

Through the Looking Glass Darkly? When Self-Doubts Turn Into Relationship Insecurities

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The authors argue that individuals regulate perceptions of their relationships in a self-protective way, finding virtue in their partners only when they feel confident that their partners also see virtues in them. In 4 experiments, the authors posed an acute threat to low and high self-esteem individuals' feelings of self-worth (e.g., guilt about a transgression, fears of being inconsiderate or intellectually inept). They then collected measures of confidence in the partner's positive regard and acceptance (i.e., reflected appraisals) and perceptions of the partner. The results revealed that low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubt with heightened doubts about their partners' regard, which then tarnished impressions of their partners. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts by becoming more convinced of their partners' continued acceptance, using their relationships as a resource for self-affirmation.

The experience of romantic love seems to tempt individuals with the hope of unconditional acceptance—the hope of finding that one person who will always love them despite their faults. This state of felt security or confidence in a partner's continued affections seems critical for relationship satisfaction and stability (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brickman, 1987; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Reis & Shaver, 1988). However, for some individuals, dispositional insecurities may frustrate the complete realization of this hope.

Intimates who are troubled by low self-esteem might project their self-doubts onto their partners, leaving them uncertain of the constancy of their partners' affections. As a result, occasional self-doubts or personal failures might turn into relationship insecurities. For instance, when shaken by a poor evaluation at work, a low self-esteem individual might fear her partner's disappointment and perhaps disillusionment, rather than turning to her partner as a source of comfort and support. In fact, she

might even criticize her partner or distance herself from her relationship to protect herself from the prospect of rejection. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals may never seriously question the constancy of their partners' affections. As a result, occasional self-doubts or failures are less likely to turn into relationship insecurities. Troubled by a poor evaluation at work, a high self-esteem individual might even compensate for this threat by embellishing the value of her relationship and her partner's positive regard as a means of self-affirmation.

In this article, we present four experiments that explore these dynamics in the context of romantic relationships. We hypothesize that low self-esteem poses a vulnerability in relationships because low self-esteem individuals react to self-doubts with heightened insecurities regarding their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance. Once anxieties are activated, low self-esteem individuals then defend against them by devaluing their relationships, thereby reducing their dependency on this threatened resource. In contrast, we expect high self-esteem to act as a strength in relationships, buffering the impact of self-doubts so that they seldom shake confidence in a partner's regard. Instead, high self-esteem individuals might compensate for self-threats by exaggerating their partners' positive regard and acceptance.

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Nagging Insecurities: Self-Esteem and Relationship Well-Being

Consistent with writings in both the symbolic interactionist and attachment traditions, positive models of self seem to play a critical role in sustaining relationship well-being (see Baldwin, 1992; Bowlby, 1982; Collins & Read, 1990). Why might this be the case? Considerable research suggests that satisfaction and well-being depend in part on intimates seeing one another's behaviors and attributes in the most positive light possible (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Hall & Taylor, 1976; Karney &

Bradbury, 1997; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). However, the projection of personal insecurities appears to interfere with such generous perceptions, mirroring Bowlby's (1982) initial notion that models of self as lovable and models of others as loving are naturally confounded.¹

For instance, individuals troubled by greater neuroticism (and thus lower self-esteem) are more likely to make blaming or accusatory attributions for their spouses' behaviors (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994). Similarly, dating and married individuals with lower self-esteem perceive fewer virtues in their romantic partners. In contrast, individuals with higher self-esteem are more generous in their depictions of their partners, minimizing the significance of faults and embellishing virtues (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b). Moreover, the partners of low and high self-esteem dating and married individuals in the Murray et al. studies did not significantly differ in self-esteem, suggesting that intimates actually distort interpersonal realities—seeing their partners in ways that mirror their own fears (or hopes).

Positive models of self seem to play an even greater role in sustaining well-being as relationships progress, whereas low self-esteem seems to pose further vulnerabilities. For instance, individuals with higher self-esteem are involved in more stable dating relationships (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Dating intimates with higher self-esteem seem better able to continue seeing the best in their partners over time (Murray et al., 1996b). Conversely, the dating partners of low self-esteem individuals report less positive perceptions of their partners, less satisfaction, greater conflict, and greater ambivalence as their romances progress (Murray et al., 1996b). Married individuals with higher self-esteem are also involved in more satisfying relationships (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993). In contrast, more neurotic individuals are involved in more dissatisfying (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kelly & Conley, 1987) and less stable marriages (Kelly & Conley, 1987). Despite the seeming importance of positive self-regard, little research to date has directly examined the possible causal mechanisms linking models of self to relationship well-being. The present experiments addressed this critical gap in the literature.

