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**SELF-EXPANSION AND ROMANTIC PARTNER REQUEST FOR FRIENDSHIP
TERMINATION**

by

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Abstract

According to self-expansion theory, there is an innate drive to gain new resources, identities, and perspectives, which causes people to seek and maintain interpersonal relationships. However, an individual's relationship partners may come into conflict with each other. In the current research, 656 adults in established monogamous romantic relationships completed an online questionnaire about romantic partners asking them to give up a friendship. The researcher explored the prevalence of this friendship interference phenomenon and its relationship to sources of self-expansion. The amount of self-expansion provided by a friendship was manipulated through vignettes. Additional measures assessed the relationship between amount of self-expansion provided by the partner and gained independently as well as desire for self-expansion on willingness to give up the proposed friendship. Further measures assessed whether a current or previous partner had requested a friendship termination, partner's reasoning given for the request, whether the participant acquiesced to the request, and the degree to which the request contributed to break-up.

Results showed that about 1/3 of people had been asked by a romantic partner to terminate a friendship, with 73% asked acquiescing to a current partner's request, and 34% acquiescing to a previous partner's request. Contrary to what was predicted, no gender difference was found for rate of acquiescence to partner's request for friendship termination. Sexual orientation, age, and desire for self-expansion significant predicted willingness to give up a friendship. Additionally, participants were mostly willing to give up the friendship when their partnership was highly self-expanding but the friendship was not, and willingness declined when the friendship was highly self-expanding, regardless of how self-expanding the partnership.

Keywords: self-expansion, friendship termination, dissolution, relationship interference

“A friendship that can end never really began.”
-Publilius Syrus

Imagine the following scenario: you get a call from a friend that you knew in college and haven't seen in a few years. You two used to go out to bars together back when you were in school, but you didn't really spend time together otherwise. She happens to be in town, so you and your romantic partner decide to meet up with her to have dinner. At the restaurant, it becomes clear that she hasn't changed much since college: she still spends a lot of time in bars trying to find men. Your partner clearly doesn't like this about her and thinks it's immature, and after dinner your partner asks you not to stay in contact with her. What do you do? Do you remain friends with her or call it quits? One way you might make your decision is based on how much self-expansion you're getting from the friendship, that is, how many new resources, perspectives, and identities you are getting from the friendship. Referring back to the quote by Syrus, the amount of self-expansion gained may be roughly related to whether the friendship ever truly began, or at least whether it is being maintained in any meaningful or fulfilling way. If you are not getting much out of the friendship anymore, and especially if you never did, it is likely that the friendship will end. Through the current research, the researcher examined the prevalence of the phenomenon of friendship interference by a romantic partner, as well as how often individuals acquiesce to their partner's request to end a friendship. In addition, the current research provides an initial look at how sources of self-expansion impact willingness to give up a friendship at the request of a romantic partner.

Self-Expansion

Research has suggested that close relationships are the greatest factor in determining quality of life and depression and suicide (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Durkheim, 1897, as cited in

Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000), and strong close relationships are also related to several other physical and mental health related areas, including reduced risk of heart disease (Emery et al., 2004), better AIDS prognoses (Lan et al., 2015), and more. But why are social relationships so important? Evolutionary psychologists suggest that humans' social nature may have evolved to provide safety from threats, to provide emotional support, and to have assistance when accomplishing life goals (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berscheid & Reis, 1998). While evolutionary perspectives do lend some insight into the importance of close relationships, they do not seem to fully account for the centrality of interpersonal relationships in people's lives. Another explanation is that, as humans, close relationships are intimately ingrained in the experience of the self.

Indeed, research suggests that people include close others' resources, perspectives, and identities into their conceptions of their self (Aron et al. 2004). People in romantic relationships tend to think and speak of themselves and their partner as a collective unit instead of individualistically (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006). That is to say, to an extent, when people feel close to someone, they actually perceive their selves as overlapping. In fact, inclusion of other in the self can be reliably measured through the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale in which there are two circles that represent the self and the other that begin disparate and gradually overlap until they are nearly completely overlapping at the opposite end of the scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The fact that this measure is reliable and intuitive for participants suggests that people really do view relationships with others as leading to one-ness and integration of the self.

Inclusion of others in the self is just one element of self-expansion theory, which states that it is a central human motivation to expand the self by gaining new resources, perspectives,

and identities in order to accomplish goals (Aron & Aron, 1986). Self-expansion occurs when people add new desirable elements to their self-concept, strengthen existing desirable elements by improving their capacity in that area or developing a more complex understanding of themselves, or rediscover previously neglected aspects of their self-concept (Aron & Aron, 1986; Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). Self-expansion is generally accompanied by the experience of positive affect (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998) which acts as a motivator for continually seeking sources of self-expansion. People gain these new resources, perspectives, and identities both through relationships with others (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993) as well as through engaging in novel experiences independently (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014; Xu, Floyd, Westmaas, & Aron, 2010).

Self-Expansion in Romantic Relationships. Because romantic relationships can take many forms that serve different functions (Jonason, 2013), the current research has limited its definition of romantic relationships to at least somewhat established (three months or more), love-based, monogamous, dyadic (two person) relationships between adults. Most research on self-expansion in romantic relationships has focused on established, monogamous relationships (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron et al., 2004; Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993), and because the current research is investigating one romantic partner's request for their partner to terminate an extra-relational friendship, it does not make sense to include non-dyadic relationships in the research at this time.

With that definition in mind, much research has shown that romantic relationships can be particularly strong sources of self-expansion. This tends to be particularly true at the beginning stages of romantic relationships (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron et al., 2004; Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995) during which time people are rapidly learning their partner's novel views,

experiences, interests, and skills. This rapid self-expansion may actually result in feelings of falling in love (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Partners may also encourage individuals to seek self-expanding opportunities to realize aspects of their ideal self. This is the premise of the Michelangelo phenomenon, in which a partner will directly influence and shape their significant other toward his or her ideal self, adding positive aspects and removing negative ones (Rusbult, Finkel, Kumashiro, 2009).

Additionally, couples' increased participation in self-expanding activities has been shown to cause increased marital satisfaction compared to couples who spent increased time together but did pleasant but not self-expanding activities, which resulted in a decrease in marital satisfaction even compared to couples who spent no increased time together (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). The decrease in satisfaction of the couples who engaged in pleasant activities is likely due to habituation effects. Therefore, self-expansion in romantic relationships seems to be a way to keep the 'spark' alive and attenuate or even reverse the typical pattern where in time spent together and relationship length lead to habituation and decreased passion (Sprecher & Regan, 1998; Tucker & Aron, 1993). Romantic relationships that facilitate self-expansion have also been correlated with greater relationship quality (Aron & Aron, 1986), feelings of romantic love (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000), and more relationship maintenance behaviors (Ledbetter, Stresen-Ferrara, & Dowd, 2013).

Self-Expansion in Friendships. In part because of the prevalence of self-expansion within romantic relationships, nearly all self-expansion research has been done in the context of relationships. Some preliminary research has been done on non-relational forms of self-expansion. Unfortunately, direct research conducted on self-expansion in the domain of friendships is severely lacking in the field. A friendship has been defined as a voluntary,

personal relationship between at least two people, where the individuals enjoy and seek out each other's company and provide emotional intimacy and help to each other (Fehr, 1996). Compared to romantic relationships, friendships are typically more based on liking than loving or passion, and tend to have looser rules of conduct and less expectation of exclusivity (Balzarini, Aron, & Chelberg, 2014, as cited in Miller, 2015).

There is nothing inherent about self-expansion that should rule out friendships as sources of expansion. As in romantic relationships, beginning a new friendship would introduce individuals to new resources, perspectives, and identities from their friend that could elicit spontaneous self-expansion. Additionally, much the same way that romantic partners do (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993), friends could encourage self-expansion through participation in novel activities, and self-expansion could be attributed to the friendship even though the activity is not inherently linked to the friend.

Although indirect, researchers give glimpses that self-expansion in a friendship context is possible. For example, on Xu, Floyd, Westmaas, and Aron's (2010) Experienced Novel and Interesting Events Measure, a general measure of engagement in self-expanding events, some included items directly referenced friendship (e.g., "Outstanding personal achievement of partner, friend, or family member to whom you are close"), while others were relational but did not specify the relationship type (e.g., "Someone you knew recovered from personal illness or injury"). While these events did not include a friend directly encouraging self-expanding events, the inclusion of a friend or non-romantic relationship as a source of self-expansion is a beginning step in acknowledging the potential importance of friendships in the model of self-expansion.

Another study (White & Gaines, 2006) used the self-expansion model as a lens through which to interpret results related to friendship but did not measure self-expansion directly. In the

study, African American men in cross-sex feminist friendships demonstrated stronger emotional bonds and less traditional gender-roles. This suggested that the friendships had acted as a source of self-expansion, causing the men to acquire and incorporate new feminist insider perspectives into their self-concept and alter their conceptions of masculinity. The current research hopes to further demonstrate the importance of friend-related self-expansion in relationship dynamics.

