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# Self Control & Relationships

## The sum of friends' and lovers' self-control scores predicts relationship quality



### Principle

In a relationship, both people's self-control predicts how good the relationship is.

### Quote

“Across all three studies, the higher the total self-control across both partners, the more satisfied they were with the relationship.”

### So What - Application

If two people's combined self-control scores predict the quality of the relationship, how do we apply this principle?

It could be just explanatory - oh, that's why our relationship is good, bad, or mediocre. It's partly explained by who, if either of us has high self-control.

it could also be something to consider as we form friendships and date. Of course there are dozens of other reasons to be friends or date someone, but being aware of the predictive nature of self-control can give us a clue about what's going on in a relationship.

### The Research Story

Three researchers from Minnesota, Amsterdam, and Florida explored how self-control affects relationships. They had three ideas. Maybe people's strengths compliment each other and so the biggest difference in scores would predict the best relationships. Or, maybe people who are more similar, with the smallest differences in self-control scores will have the best relationships. Finally, maybe the more self-control the pair has combined could predict the best relationships.

They used the Trait Self-Control Scale which asks 36 questions about how people control their thoughts, emotions, performance, and habits.

Study #1 - 120 students and their friends were surveyed about self-control and the quality of their friendship. There was no self-control pattern of who was friends with whom. They found that higher total self-control was linked to higher friendship quality.

Study #2 - 59 couples (dating, engaged, or married) were surveyed for self-control and relationship quality. There are a lot of ways to measure love and they chose two ways that tend to create lasting relationships. These couples had chosen each other with somewhat different levels of self-control. they found that the higher the total of adding together the couple's self-control scores, the healthier the relationship.

Study #3 - 199 couples married just one month were surveyed for self-control and a number of relationship quality measures including trust, satisfaction, daily coordination, forgiveness, and partner responsiveness. These couples also seemed to choose someone with different levels of self-control than themselves. Again, the adding each person's self-control score together predicted better relationships.

In all three studies the higher the combined self-control scores were, the better the relationships were. It's interesting that friends didn't choose their friends based on self-control - there were just as many with similar levels as there were with different levels. it was random. However, couples seemed to more often choose someone with a different level of self-control that they had. To the extent that at least one partner had high self-control and the other partner had self-control low enough to be different, but not so low as to be irresponsible, the relationship flourished.

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