The Role of Reflected Appraisals in Regulating Dependency

Individuals are uniquely vulnerable in romantic relationships. In perhaps no other context do adults voluntarily tie the satisfaction of their own needs and goals to the goodwill of another, as interdependence theorists have noted (e.g., Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Kelley, 1983). Such dependence necessitates a certain degree of circumspection for most individuals (e.g., Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley, 1983). Intimates are typically unwilling to take the leap of faith that committing to a romantic partner entails unless they feel reasonably assured that their feelings are reciprocated (e.g., Berscheid & Fei, 1977; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley, 1983; Murray & Holmes, 1997).

We proposed that low and high self-esteem individuals alike regulate feelings of closeness (and thus dependence) with a sense of security, not letting themselves feel fully in love until they feel confident in their partners' reciprocated regard and

affection. In our experiments, we explored the specific hypothesis that *reflected appraisals*—confidence in a partner's positive regard and unconditional acceptance—link self-esteem to relationship perceptions. In other words, we believe that individuals regulate closeness and dependency in a self-protective fashion, finding value or virtue in their partners only when they feel confident that their partners also see special qualities in them. Unfortunately, enduring insecurities about the likelihood and conditions underlying others' acceptance may make this level of confidence in a partner's regard difficult for low self-esteem individuals to attain.

The idea that intimates regulate closeness with confidence in a partner's acceptance is consistent with basic notions concerning the foundations of trust and felt security (Bowlby, 1982). For instance, more chronic attachment-related anxieties or doubts concerning romantic partners' affections seem to cloud perception and undermine well-being. Dating intimates who are high on anxiety or fear of rejection (i.e., a more negative model of self) interpret their partners' hypothetical transgressions in suspicious ways that are likely to exacerbate feelings of distress (Collins, 1996; Collins & Allard, 1997). Similarly, anxious-ambivalent individuals seem to interpret their partners' actual behaviors during conflict interactions in overly harsh, defensive ways (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Intimates who fear and anticipate others' rejection also report greater, but unwarranted, insecurities about their partners' commitment (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

As the first, correlational test of our hypothesis about the role of reflected appraisals in mediating the link between self-esteem and satisfaction, we asked established dating and married intimates to rate themselves on a variety of virtues and faults, such as "responsive," "critical," "lazy," and "warm" (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1997). Participants also rated how they thought their partners saw them on these same qualities (i.e., perceived reflected appraisals) as well as how they wanted their partners to see them (i.e., desired reflected appraisals). Partners' ratings of the participants on these same qualities indexed their actual regard. Consistent with our dependency-regulation hypothesis, dating and married individuals were more likely to see virtue in their partners and find happiness or satisfaction in their relationships when they believed their partners also saw special virtues in them. Further, and most critical, reflected appraisals completely mediated the link between self-esteem and relationship perceptions in both dating and married couples.

The Unwanted, Unwarranted Insecurities of Low Self-Esteem Individuals

Sadly, confidence in a partner's regard was particularly difficult for low self-esteem individuals to secure—even though this self-affirmational resource existed. A comparison of perceived reflected appraisals with the partner's actual regard revealed

¹ Models of self have been variously conceptualized in terms of global self-esteem, anxiety about attachment or closeness, and negative affectivity or neuroticism. The results of latent variable analyses suggest that these measures all tap a latent "model of self" construct (e.g., Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Given this convergence, we focus on global self-esteem as a proxy for models of self in this article.

that dating and married low self-esteem individuals greatly underestimated just how positively their partners saw them. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals more accurately appreciated their partners' rosy regard. Moreover, the unwarranted insecurities of low self-esteem individuals arose despite their hopes: Even they reported wanting their partners to see them much more positively than they saw themselves. In fact, the discrepancy between their self-perceptions and desired reflected appraisals was greater for low than for high self-esteem individuals, suggesting that low self-esteem individuals need their partners more as a resource for self-affirmation than do high self-esteem individuals (Murray et al., 1997).

Why then do low self-esteem intimates fail to appreciate the positive regard and acceptance they so desperately seek? These insecurities might develop if individuals were to behave like naive realists and assume that others see them in roughly the same way as they see themselves (e.g., Kenny, 1994; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). In our cross-sectional study (Murray et al., 1997), dating and married intimates used their own self-images as templates for constructing impressions of their partners' perceptions of them. Accordingly, high self-esteem individuals believed that their partners saw them relatively positively, whereas low self-esteem individuals (incorrectly) believed that their partners saw them relatively negatively.