Individual Self-Expansion. The basis of self-expansion theory is that individuals are motivated to expand their sense of self by acquiring new identities, skills, perspectives, and resources. Under this understanding, there is nothing that requires self-expansion to take place in the context of a relationship or even in social experiences. However, self-expansion research has focused almost exclusively on self-expansion in the context of a romantic relationship. It was not until recently that research began to examine non-relational self-expansion, or self-expansion that does not involve a friend or romantic partner.

Xu, Floyd, Westmaas, and Aron (2010) provided some of the first research in support of self-expansion occurring outside of relationship contexts. Their research focused on self-expansion as a possible intervention for smoking cravings in people attempting to quit smoking. They posited that because self-expansion and smoking both enact dopaminergic responses (Aron, Fisher, Mashek, Strong, Li, & Brown, 2005), one reward could be swapped for the other. The researchers looked at the number of self-expanding events experienced in the past six months and found that the more self-expanding events one experienced, the greater the likelihood of a quit attempt or quit success. While some of the possible self-expanding experiences measured were relational (i.e. “Marriage or starting to live together with partner”), others were not (i.e. “Major increase in amount of recreation or exercise or starting a new type of recreation or exercise”). The researchers analyzed the overall effect of number of self-expanding events on

smoking behaviors and did not differentiate between relational and non-relational in analysis.

This leaves much room for future research on non-relational, individual self-expansion.

However, the overall effect of the self-expanding events on smoking abstinence suggests that some of the non-relational events contributed to the pattern of results. Furthermore, events were found to be particularly helpful in smoking abstinence if they were voluntary and positive in nature, which excluded many of the relational items in the measure, further suggesting the importance of non-relational self-expansion.

When Mattingly & Lewandowski (2013, 2014) looked specifically at non-relational self-expansion, they found that in experimentally manipulated conditions, participants who engaged in non-relational, novel, exciting, and interesting activities produced self-expansion. They also found that higher experienced self-expansion lead to greater exerted effort in following tasks. This finding was consistent with results of increased exerted effort in tasks demonstrated in relational contexts (Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2015), suggesting that similar processes were in place in non-relational self-expanding events.

Individual Differences in Desire for Self-Expansion. Self-expansion is touted as an innate human desire and is often studied as if the desire were constant across individuals. However, even at face value, individual differences in desire for self-expansion seem likely. We all know people who are constantly traveling or learning new hobbies and people who prefer to spend most weekends at home watching television. These two individuals seemingly do not both enjoy self-expansion to the same degree.

Research in this area is sparse but has so far discovered two factors that influence individuals' desire for self-expansion: approach motivation and self-concept clarity. Approach motivation refers to the desire to seek rewards and desirable experiences (Gable & Gosnell,

2013). This is contrasted with avoidance motivation, in which people try to escape punishment or pain and therefore avoid undesirable experiences (Gable & Gosnell, 2013). Approach motivation seems particularly relevant to self-expansion, as self-expanding events are typically classified as novel, exciting, and interesting (Aron et al., 2004), something that approach motivation would draw one towards. Mattingly, McIntyre, and Lewandowski (2012) found just that, that general individual differences in approach motivation positively correlated with desire for self-expansion, while there was no correlation between self-expansion and avoidance motivation.

Self-concept refers to people's sense of who they are, all their cognitions about the self, including physical attributes, social relationships, motives, possessions, etc. (Campbell, Assanand, & DiPaula, 2003; Campbell et al., 1996). People vary in their level of clarity and coherence with which they perceive their self-concept, the basis of self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996). That is, some individuals have a clearer sense of who they are, and few aspects of their behavior, thoughts, and feelings seem to contradict that sense of self. High self-concept clarity has been found to increase well-being and self-esteem and is negatively correlated with stress and depression (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003). Emery, Walsh, and Slotter (2015) found that individuals with lower overall self-concept clarity as well as experimentally reduced self-concept clarity were less interested in relational and non-relational self-expansion. The researchers suggested that because self-expansion adds new information to the self-concept, individuals with already limited self-concept clarity would not risk further disrupting their self-concept and risking poorer well-being. Individuals high in self-concept clarity would also slightly disrupt their self-concept clarity if they added new information gained

through self-expansion, but because self-concept clarity was already high, this minor disruption would likely not impact well-being.

There is some additional support for the idea that individuals vary in their interpretation of self-expanding events. In Xu et al.'s (2010) previously mentioned study on self-expansion as an intervention in smoking cravings, Xu et al. (2010) found that, for people who successfully quit smoking, increased number of clearly positive or ambiguous self-expanding events was positively correlated with helpfulness in quitting. This was in contrast to unsuccessful quitters, for whom only clearly positive self-expanding events were correlated with helpfulness. This suggests that some people are more likely than others to interpret an event as helpful or positive and to gain a benefit from them, while others who experience the same events may interpret some events more negatively and not benefit from them. The researchers did not give an explanation for why these individual differences occurred or what predictors were involved, although they did control for personality and depression in following analyses, which did not change the pattern of results. While these findings are not directly related to desire for self-expansion, they do provide evidence for individual differences in reaction to self-expanding events.

Conflict between Relationships and Partner Interference in Friendship

Clearly relationships, be they familial, friendships, or romantic relationships, are important to us for both psychological and physical health and well-being. We invest our time, energy, and other resources into relationships and hopefully gain rewarding experiences from them. Relationships can provide excitement, stability, support and encouragement, and ultimately, relationships can change, shape, and form our understanding of ourselves. If our

relationships are healthy, we generally seek to maintain them. Perhaps ideally, we would be able to maintain a wide variety of different relationships. However, sometimes different relationships can clash; a member of one relationship may dislike your relationship with another person, and you may be forced to choose between the two or come up with another form of conflict resolution.

Although there has been much research on why relationships end, the research generally focuses on examples of romantic relationships (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Levinger, 1980), and little research has been done specifically on why friendships end. Due to the differences between romantic relationships and friendships, such as varying expectations of exclusivity or rules of conduct (Balzarini et al., 2014, as cited in Miller, 2015), it is likely that the ways that these types of relationships end differ as well. Rodin's (1982, as cited in Rose, 1984) model of relationship disengagement specifies four ways that friendships could end: a friend could do something that one dislikes, one's criteria of things they like may change to no longer include the friend, friends may be displaced by new friends, or the pleasure/cost ratio varies too far from the ideal, such as when pleasure decreases or cost of maintaining the friendship increases. This last criteria seems most directly related to a partner asking an individual to end a friendship, as cost of maintaining the friendship would likely increase due to some risk of detriment to the romantic relationship. Rose (1984) studied friendship dissolution in college-age participants and found that dating or marriage interference was reported as the fourth leading cause of friendship dissolution for that age group. Rose suggested that dating or marriage interference generally took the form of increased commitment to romantic relationships, causing a withdrawal from friendships. For example, when asked to write about why their friendship had ended, several participants specifically indicated constraints on time that made scheduling time for the

friendship more difficult or stated generally that, “After she [the friend] moved in with a guy I saw her a lot less,” (p. 272). When asked imagine they had the friendship to do over, several women stated that they “would not let a man stand in the way of a friendship,” (p. 275). These general responses do not touch on, nor do they exclude, the specific phenomenon of a romantic partner requesting the termination of the friendship. Specifically, “stand in the way” could connote active resistance against the friendship by the partner. Additionally, Rose found that, consistent with previous research on married couples (Babchuk, 1965), interference from a romantic relationship was a much more common cause of friendship dissolution for women than for men. This suggests that there is likely a gender gap in either the likelihood that a romantic partner has requested the termination of an individual’s friendship or the likelihood of that individual acquiescing to the request.

Aside from determining that this friendship interference phenomenon occurs, it is important to understand why it occurs—to examine the partner’s reasoning for making the request. One of the main reasons that a romantic partner may dislike their significant other’s friends is jealousy. People experience jealousy when a real or imagined rival threatens to take their place in a valued relationship or to take something away from them (Guerrero, Spitzberg, & Yoshimura, 2004; Parrot, 1991). Most research on jealousy has focused on romantic rival jealousy (RRJ; Harris, 2003; Parrot, 1991). Romantic rivals are particularly threatening because they have the potential to completely end a currently valued relationship. Individuals who are prone to romantic jealousy may be particularly likely to engage in mate-retention tactics, or effort devoted to retaining a mate, ranging from vigilance to violence (Buss, 1998; Buss, Shackelford, & McKibbin, 2008). Tactics of mate prevention, including monopolization of time, punishing mate’s infidelity threat, and derogation of competitors, seem particularly related to

asking a partner to terminate a potentially romantically threatening friendship. For example, if a man sees his girlfriend flirting with another man, he may derogate the other man, pointing out the other man's flaws and why he is not worth-while. Then he may monopolize her time, requesting that she not see the other man and instead spend her time with him. Finally, he may punish the woman's infidelity threat by threatening to break up with her if she ever sees the other man again—a three-fold method of mate-retention to reduce a romantic threat on the relationship.

