that both enhancement and accuracy may contribute to relationship quality, the current model takes this discussion a step further by formally operationalizing how the healthiest, most stable relationships may be characterized simultaneously by both enhancement and accuracy. That is, in line with research on enhancement in relationships, the current model suggests that enhancing a partner is a necessary component of successful relationships. Enhancing a partner at the level of global perceptions seems critical for maintaining the belief that one's partner is the "right one" and for protecting the relationship from doubt (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b). However, globally enhancing

a partner may not be sufficient for sustaining marital happiness over time. That is, once global enhancement has been established, a love without an accurate view of the partners' specific qualities nevertheless may be fragile. Global adoration lacking in specific accuracy not only leaves spouses vulnerable to disappointment as their partners' faults surface over the course of the relationship but also may lead partners to doubt the credibility of their spouses' love.

Thus, in line with research on accuracy in relationships, the current model also argues for the critical role of accuracy for successful relationships. An accurate view of a partner's specific qualities should ensure that interactions will proceed smoothly and cooperative efforts to achieve relationship goals will prove successful (Swann et al., 1994). Spouses who begin the relationship recognizing their partners' relative strengths and weaknesses are less likely to be surprised by their partners' negative qualities and thus better able to cope with those qualities as they surface throughout the relationship. Furthermore, trust in a spouse's love may be particularly high when global adoration is accompanied by specific accuracy, because spouses are communicating that they love their partners in spite of (or perhaps because of) their faults.

The current model also complements current theories on positive forms of love. For instance, Noller (1996) has argued that mature love, which involves "acknowledging and accepting differences and weaknesses" (p. 112), should be more likely than immature, more selfish love to promote marriage and family. Similarly, a number of researchers recently have begun investigating compassionate love, in which the needs, interests, and desires of the others are placed before the self (Fehr & Sprecher, 2003). Spouses who globally adore their partners while also recognizing their partners' specific positive and negative qualities may be providing a love that is more selfless in nature than are spouses who adore their partners without specific accuracy. If one enhances a partner on all dimensions, loving the partner should not be very difficult. In fact, some spouses may not be able to love their partners unless they view each of their partners' traits as positive. In this case, the spouse may be unwilling to recognize a partner's faults, and once the partner's less than perfect traits come into awareness, the spouse's love for the partner may dissipate. However, demonstrating a relatively accurate view of a partner's specific strengths and weaknesses may represent a selfless act, in that spouses are loving their partners, both the good and the bad aspects, for who they are.

### *Strengths and Limitations of the Studies*

Our confidence in the results of these studies is enhanced by a number of strengths in their methodology and design. Foremost among these was the use of within-couple analyses to examine the associations between spouses' perceptions of their partners and partners' self-views. The HLM approach allowed for the estimation of this association while controlling for spouses' idiosyncratic tendencies to view the partner more or less favorably across the attributes. Second, in contrast to much prior close relationship research that has addressed samples varying widely in marital duration, the analyses reported here examined data from homogeneous samples of happy, newly married couples. These samples enabled us to identify the type of love that should be associated with better marital quality among spouses who all profess a strong love for their partners. Third, the use of observational methods to

assess support provision behaviors allowed us to limit the possibility that third variables, such as neuroticism, may be affecting spouses' perceptions of their partners and their reports of support provision, thereby inflating the association between those variables. Finally, the studies relied on multiple measures of marital satisfaction and of specific traits, ensuring that the results were not tied to a single form of measurement.

Nevertheless, several factors common to both studies limit interpretations of the current findings. First, both studies relied on correlational data. This article suggests that an accurate perception of a partner's specific qualities should lead to better social support abilities. However, these data cannot rule out the alternative perspective that the manner in which spouses support their partners may lead to a more accurate perception of partners' qualities. Most likely, the link between accuracy and support abilities may be a reciprocal one. Initially, specific accuracy may allow spouses to engage in supportive behavior that is more helpful to the partner. However, each support interaction may also inform spouses of the types of support behaviors that are most successful, leading spouses to refine their perceptions of their partners' traits and abilities.

Second, though the two studies relied on different sets of specific attributes, the current studies nevertheless captured a somewhat limited array of specific traits. For instance, only one truly negative trait was included in the two studies (neuroticism), and few participants rated themselves poorly on the remaining traits and abilities. Consequently, rather than measuring spouses' perceptions of their partners' specific strengths and weaknesses, the current studies measured perceptions of partners' positive and less positive qualities. Our theory argues, however, that the inclusion of more undesirable traits would only enhance the pattern of results obtained here. Accurately perceiving a partner's negative traits should be just as important for enhancing feelings of control and ensuring that marital interactions are effective as accurately perceiving a partner's positive traits. By using primarily positive qualities, the current studies represent conservative tests of the hypotheses.

Similarly, though a large literature suggests that the abilities and personality traits measured in the current studies are important and relevant for the maintenance of marital satisfaction (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Swann et al., 1994), the specific attributes measured were not necessarily unique to intimate sexual relationships. For instance, according to evolutionary theory, specific attributes related to a partner's status or resources may play a particularly important role in marriage, and thus one could speculate that spouses might benefit from enhancing their partners on these dimensions. However, the current theory again would suggest that a similar pattern of results would emerge even when using a selection of attributes that may be more exclusive to marital relationships. In fact, consistent with a model of global adoration and specific accuracy, spouses have been shown to rate specific partner attributes that are more distinct to marital relationships (e.g., good sexual partner, trustworthy, successful in career) as less important to their overall marital satisfaction than more global partner attributes (e.g., warm, loving; Neff & Karney, 2002a). As a result of their relatively lower importance, the current theory would predict that even on these specific dimensions particular to marital relationships, spouses should be less biased in their views of their partners. Moreover, accurately perceiving the specific qualities partners bring to the relationship, whether their social

skills and personality traits or their status and resources, should ensure that spouses do not become disappointed or disillusioned by a partner who can never live up to a spouse's expectations.

Finally, though this is also a strength of the research, the current study examined specific accuracy only within a homogeneous sample of satisfied couples. In other words, these results speak to the role of accuracy in relationships only when couples love and adore one another at the level of their global impressions. For couples that do not hold positive global impressions of their partners, an accurate view of a partner's specific qualities may do little to enhance the quality of marital interactions or future outcomes. For instance, distressed couples may provide poor support despite their accurate perceptions of their partners' qualities. Furthermore, recognizing a partner's positive and negative specific qualities may actually prove detrimental for marital well-being among unhappy couples, because acknowledging a partner's negative traits may provide spouses with justification for not loving the partner. Further research is necessary to compare the role of specific accuracy for distressed versus nondistressed spouses.

## Conclusions

Historically, most research on cognition in close relationships has assumed that perceptions at different levels of abstraction have similar implications for relationship quality. In other words, holding the belief that a partner is a good person should exert the same positive influence on relationship outcomes as holding the belief that a partner is intelligent. The current studies, however, challenge this assumption by suggesting that global and specific relationship perceptions operate quite differently within relationships. If spouses are less enhancing in their specific perceptions compared with their global perceptions, this finding suggests that specific perceptions may be responsive to daily experience in a way that more global perceptions are not. As a result, changes in specific perceptions may "trickle up" to affect global satisfaction, such that as negative specific perceptions accumulate and fail to support a positive global relationship evaluation, relationship satisfaction will decline. The current studies argue that a more complete understanding of how relationships change over time may require that research attend to both the content and the specificity of relationship perceptions.

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