However, another type of jealousy exists, partner-friend jealousy (PFJ), in which an individual is jealous of their partner's friends even when the friends do not pose a romantic threat (Gomillion, Gabriel, & Murray, 2014). According to Gomillion et al. (2014), PFJ occurs because friends can threaten an individual's central role in their partner's life. And there may be some merit to that. People show a great sense of belonging based on their friendships (Dohery & Feeney, 2004). College students are generally more securely attached to their close friends than relationship partners (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). And even married individuals often report time spent with friends as more enjoyable than time spent with their spouse (Larson & Bradeny, 1988). However, individuals still expect their partners to be more responsive to their needs than to the needs of their friends (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). When this expectation is not met, individuals may feel jealous of the amount of time their partner spends with friends, the amount that their partner confides in their friends, or the degree to which their partner is willing to help their friends. Individuals may therefore ask their partner to terminate a friendship if they feel the friend is a threat to their centrality in their partner's life.

Of course, jealousy is not the only reason that an individual may ask their partner to terminate a friendship. According to the Michelangelo phenomenon (Rusbult et al., 2009),

individuals may try to sculpt their partner to be their ideal self, directly working to add positive elements and remove negative ones. For example, an individual may view their partner's friend as having negative characteristics, perspectives, or interests—generally being a “bad influence” on their partner. The individual may request that their partner terminate the friendship in order to remove this bad influence and allow their partner to become their ideal self.

Impact of Lost Relationship

According to self-expansion theory, when a relationship is lost, the self contracts. Just as a new relationship brings new resources, perspectives, and identities, the dissolution of a relationship takes them away (Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis, & Kunak, 2006). Of course, this is not true of all new additions gained during the relationship. If someone's partner taught them how to ride a motorcycle during the relationship, the dissolution of the relationship does not mean that person would forget how to ride a motorcycle. However, the dissolution of the relationship may result in a loss of access to resources to engage all aspects of the newly expanded self (e.g., it was the partner's motorcycle, and they take it when the relationship ends). Additionally, losing a relationship means losing a person with whom to do interesting and exciting (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen), self-expanding activities as well as losing someone who potentially encouraged individual self-expansion opportunities (Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2015). Loss of self-expansion opportunities due to loss of a relationship would likely lead to reduced self-concept size and clarity (Emery et al., 2015), which has been associated with low self-esteem, stress, and depression (Campbell, Assanand, & DiPaula, 2003). In general, loss of relationship is related to a litany of negative effects, so people try to maintain relationships.

However, effects of relationship loss are largely dependent on an individual's perceptions of the relationship. For instance, friendship interference by a partner may be beneficial to the individual and the partnership if the individual, through self-expansion, takes on their partner's view that the friendship was a bad influence. This view is referred to as self-pruning, in which one removes negative content from their self-concept (Mattingly, Lewandowski, & McIntyre, 2014). Self-pruning is positively correlated with feelings of romantic love, relationship satisfaction, and commitment (Mattingly et al., 2014). However, if the individual does not believe that the friendship was a negative force in their life, they may view the event as self-contraction, in which one removes positive content from their self-concept (Mattingly et al., 2014). Self-contraction is negatively correlated with romantic love, relationship satisfaction, and commitment (Mattingly et al., 2014). This research suggests that different people would vary in their willingness to terminate the same friendship depending on their perspective of the benefits and costs of the friendship, or, if they had already terminated the friendship at the request of their partner, they would likely vary in the degree to which they felt love or resentment toward their partner.

Current Research

In the current research, participants completed an online survey in which they were presented with a vignette about a hypothetical friendship in which amount of self-expansion provided by the friendship was manipulated. Participants then completed a questionnaire with measures that assessed amount of self-expansion provided by their current romantic partner and gained independently, desire for self-expansion, and willingness to give up the proposed friendship. Further measures assessed whether a current or previous partner had requested a

friendship termination, the partner's reasoning given for the request, whether the participant acquiesced to the request, and the degree to which the request contributed to break-up.

In part, the research was intended to provide a preliminary understanding of the prevalence of the phenomenon of a romantic partner asking their significant other to end a friendship. This phenomenon was explored generally and with same-sex or opposite-sex friends. Related to Rose's (1984) finding of gender differences of relationship interference as a condition of friendship dissolution, it was predicted that women, more than men, would report having acquiesced to their partners request that they dissolve a friendship. It was also predicted that partners would complain of sexual jealousy toward the friend more when their significant others' friend was of the same gender as themselves compared to when the friend was not of their gender.

The current study provided much needed research on self-expansion in the domains of friendships and non-relational areas. Theory suggests that self-expansion is a fundamental human drive. However, this drive may not be as strong for all individuals or may fluctuate over time, as the current study also supported limited findings that individuals vary in their desire for self-expansion. It was hypothesized that self-expansion provided by the partner and self-expansion gained independently would show a positive relationship with willingness to give up the friendship such that as self-expansion from the partner or gained independently increased, individuals would be more willing to terminate the friendship. Main effects of amount of self-expansion provided by friend as well as individual desire for self-expansion were expected to show a negative relationship with willingness to terminate friendship such that as self-expansion provided by friendship and desire for self-expansion increased, individuals would be less willing to terminate the friendship. An interaction effect was predicted between amount of self-

expansion provided by the partner and amount of self-expansion provided by the friendship on willingness to terminate friendship such that people would be least willing to terminate the friendship when amount of self-expansion provided by the partner was low and self-expansion provided by the friendship was high and most willing when amount of self-expansion provided by the partner was high and amount of self-expansion provided by the friend was low. Finally, individual importance of self-expansion was predicted to moderate the correlation between amount of partner, friend, and individual self-expansion and willingness to terminate the friendship such that when importance of self-expansion was high, correlations between sources of self-expansion and willingness to terminate friendship would be stronger than when importance of self-expansion was low.

Method

Participants

Of the 774 individuals who began the survey, 118 were excluded due to not meeting the qualification criteria of being in an ongoing monogamous relationship of at least three months, not correctly answer the attention question, or for beginning the survey but not completing any questions. Therefore, the final analyses included 656 American adults who self-identified as currently in a monogamous romantic relationship (49.3% male, 50.4% female, 0.3% other; ages 18-74, $M_{age} = 33.35$, $SD_{age} = 10.26$). Participants predominantly identified as White/Causasian (74.5% White, 7.9% Asian, 6.5% Hispanic/Latino, 5.7% Black/African American, 4.5% mixed, 0.2% other). Participants predominantly identified as heterosexual/straight (89.8% straight, 6.0% bisexual, 3.9% gay/lesbian/homosexual, 0.3% other). Most participants lived together or less than three miles from their partner (64.2%, 35.8% lived farther than three miles) and the

median relationship length was 45.5 months. Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online work distribution site, where “requesters” post a task they want completed, and “workers” complete the task for a small fee. Participants were compensated \$0.50 for their time.

Materials

Attention task. Participants were asked to choose the largest number from the response options: “0,” “1,” “3,” and “4.” This simply acted as a qualification variable to ensure that participants were paying attention to the task. Data from participants who answered incorrectly were excluded from later analyses.

Relationship involvement. Participants were asked to answer the question “Are you currently in a romantic relationship, and if so, have you been in this relationship for at least 3 months?” Response options were “yes” or “no.” This acted as a second qualification variable. Data from participants who answered “no” were excluded from later analyses.

Self-expansion provided by the friendship. The extent to which a friendship was experienced as expanding the self through increased novelty, excitement, and interest was manipulated through a series of two vignettes, one low self-expansion vignette and one high self-expansion vignette. Participants were prompted to “read the following vignette about a long-time friend and really imagine that the friend described.” In the vignettes, how the friendship began, length of friendship, and frequency and type of interaction, as well as discussion topics were controlled, and gender of friend was controlled through omission. General tone was also controlled between the two conditions, so that both friendships seem positive. Only degree of self-expansion was manipulated.

Example of high self-expansion condition vignette:

Imagine a friend that is not your partner's gender and outside the range of people you would normally date. You have known this person since you were little, and the two of you grew up together. You went to the same elementary and middle school and even had a lot of the same classes. As the years went by, you both went your separate ways, but 6 months ago, the two of you reconnected on social media. Since you reconnected, you two meet up at least once every two weeks to check in. You two have different views on various issues, such as politics, religion, and human nature, and you enjoy having civil discussions and, the more you talk, the more you feel that hearing your friend's opinions has really broadened your understanding of the issues and given you new perspectives. You also take turns planning ways to engage in each other's differing hobbies, and you've strengthened some old skills and learned some exciting new skills through the process.

(See Appendix A for low self-expansion condition vignette.)

After reading the vignette, participants were again asked to reflect on the friendship and imagine how they felt about the friendship.

A manipulation check was conducted to determine whether the manipulation of self-expansion provided by the friendship was successful. Participants were prompted to think about the friend in the vignette while answering the following two modified items from the Self-Expansion Questionnaire (SEQ; see below) in which language about romantic partners was replaced with language about friends: "How much do you see your friend as a way to expand your own capabilities?" and "How much does your friend help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?"

Self-expansion provided by the partner. The extent to which a romantic relationship was experienced as expanding the self through increased novelty, excitement, and interest was measured through the 14-item Self-Expansion Questionnaire (SEQ), established by Lewandowski and Aron (2002, accessed through personal communication, 2016). Sample items include "How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?" and "How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?" Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1/not very much to 7/very much). Lewandowski and Aron found

the measure to have strong concept validity and internal consistency, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$. (See Appendix B for full text of the measure.)

Amount of self-expansion gained independently. This scale measured the number of self-expanding events that an individual had experienced in the 2 months prior to participation in the study. Participants were presented with a list of 36 events and prompted to mark all the events they had experienced in the 2 months prior to participation in the study (See Appendix C for full measure). Higher scores on this measure indicated higher levels of self-expansion gained outside of the romantic relationship or hypothetical friendship.

This was a modified version of Xu et al.'s (2010) measure of self-expansion. Xu et al.'s measure was adapted from the Life Experiences Survey (LES; Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978). Of the 60 life experiences on the LES, Xu et al. included 49, eliminating events that were overly negative and not self-expanding (e.g., experiencing sexual difficulties) or reflective of too narrow a sample of the population (e.g., being imprisoned), and adding events that were specifically self-expanding (e.g., learning something new and exciting). The determination of the events as self-expanding was conducted by the authors and self-expansion expert, Arthur Aron. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable at at least 80%. Xu's measure is one of the few that include channels for self-expansion outside of a romantic relationship setting. In the current research, events directly related to current romantic partners were eliminated or reworded to avoid overlap with the measure of self-expansion from romantic partner. However, because the friendship in the current research was hypothetical, events related to other friendships, familial, or other social connections were included because they did not overlap with the amount of self-expansion provided by the hypothetical friend.

Desire for self-expansion. Participants were asked to complete The Desire for Non-Relational Self-Expansion Scale, an 8-item measure with $\alpha = .85$, established by Mattingly, Lewandowski, and Bobrowski (2013, accessed through personal communication, 2016). Participants were asked to indicate their interest from 1/not at all to 7/very much in response to items including “having new experiences” and “expanding myself.” Higher average scores on the measure indicated higher desire for self-expansion. (See Appendix D for full text of measure.)

Willingness to end friendship. Participants were asked to think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that their romantic partner asked them to give up the friendship for a variety of reasons. For example:

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they felt jealous of how much time you were spending with your friend and felt it was taking time away from them.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”
“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

(See Appendix E for full list of items).

For each reasoning given, participants were asked to indicate how willing and how reluctant they would be to give up the friendship given the reasoning. Response options ranged from 1/not at all to 7/extremely. Scores for reluctance were reverse-scored and averaged with scores for willingness to create a composite score. Higher scores indicated higher willingness to end the friendship given the partner’s reasoning.

Demographic information. Participants were presented with a series of demographic questions including age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, length of romantic relationship (in months and years), and relationship distance (in miles). Participants were prompted to answer however they self-identified. Response options were provided in addition to an “other” option where participants could specify another response.

Current partner request of friendship termination. Participants were asked “Has your current partner ever asked you to end a friendship for any reason?” and responded either “yes” or “no.” If yes, participants were also asked “Did you end the friendship at the request of your current partner?” and responded either “yes” or “no.” If this had occurred more than once, participants were asked to respond to the most recent instance in which their partner asked them to end a friendship.

Previous partner request of friendship termination. Participants were asked “Has a previous partner ever asked you to end a friendship for any reason?” and responded either “yes,” “no.” If yes, participants were also asked “Did you end the friendship at the request of your previous partner?” and responded either “yes” or “no.” If this had occurred more than once, participants were asked to respond to the most recent instance in which a previous partner asked them to end a friendship.

Participants were also asked to indicate on a single Likert-type scale “To what degree did your previous partner’s request that you end a friendship contribute to your break-up?” Response options ranged from 1/no contribution to break-up to 7/main reason for break-up. If this had occurred more than once, participants were asked to respond to the most recent instance in which a previous partner asked them to end a friendship.

Partner reasoning for termination request. Participants were asked to check all reasons that a partner (current or previous) had given for requesting the termination of a friendship in which the friend was the same gender as the partner. Response options included the reasons given in the measure of willingness to end friendship (e.g., jealousy of time, jealousy of emotional intimacy) with the addition of “Romantic/sexual jealousy: fear that you would cheat

on or leave your partner for your friend;” and “Other.” Participants who marked “other” were asked to specify.

Participants were also asked to check all reasons that a partner (current or previous) had given for requesting the termination of a friendship in which the friend was a different gender from the partner. Response options were the same as with Partner reasoning for termination request for a same-gender-as-partner friend.

Procedure

The study was run online, through MTurk and SurveyMonkey, a website commonly used by researchers in which users can build surveys for participants to complete. Participant workers on MTurk could select the current study from a list of potential tasks. Upon selecting the survey task page, participants were directed to follow a link to a SurveyMonkey survey. Upon indication of consent and compliance with the participation criteria, participants were presented with the short attention task and relationship involvement question to confirm their compliance with participation criteria. Participants were then randomly assigned to a vignette condition for either high or low “self-expansion provided by friendship” followed by a manipulation check to ensure that the manipulation between the vignettes was successful. Participants were then asked to complete all “willingness to give up friendship” items. The order of these items was counterbalanced to limit order effects. Next, measures for “Individual desire for self-expansion,” “Amount of self-expansion gained independently,” and “Amount of self-expansion provided by partner” were completed. The order of these measures was counterbalanced to limit priming or other order effects. Participants then completed measures for “Current partner request of friendship termination,” “Previous partner request of friendship termination,” “Friendship

termination request contribution to break-up,” and “Partner reasoning for termination request.” Lastly, participants completed demographic information questions. Participants were debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

Ethics

The current study was not above the level of minimal risk. The topic of the study was one that participants could encounter in daily life and conversation. Potentially sensitive information that could have been gained was participants’ sexual orientation. Sexual orientation was an important variable to examine in the study in order to determine if the phenomenon occurred in similar ways among homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual couples. However, participants were not required to provide this information if they felt uncomfortable doing so. If participants did wish to disclose this information, they did so anonymously. Other sensitive information was not obtained. Additionally, the study did not target protected or vulnerable populations, although members of protected or vulnerable populations were not excluded from participation if they participated on a voluntary basis and met the established participation criteria. Furthermore, no deception was involved in the study. Therefore, the study was not above the level of minimal risk.

Participant safety and privacy was taken seriously, so there was little risk of being identified through participation. As per MTurk’s policy, participant IP addresses and worker ID were collected by the company to track task completion, but this information was not shared publicly, and only worker IDs, not IP addresses were shared with the researchers for the purpose of distributing compensation. IP addresses were not collected through SurveyMonkey. If a Worker chose to contact the researcher through MTurk, their email address and name were

automatically inserted by MTurk into the message so the Requester (the researcher) could reply. However, correspondence were kept in a secure location that was only accessible to the researcher through her personal MTurk and email accounts and other results were only accessible through a password-protected SurveyMonkey account with limited access. Any identifying information was kept separate from individuals' responses and was kept confidential.

If confidentiality is breached, MTurk worker IDs and the full set of data could be disseminated. While MTurk worker IDs could be linked to individual worker profiles, worker IDs will not be stored in connection to individual data points. Therefore, participants may be identified, but data each participant provided would not be linked directly to that individual.

All participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained before participants could progress in the study. Additionally, upon completion of the study, participants were presented with debriefing information and provided with contact information of the researcher and counseling services and mental health hotlines in the case that participants had questions, concerns, or needed counseling in response to the research.

The overall purpose of the current study was to add to the knowledge in the field and hopefully lead to practical applications in counseling. There was little knowledge about direct interference by a romantic partner on friendships, and the literature is also limited in the areas of individual differences in desire for self-expansion and self-expansion outside of a romantic relationship setting. The study added to the knowledge base in these areas. There were no direct benefits to participants aside from minor compensation for their time (\$1.50) and gaining knowledge during debriefing about self-expansion theory and the benefits of self-expansion on relationships and personal wellbeing. However, results from the study are applicable to individuals in society at large who are interested in relationships and to the field of relationship

counseling for understanding some of the factors involved in complicated relationship dynamics. With this understanding, individuals gain the ability to improve their own relationship dynamics. Therefore, the benefits of the current study outweighed the potential risks to participants, as risks were minimal.

Results

First, outlier analyses were conducted. Most variables were fairly normally distributed, however, some of the participant variables were not. Both participant age and relationship length were positively skewed and therefore Winsorized at 2.5 standard deviations above the mean. For age, skewness was brought from 1.11 originally down to 0.89 with kurtosis of 0.19. For relationship length, skewness was brought from 2.28 originally down to 1.55 with kurtosis of 1.65. This left skewness and kurtosis slightly higher than desirable, but Winsorizing at three standard deviations above the mean would have replaced more than five percent of actual values, which was deemed too high. Due to the extreme skew of relationship distance, this variable was split into two groups: 1) individuals living 0-3 miles from their partners and 2) individuals living greater than 3 miles from their partners. Additionally, due to the small number of individuals who identified outside of the gender binary, these individuals were excluded from analyses involving gender. Similarly, due to small representation, individuals who did not identify as straight, gay or lesbian, or bisexual were excluded from analyses involving sexual orientation. Because participants were able to identify with multiple ethnicities, anyone who self-identified as “mixed” or selected multiple ethnicities was coded as “mixed.” However, due to relatively small numbers of participants of color, ethnicity was recoded as a dichotomous variable with

“White” and “participants of color” categories, with all mixed individuals coded as participants of color.

Prevalence and Impact on Relationship

To demonstrate the importance and scope of the phenomenon of a romantic partner requesting that their significant other end a friendship, prevalence data were analyzed. Of all participants, 207 (31.7%) reported that they had been asked at least once by a romantic partner to give up a friendship. Of those participants, 114 (55.1%) reported that only a previous romantic partner had requested that they terminate a friendship, 45 (21.7%) reported that only their current romantic partner had requested that they terminate a friendship, and 48 (23.2%) reported that both a previous and a current romantic partner had requested that they terminate a friendship.

Of participants who had been asked by their current partner to give up a friendship (participants who had been asked exclusively by their current partner or by both partners), 72.8% ($n = 67$) acquiesced to the current partner's request. Of participants who had been asked by a previous partner (participants who had been asked exclusively by a previous partner or by both previous and current partners), only 34.1% ($n = 56$) acquiesced to the previous partner's request. While it would have been desirable to analyze whether there was a statistically significant difference in the rate of acquiescence to current or previous partners, unfortunately observations with these variables were not independent because participants could have been in multiple categories and such an analysis was not feasible. Therefore, only frequency data can be presented for the general sample. However, a Chi-square Test of Independence suggested that individuals who had been asked by both a current and previous partner to give up a friendship were significantly more likely to answer similarly to both requests ($N = 33$), either acquiescing or

not acquiescing, instead of acquiescing to one request but not the other ($N = 14$), $X^2(1) = 6.90$, $p = .009$. Of those who did acquiesce to one request but not the other, a Chi-square Test of Independence suggested that significantly more participants only acquiesced to their current partner ($N = 12$) than only acquiesced to their previous partner ($N = 2$), $X^2(1, N = 14) = 5.78$, $p = .016$.

On a 7-point scale, participants who reported that a previous partner had requested that they terminate a friendship reported that the request had a moderate impact on the reasoning for why the couple broke up ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.82$). However, a sizable number of those participants (21.1%, $n = 12$) reported no contribution to breakup and no participants reported that it was the main reason why they broke up with their previous partner. However, according to a single sample t-test, on average, the sample mean was significantly different from 1, the response value indicating no contribution to the break-up, $t[56] = 11.19$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = 0.69$.

Furthermore, two logistic regressions were run to determine if the extent that a previous partner's request for friendship termination impacted the break-up helps predict the current behaviors from partners and individuals. Contrary to what was expected, results suggest that there was no significant relationship between contribution to break-up and rate of current partner requesting friendship termination ($X^2(1, N = 57) = 0.02$, $p = .889$). Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between contribution to break-up and rate of acquiescence to a current partner's request for friendship termination ($X^2(1, N = 27) = 0.89$, $p = .347$).

Effects of demographic variables on prevalence and response to being asked to give up a friendship were examined. A Chi-square Test of Independence was performed to test for a gender difference in acquiescence to any partner's request for friendship termination. Contrary to what was predicted, women were no more likely than men to report having acquiesced to a

partner's request to dissolve a friendship, $X^2(1, N = 205) = 0.01, p = .917$. Chi-square Tests of Independence exploring the potential existence of a gender difference in acquiescence specifically to a current partner and specifically to a previous partner were similarly nonsignificant.

A series of Chi-square Tests of Independence were conducted to determine if there was a relationship between ethnicity and whether participants had been asked by a partner, current or previous, as well as whether they had acquiesced to the requests. No significant differences were found between White individuals and individuals of color for any of the analyses. Similarly, no significant effects were found as a function of sexual orientation, either defined as three groups (straight vs gay/lesbian vs bisexual) or dichotomously (straight/gay/lesbian vs bisexual).

A series of Chi-square Tests of Independence suggested that relationship distance (physical distance between residences of the individual and their current partner) had no significant relationship to history of being asked by either a current partner to terminate a friendship. However, relationship distance was a significant predictor of whether an individual had terminated a friendship at the request of their current partner, $X^2(1, N = 88) = 7.56, p = .006$. As would be expected, there was no significant relationship between distance from current romantic partner and history of being asked by a previous partner to terminate a friendship nor a relationship with having acquiesced to a previous partner's requests. All X^2 's < 7.56 were nonsignificant.

A series of logistic regressions found that age was not a significant predictor of history of being asked by a current ($X^2(1, N = 649) = 0.02, p = .884$) or previous partner ($X^2(1, N = 644) = 1.51, p = .220$) nor a significant predictor of acquiescing to a previous partner's ($X^2(1, N = 165) = 0.09, p = .768$) or current partner's ($X^2(1, N = 92) = 0.04, p = .852$) request. Similarly, a series

of logistic regressions found that length of relationship was not a significant predictor of history of being asked by a current ($X^2(1, N = 636) = 1.98, p = .159$) or previous partner ($X^2(1, N = 631) = 3.69, p = .055$) nor was it a significant predictor of acquiescing to a previous partner's ($X^2(1, N = 160) = 0.09, p = .766$) or current partner's ($X^2(1, N = 88) = 0.18, p = .670$) request.

Partner Reason for Termination Request

As shown in Table 1, for friendships in which the friend was the same gender as the partner, sexual jealousy was the most commonly reported reason partners gave for requesting termination of the friendship. For friendships in which the friend was not the same gender as the partner, jealousy of time was the most commonly reported reason partners gave for requesting termination of the friendship.

Table 1.

Frequencies of Reasons Given for Termination Request as a Function of Gender of Friend.

	Friend of same gender as partner	Friend of different gender than partner
Sexual Jealousy	102 (15.6%)	85 (13.1%)
Jealousy of Time	91 (13.9%)	90 (13.9%)
Jealousy of Emotional Closeness	70 (10.7%)	79 (12.2%)
Disrespectful of Relationship	78 (11.9%)	67 (10.4%)
Different Morals	32 (4.9%)	48 (7.4%)
Different Interests	22 (3.4%)	30 (4.6%)

Note: Frequency (%)

A series of Chi-square Tests of Independence were performed to examine the relationship between sexual orientation (defined as single-sex attraction versus bisexual attraction) and each of the reasons given by romantic partners (current and previous) for requesting friendship termination. As expected, bisexual individuals reported significantly higher instances of partners citing sexual jealousy as the reason for requesting the termination of a friendship when the friend is of the opposite gender of the partner than heterosexual or gay/lesbian individuals ($X^2(1, N = 640) = 6.38, p = .012$). Unexpectedly, bisexual individuals also reported higher instances of their

partners citing jealousy of emotional closeness for friends that were of the opposite gender of the partner ($X^2(1, N = 640) = 5.18, p = .023$). Additionally, bisexual individuals reported significantly higher instances of partners citing sexual jealousy ($X^2(1, N = 643) = 5.06, p = .024$), jealousy of emotional closeness ($X^2(1, N = 643) = 4.15, p = .042$), and concern over the friend having different interests ($X^2(1, N = 643) = 5.87, p = .015$) as the reason for requesting the termination of a friendship when the friend was of the same gender of the partner. There were no other significant relationships between sexual orientation and partner reasoning for friendship termination request. There were no reasons that individuals interested in single-gender attraction (straight/gay/lesbian) cited significantly more frequently than bisexual individuals. All $X^2 < 4.15$ were nonsignificant.

Self-Expansion and Willingness to Terminate

Willingness to Terminate Friendship. In response to the friendship vignette, participants' responses used the full range of the 7-point scale for willingness to give up the friendship, with means ranging from low to moderate willingness to give up the friendship based on the reason given by the partner for the friendship termination request. (See Table 2). The range of participants' scores suggests that participants varied in their willingness to give up the friendship, potentially based on other factors such as sources of self-expansion, instead of always being willing or unwilling to give up the friendship at the request of their partner. A Pearson correlation found that all willingness subscales (based on each reason given) were significantly positively correlated with each other (all r 's $> .56, p$'s $< .001$). Therefore, a willingness composite variable was created as an average of all the subscales.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics for Willingness and Self-Expansion Measures.

	N	Mean (SD)
<i>Willingness to give up friendship:</i>		
Sexual Jealousy	655	3.50 (1.65)
Jealousy of Time	656	3.36 (1.58)
Jealousy of Emotional Closeness	654	3.37 (1.60)
Disrespectful of Relationship	654	3.68 (1.56)
Different Morals	654	3.09 (1.52)
Different Interests	655	2.73 (1.55)
Composite	656	3.29 (1.35)
<i>Self-Expansion Measures:</i>		
Self-Expansion from Friendship	654	4.90 (1.26)
Self-Expansion from Partner	654	4.97 (1.09)
Self-Expansion gained Independently	655	3.29 (3.36)
Desire for Self-Expansion	654	5.75 (1.01)

Sources of Self-Expansion. For the self-expansion measures, participants' responses also used the full range of the 7-point scales. Participants showed a moderate to strong desire for self-expansion, suggesting that self-expansion may act as a motivator of behavior and decision making. Participants also reported receiving a moderate amount of self-expansion from their romantic partner and from the friend in the vignette. However, participants showed relatively low levels of self-expansion gained independently.

Unfortunately, the manipulation of self-expansion provided by the friendship was not successful. According to an independent samples t-test, there was no significant difference in willingness to terminate the friendship between the high self-expansion ($M = 4.98, SD = 1.22$) versus low self-expansion ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.30$) vignette condition, $t[652] = -1.52, p = .129$.

Upon further examination, it appears that participants in the low self-expansion vignette condition tended to rate the friendship as more self-expanding than was originally predicted. Therefore, further analyses of self-expansion provided by the friendship were based not on vignette condition but rather on participants' scores on the manipulation check, which represent how self-expanding they personally viewed the friendship.

A series of multiple regressions were run to test for effects of participant age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, physical distance between partners, and relationship length. These variables explained a significant proportion of variance in self-expansion provided by partner scores, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(6, 619) = 4.24$, $p < .001$. Age showed a significant negative relationship with amount of self-expansion provided by the partner, $\beta = -0.15$, $t = -3.17$, $p = .002$, such that as age increased, self-expansion provided by the partner decreased. These variables also explained a significant proportion of variance in scores for self-expansion gained independently, $R^2 = 0.18$, $F(6, 619) = 3.31$, $p = .003$. Age also showed a significant negative relationship with amount of self-expansion gained independently, $\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.57$, $p = .011$, such that as age increased, self-expansion gained independently decreased. The participant variables also explained a significant proportion of variance in scores for desire for self-expansion, $R^2 = 0.03$, $F(6, 619) = 3.24$, $p = .004$. Gender (male = -1, female = 1) positively predicted desire for self-expansion, $\beta = 0.15$, $t = 3.57$, $p < .001$, such that women tended to desire more self-expansion than men. No other significant effects were found for any of the participant variables and measures of self-expansion.

Relationship between Self-Expansion and Willingness. As shown in Table 3, each source of self-expansion except self-expansion gained independently and, in a few cases, self-expansion

from partner were significantly correlated with willingness to terminate friendship (composite and subcategories) in the directions predicted.

Table 3.

Pearson Correlations between Sources of Self-Expansion and Willingness to Terminate Friendship.

Willingness	Source of Self-Expansion			
	Friend	Partner	Independent	Desire
Composite	-0.33***	0.12**	0.11	-0.18***
Sexual Jealousy	-0.22***	0.13***	-0.01	-0.11**
Time Jealousy	-0.25***	0.11**	0.05	-0.16***
Emotional Closeness	-0.30***	0.13***	-0.00	-0.19***
Talked Negatively of Relationship	-0.28***	0.17***	0.03	-0.09*
Different Morals	-0.34***	0.03	-0.01	-0.09*
Different Interests	-0.32***	0.06	-0.02	-0.22***

*Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*** Significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

A multiple regression was run to determine if the demographic variables of participant age, physical distance between partners', relationship length, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (defined as heterosexual/gay/lesbian vs bisexual) significantly predicted willingness to give up the friendship. These variables explained a significant proportion of variance in willingness scores, $R^2 = 0.03$, $F(6, 606) = 3.20$, $p = .004$. There was a significant negative relationship with age and willingness such that as age increased there was less willingness to terminate the friendship, $\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.57$, $p = .010$. There was also a significant relationship between sexual orientation and willingness such that individuals interested in single-sex attraction (straight, gay, or lesbian) demonstrated more willingness to terminate the friendship ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.34$) than individuals interested in both-sex attraction (bisexual) ($M = 2.70$, SD

= 1.34), $\beta = -0.11$, $t = -2.64$, $p = .009$. Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant relationship between length of romantic relationship and willingness to terminate the friendship. No other significant relationships were found between physical distance between partners, gender, or ethnicity on willingness to terminate the friendship. All t 's $< \pm 2.57$ were nonsignificant.

A hierarchical multiple regression was run to determine relationships between sources of self-expansion on willingness to give up the friendship (See Table 4). First, sexual orientation and age were included as control variables in the first step of the hierarchical multiple regression due to significantly accounting for variance in willingness scores. These variables explained a significant proportion of variance in willingness scores, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F(2, 641) = 6.08$, $p = .002$. Step 2 of the regression included the self-expansion variables as well as interactions between all self-expansion variables. These variables too explained a significant proportion of variance in willingness scores, $R^2 = 0.18$, $F(12, 631) = 11.48$, $p < .001$. There was a significant main effect for desire of self-expansion on willingness such that the more an individual desired self-expansion, the less willing they were to give up the friendship, $\beta = -0.53$, $t = -2.33$, $p = .020$. Contrary to the hypotheses, no other main effects were found for self-expansion from the friendship, self-expansion from the partner, or self-expansion gained independently on willingness.

Table 4.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression to Predict Willingness through Self-Expansion Variables and Interactions (Int.).

Model		B	SE	Beta (β)	<i>t</i>
1	(Constant)	3.35	0.20		16.59
	Sexual Orientation	-0.34	0.11	-0.12	-3.04**
	Age	-0.01	0.01	-0.08	-2.01*
2	(Constant)	4.87	1.39		3.51
	Sexual Orientation	-0.28	0.10	-0.10	-2.69
	Age	-0.01	0.01	-0.04	-1.12
	Self-Expansion from Friendship	-0.09	0.26	-0.09	-0.35
	Self-Expansion from Partner	0.42	0.27	0.34	1.53
	Self-Expansion gained Independently	0.09	0.12	0.24	0.80
	Desire for Self-Expansion	-0.70	0.30	-0.53	-2.33*
	Int.: Friendship x Partner	-0.10	0.04	-0.68	-2.82**
	Int.: Friendship x Desire	0.06	0.04	0.46	1.47
	Int.: Friendship x Independently	-0.01	0.01	-0.18	-0.99
	Int.: Partner x Desire	0.05	0.05	0.35	0.99
	Int.: Partner x Independently	0.01	0.02	0.14	0.66
	Int.: Desire x Independently	-0.01	0.02	-0.19	-0.69

*Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*** Significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

$\Delta R^2 = 0.160$

A significant interaction effect was found between amount of self-expansion provided by the partner and amount of self-expansion provided by the friendship on willingness to give up the friendship ($\beta = -0.68$, $t = -2.82$, $p = .005$). (See Figure 1.) When the friendship was highly self-expanding, individuals were relatively unwilling to give it up regardless of the amount of self-expansion provided by their partner. However, when the friendship provided little self-expansion, individuals' willingness to terminate the friendship increased if their partner provided a lot of self-expansion. No other significant interactions were found. Therefore, contrary to the hypothesis, desire for self-expansion did not moderate the effects of any other sources of self-expansion on willingness to give up the friendship.

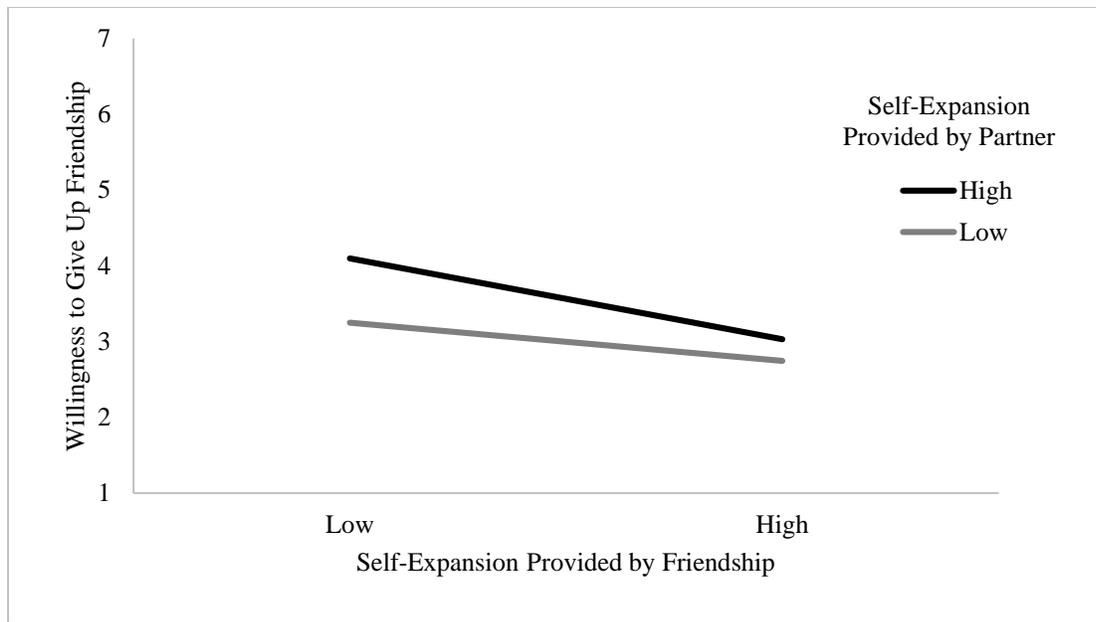


Figure 1. Interaction effect of self-expansion provided by partner and self-expansion provided by friend on willingness to give up friendship.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the phenomenon of a romantic partner asking their significant other to give up a friendship occurs at a moderate rate within dating or married couples in the United States. Additionally, these requests seem to impact behavior, such as ending the friendship—with a high number of participants reporting acquiescing to their partner's requests—and impact the romantic relationship, often having at least some impact on relationship termination (break-up). Based on research (Rose, 1984) that suggests that partner interference is one reason that young women's relationships tend to end, it was surprising that no gender difference was found in whether individuals had been asked to end a friendship or of ending a friendship when asked. However, one of the limitations of the current study was that it did not look at lifetime history of being asked to terminate a friendship nor lifetime history of acquiescing. Therefore, the current measures may be hiding gender differences that would be seen when analyzing the total number of times individuals had experienced this phenomenon

over their lifetimes. Additionally, the phenomenon of asking for a friendship termination may function differently in men and women, such as in the reasons given for requesting the termination. These would be potentially fruitful areas of further investigation to more fully understand the phenomenon of friendship termination requests by a romantic partner.

Additionally, while the current research examined whether individuals had been asked at least once by a current partner, the research does not take into consideration at what point in the current relationship the request was made. This may, at least in part, account for the lack of a significant relationship between relationship length and willingness to give up the friendship. Relationship length at the time of friendship termination request may be significant, such that if an individual has been with someone for a long time when their partner makes the request, they individual may trust their partner's judgement more or may be more committed to maintaining the romantic relationship. However, relationship length did negatively predict self-expansion provided by the partner. According to self-expansion theory, this negative relationship suggests that individuals may actually be less willing to acquiesce to their partner's request if they have been with their partner for a long time because their partner is no longer providing a necessary alternative source of self-expansion. Additional research would be needed to determine the relative predictive ability of self-expansion provided by the partner in comparison to other relationship factors, such as relationship satisfaction, on willingness to acquiesce to a partner's request to terminate a friendship.

The current research also suggests that request for friendship termination may occur for a variety of reasons, mainly as sexual jealousy for friends who are of the same gender as the asking partner or jealousy of time for friends who are of a different gender as the partner. This is likely because friends who are of the same gender as the partner are more likely to be seen as sexual

threats to the relationship than those of the opposite gender (Buss, 1998). However, this may not be the case for bisexual individuals. Although this theory could not be tested in the current study, it seems possible that bisexual individuals are asked more often to give up friendships with friends of all genders due to their partners' sexual jealousy. The fact that bisexual individuals were significantly more likely to have had partners cite several reasons for making the request more frequently for friends of all genders seems congruous with this hypothesis. This higher rate of being asked to give up a friendship may lead bisexual individuals to develop a resistance to the requests and therefore be less willing to give up friendships. Another possible explanation for decreased willingness to give up the friendship in bisexual individuals is that they are simply more open than other individuals and do not want to cut off any sources of self-expansion. However, this is inconsistent with the finding that there were no significant differences in mean between bisexual individuals and gay/lesbian/straight individuals for any of the self-expansion measures. Therefore bisexual individuals seemed to experience the friendship and their relationships as similarly self-expanding compared to others; they were not independently seeking more self-expansion than others; and they did not crave self-expansion more than others.

Additionally, many of the reasons given by partners for requesting friendship termination were not inherently negative. Previous research has suggested that romantic partners may try to change things about their significant others out of good intentions in order to help their significant other become their ideal self and live their ideal life (Rusbult et al., 2009). For example, several participants reported that their partner asked them to give up a friendship because the partner viewed the friend as a bad influence or thought they were "creepy" or "stalkerish." These examples suggest that requests for friendship termination may not always be a red flag for controlling behavior by the partner but may in fact be coming from a place of

genuine interest in the individual's wellbeing. However, it is also possible that these reasons given by the partner for the friendship termination request were still made out of controlling sexual jealousy and given after-the-fact justifications that seemed more palatable. Understanding the perceived reasoning behind the request may shed some light on why individuals acquiesce to the request or not. Further research into the perceptions of the request as positive or well-intentioned may show interesting impacts on relationship outcomes. Additionally, understanding the phenomenon of requests for friendship termination as not inherently negative and controlling may allow for more nuanced relationship counseling, although one should be wary of ignoring true warning signs of problematic relationship dynamics.

In addition, the phenomenon of acquiescence, or lack thereof, to friendship termination requests was found to be related to self-expansion. Due to positive outcomes associated with self-expansion such as increased self-concept size, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998), it was predicted that people will generally strive to maximize self-expansion opportunities (Aron & Aron, 1986) through romantic relationships, friendships, and individually. However, because relationships can clash, individuals may occasionally have to choose between relationships. It was expected that individuals would work hardest to maintain their friendships when they were highly self-expanding and the individual had few other sources of self-expansion. It was somewhat surprising that no main effects were found for the amount of self-expansion provided by the friendship or by the romantic partner. However, the significant interaction effect between self-expansion provided by friend and that provided by partner is particularly consistent with these findings, demonstrating that in general, there was some, but not strong, willingness to give up the friendship, but this willingness was stronger when the romantic partnership was highly self-expanding. The fact that there was any willingness at all, even when

the romantic relationship was not very self-expanding suggest that there is more at play than just self-expansion, perhaps including personality; attachment style; a valuation of romantic partnerships as more important than friendships; a desire to avoid conflict with the romantic partner; financial, emotional, or social dependence on the partner; etc.

Additionally, it was expected that individuals with a high desire for self-expansion would be less willing to give up any sources of self-expansion. This was consistent with the finding that desire for self-expansion significantly predicted willingness to give up the friendship, such that when individuals wanted a lot of self-expansion, they were less willing to give up the friendship; but when they did not want as much self-expansion, individuals were more willing to give up the additional source of self-expansion provided by the friendship. It would be interesting to examine the effects of desire for self-expansion in other contexts, such as relationship satisfaction and risk-taking behavior, as it has garnered little attention in previous research.

Self-expansion provided by friendship was manipulated through vignettes because there were too many other variables involved in real friendships that would be difficult to control, such as length of friendship, amount of interaction, integration of friend in social circle, etc., which, according to interdependence theory (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015) would likely all affect commitment to the friendship and therefore willingness to give up the friendship. However, the vignettes were somewhat limited. This seemed to be evidenced by the lack of success of the vignette manipulation on willingness. One explanation for this is that, in trying to keep the vignettes as consistent as possible, the friends in both conditions were friends that were said to have reentered the participants' lives recently after a long period of no communication. This was done to eliminate the possibility of a long-time friend, which participants may have deemed as

automatically important due to their longstanding position in their lives (i.e. “I kept this person in my life for this long, so they must be important.”). However, Non-Relational Self-Expansion Scale by Xu and colleagues (2010) includes an item about making a new friend, suggesting that by virtue of the friend in the vignette recently reentering the live of the participant, the friendship may automatically provide a certain amount of self-expansion. Therefore, the fact that the friendship was recently rekindled may partly account for the higher than expected scores found in the low self-expansion vignette condition.

Additionally, the artificiality of the friend in the vignette likely caused somewhat lowered mundane realism. It is therefore unlikely that this friend held as much weight as a real friend would, and participants may have been more inclined to favor the request of their real romantic partner to give up the friendship. However, the partner’s request is also artificial, which may weaken these effects. Additionally, the relatively high levels of self-expansion provided by the friendship (in both conditions) may also suggest that participants responded to the measure of self-expansion provided by friendship while thinking not about the vignette but about their actual friendships. If participants were really thinking about the vignette friendship, the artificiality of the measure is likely to make the effects gained through this measure to be more conservative than they would be with real friendships. Therefore, finding a correlation between self-expansion provided by friendship on willingness to give up friendship despite the limitations of the vignettes may suggest that the effect would be even stronger for real relationships.

As with the measure of self-expansion gained by the friendship, additional limitations are involved in the measure of self-expansion gained independently. It is lacking in content validity; that is, the measure does not capture all self-expanding events that a person could experience outside of their romantic relationship and one friendship. It is possible that individuals may be

experiencing more individual self-expansion than is being measured. Additionally, many items are age specific, such as taking a new college class, graduating, retiring, etc., and it seems that the age specific items are not evenly distributed across ages. It may be true that, in life, individual self-expansion peaks at certain times of life due to these events, or it may be that the measure is insufficient and may lead to unrealistic skews by age. It is unclear at this time which possibility is more reasonable. However, Xu et al.'s (2010) measure of self-expanding events was approved by self-expansion expert, Arthur Aron, and was shown to have high reliability. It was necessary to further modify Xu et al.'s measure further in order to only include events outside of the relationship or friendship context in order to increase discriminate validity. Additionally, this is the only measure to date of this variable, and is therefore the most comprehensive measure available.

Further limitations with the interpretation of self-expansion gained independently are that, in the current study, participants did not have the ability to report the relative impact of each event or whether they viewed the events as positive or negative or whether they felt they had a choice in experiencing the event. Xu et al. (2010), found that events that were experienced as positive and in which participants had a choice to experience the event were most beneficial in smoking abstinence behaviors. If the current study had examined the valence and voluntariness of the events, there may have been a more significant effect of self-expansion gained independently on willingness to give up the friendship.

The limitations of self-report are also recognized. People are known to be poor at estimating their own previous and future thoughts, feelings, and particularly behaviors. The current research purposefully looked at willingness to give up the friendship, because participants could report on their current level of willingness at the time of testing instead of

estimating their future behaviors as would be the case in measuring likelihood to give up the friendship. However, there was one behavioral self-report in the measure of the contribution of a previous partner's request to the break-up with that partner. This measure may have exaggerated the contribution because participants are primed to think about the request in relation to their breakup, likely leading to acquiescence response bias. Also, having a partner request that an individual give up a friendship may be viewed as socially undesirable. Therefore participants may have over-reported that the request contributed to their break-up out of social desirability bias. However, this measure did give a preliminary sense of the participant's perception of the effects of the request on their romantic relationship. Additionally, it acted as a valuable predictor of willingness to acquiesce to a partner's request to end a friendship, providing a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon of partner interference with friendships.

An additional limitation of the current study is that the study only examined whether individuals had been asked at least once, to give up a friendship by a current and/or previous partner. The study did not measure the lifetime rate of being asked to give up a friendship or lifetime rate of acquiescing to the requests. Therefore, an individual who had been asked once by a previous partner would look the same as an individual who had been asked multiple times by multiple previous partners. It is possible that there is a compounding effect of being asked multiple times to give up a friendship in terms of willingness to give up the friendship as well as effects on the relationships, expectations of future relationships, and available sources of self-expansion. The effect of lifetime rate of being asked to terminate friendships is one possible direction for future study.

Furthermore, the researcher would like to acknowledge that multiple tests were run for each dependent variable, thereby increasing the likelihood of finding a significant effect by

chance. A Bonferroni correction was not performed to adjust alpha levels, however, many of the main significant results were highly significant and therefore such a correction would have a limited impact on the findings.

While the current research provides a preliminary look at the phenomenon and factors involved, it is limited, and further research should be conducted to further the knowledge on this topic. For example, the current research looked at the phenomenon from the perspective of the individual whose partner has asked that they give up a friendship. Future research should investigate this phenomenon from the perspective of the romantic partner requesting that their significant other terminate the friendship. This may provide valuable insight into why the partner is making the request, based on the partner's insight, not just the perception of the partner's reasoning. It would also allow for the investigation of additional variables, such as the centrality of their significant other in the partner's life (Gomillion, Gabriel, & Murray, 2014), threat to centrality, and the role that plays in whether a partner makes a friendship termination request or not. Additionally, more research should be done on the effects of such a friendship dissolution request on the couple's relationship outcomes. These lines of research could provide useful information on why this conflict is occurring, and could lead to the development of potential interventions or methods of conflict resolution that could benefit the couple. For example, if the partner was jealous of how much of their significant other's time the friendship was taking up, perhaps one solution could be to have the friend and both members of the couple all interact together, thereby minimizing the source of conflict and maximizing self-expansion opportunities for all involved.

The current research adds valuable new insights to self-expansion theory, especially in areas on self-expansion in non-romantic contexts, for which there is little research. Additionally,

although there is anecdotal evidence to support the phenomenon of a romantic partner asking their significant other to end a friendship, no research has examined this specifically. This research has potential impacts for the field of relationship therapy as well as individuals who have experienced this in their own relationships. Additionally, only through gaining this baseline knowledge can further research be conducted on the impact of this phenomenon on individual well-being and relationship outcomes.

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Appendix A

Low Self-Expansion Vignette

Imagine a friend that is not your partner's gender and outside the range of people you would normally date. You have known this person since you were little, and the two of you grew up together. You went to the same elementary and middle school and even had a lot of the same classes. As the years went by, you both went your separate ways, but 6 months ago, the two of you reconnected on social media. Since you reconnected, you two meet up at least once every two weeks to check in. You two have similar views on various issues, such as politics, religion, and human nature, and you enjoy having civil discussions and, the more you talk, the more you feel that your friend's opinions are very similar to your understanding and perspectives of the issues. You also take turns planning ways to engage in shared hobbies, and you've been able to maintain an old skillset through the process.

Appendix B

Amount of Self-Expansion Provided by the Partner

14-item Self-Expansion Questionnaire (SEQ), established by Lewandowski & Aron (2002)
(Accessed through personal communication with A. Aron January 22, 2016)

INSTRUCTIONS: The following questions are regarding your current romantic partner.
Answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not Very Much							Very Much

1. How much does being with your partner result in your having new experiences?
2. When you are with your partner, do you feel a greater awareness of things because of him or her?
3. How much does your partner increase your ability to accomplish new things?
4. How much does being with your partner make you more appealing to potential future mates?
5. How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are?
6. How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?
7. Do you often learn new things about your partner?
8. How much does your partner provide a source of exciting experiences?
9. How much do your partner's strengths as a person (skills, abilities, etc.) compensate for some of your own weaknesses as a person?
10. How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things because of your partner?
11. How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?
12. How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?
13. How much does being with your partner increase the respect other people have for you?
14. How much does your partner increase your knowledge?

Appendix C

List of Self-Expanding Events

- 1) Outstanding personal achievement
- 2) Gained some major knowledge that was new and exciting
- 3) Outstanding personal achievement of friend, or family member to whom you are close
- 4) Positive change in your own work/job
- 5) Felt you discovered a new major understanding about yourself
- 6) Major changes in financial status (a lot better off)
- 7) Death of someone you knew
- 8) Major increase in closeness to a family member
- 9) Gaining a new family member (through birth, adoption, family member moving in, etc.)
- 10) Major change in church activities (increased attendance)
- 11) Important spiritual experience
- 12) Started a new spiritual experience
- 13) Serious illness or injury of someone you knew
- 14) Major increase in amount of recreation or exercise or starting a new type of recreation or exercise
- 15) Positive change in social activities (parties, movies, visiting, etc.)
- 16) Positive change in your living conditions (building new home or remodeling, improvement of home or neighborhood, etc.)
- 17) Retirement from work
- 18) Son or daughter leaving home (because of marriage, college, etc.)
- 19) End of formal schooling
- 20) Leaving home for the first time
- 21) Beginning a new school experience at a higher academic level (college, graduate school, professional school, etc.)
- 22) Change of residence to a better living situation
- 23) Changing to a new school at the same academic level (undergraduate, graduate, etc.)
- 24) Changing a major
- 25) Dropping a course
- 26) Joining a fraternity/sorority
- 27) Taking an exciting course at school
- 28) Recovered from personal illness or injury
- 29) Learning a new skill
- 30) Winning a large sum of money or other large prize
- 31) Had new roommate or housemate (not romantic partner)
- 32) Became seriously interested in new ideas or ways of thinking
- 33) Joining a club
- 34) Became involved in politics or community activities
- 35) Taking a trip/visiting a new place
- 36) Made a new friend

Appendix D

Desire for Self-Expansion

The Desire for Non-Relational Self-Expansion Scale, an 8-item measure established by Mattingly, Lewandowski, and Bobrowski ($\alpha = .85$; 2013)

(Accessed through personal communication with B. Mattingly January 22, 2016).

INSTRUCTIONS: Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you desire each of the following areas.

Not at All Desired (I do not want to do anything in this area)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very Much Desired (I would very much like to do things in this area)
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- ___ 1. Gain knowledge.
- ___ 2. Expand my self.
- ___ 3. Add to my capabilities.
- ___ 4. Learn different perspectives on various topics.
- ___ 5. Become a better person.
- ___ 6. Have more new experiences.
- ___ 7. Discover new identities.
- ___ 8. Learn new information.

Appendix E

Willingness to give up friendship (jealousy of time):

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they felt jealous of how much time you were spending with your friend and felt it was taking time away from them.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

Willingness to give up friendship (jealousy of emotional intimacy):

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they felt jealous of how much you were confiding in your friend or how close you were getting with your friend and felt that it was taking away from how much you confided in your partner or how close you got with your partner.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

Willingness to give up friendship (fear that friend is unsupportive of relationship):

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they feared that your friend was unsupportive of your romantic relationship and felt that your friend talked negatively about the relationship or your partner.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

Willingness to give up friendship (differences in morals):

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they felt your friend had different morals than your partner.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

Willingness to give up friendship (differences in interests):

“Think back on the friend described in the vignette and imagine that your romantic partner has asked you to give up the friendship because they felt that your friend had different interests than your partner.”

“How willing would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”

“How reluctant would you be to give up the friendship if your romantic partner gave this reasoning?”