Such inaccurate perceptions may come with considerable intra- and interpersonal costs for low self-esteem intimates. Interpersonal theorists on self-esteem have argued that feelings of self-esteem reflect a sense of connection to others (e.g., Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Leary et al. argued that the self-esteem exists only to secure social acceptance and serves as a sociometer that alerts individuals to the possibility of social rejection. For high self-esteem individuals, confidence in their partners' (and others') acceptance may set the activation threshold of this sociometer at a reasonably high level. But for low self-esteem individuals, pessimistic expectations and unfulfilled needs for their partners' (and others') acceptance may oversensitize or miscalibrate this barometer, leaving them vigilant for either hoped-for signs of acceptance or feared signs of rejection (e.g., Downey & Feldman, 1996; Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997).

Low self-esteem individuals thus seem to be caught in an uncomfortable approach-avoidance tension in their romances, needing their partners' positive regard and acceptance but doubting its existence. Our correlational study suggests that low self-esteem individuals resolve this tension by maintaining a safe distance in their relationships, seeing their partners and relationships in a less positive light than do high self-esteem individuals. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals are more confident of their partners' regard and, feeling affirmed, risk greater dependence on their relationships by seeing their partners in a more generous and virtuous light than do low self-esteem individuals.

Through the Looking Glass Darkly? Managing Acute Threats to the Self

According to Bowlby (1982), the experience of threat activates the attachment system (and its component models of self

and other). If that is the case, the above dynamics should be exacerbated whenever a threat to the self is posed. Under such circumstances, romantic partners should provide a safe haven for high self-esteem individuals—a place where they can turn for self-affirmation and comfort in the face of inevitable stresses (see Collins & Read, 1994). However, for low self-esteem individuals, a miscalibrated sociometer and the vulnerabilities implicit in their working models may make this same potential source of acceptance fraught with imagined risks.

A Contamination Hypothesis

For low self-esteem individuals, the activation of self-doubts posed by a poor evaluation at work or occasional moments of intemperance with their partners might only accentuate relationship insecurities. Low self-esteem individuals are less certain of who they are than high self-esteem individuals and consequently treat incoming information as self-diagnostic (e.g., Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). This hypothesis-testing orientation then leaves low self-esteem individuals with a more labile, or reactive, sense of self-esteem than high self-esteem individuals (Baumeister, 1993, 1998; Baumgardner, 1990; Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). Imagine, then, the likely thoughts of a low self-esteem individual in response to a self-threat such as a negative evaluation at work or a critical remark from a friend.

As we noted, such experiences will first threaten their more labile and vulnerable sense of self (Baumeister, 1993, 1998; Campbell, Chew, & Scratchley, 1991). Feeling unsure of their partners' regard, but still needing their partners' acceptance to bolster their self-esteem, low self-esteem individuals may wish they could turn to their partners for support. In fact, they may be especially dependent on their partners' regard because they possess fewer internal self-affirmational resources (e.g., Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993) and they tend to feel isolated from most others (e.g., Leary et al., 1995). As a result, they might continually monitor their partners' behavior for information about the self, such as hoped-for signs of positive appraisals and caring. However, an expectation-guided search is only likely to thwart their hopes and confirm their insecurities.

Such confirmation may occur in part because both low and high self-esteem individuals act like naive realists and assume that their partners generally see them in the same light as they see themselves (Murray et al., 1997). We therefore expected low self-esteem individuals to project any new self-doubts onto their partners, imagining that their partners would share their own sense of disappointment (a type of attitudinal projection commonly described as a *false consensus effect*). The implications of such negative reflected appraisals may be further compounded by low self-esteem individuals' tendency to think in conditional terms. That is, they tend to believe that others' acceptance depends on them living up to certain standards (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996). Occasional failures or disappointments might then activate an ever-present, nagging worry that their romantic partners will eventually discover their "true" selves and their affections might diminish. In the face of personal failures, then, low self-esteem individuals would take little comfort in their partners' positive regard. In-

stead, we expected them to react to such personal failings by anticipating their partners' rejection.

Rather than leaving themselves vulnerable to rejection, we expected low self-esteem individuals to defend against this possibility by devaluing their relationships, thereby reducing their dependency on this threatened resource. In a sense, acute self-doubt might put low self-esteem individuals on the interpersonal offense, leading them to try to find fault in their partners before their partners have the chance to reject them. Such a seemingly self-defeating response might actually soothe their anxieties if it makes the prospect of rejection less threatening (because the partner now seems less desirable). Ironically, though, it also results in low self-esteem individuals' undercutting the resource of a loving, admiring partner who—if appreciated—could bolster their self-esteem.

A Compensation Hypothesis

Now imagine the likely thoughts of a high self-esteem individual in response to a self-threat such as a negative evaluation at work or a critical remark from a friend. High self-esteem individuals possess a more secure and confident sense of self than do low self-esteem individuals, and, as a result, occasional self-doubts or failures rarely seriously threaten their feelings of self-esteem (Baumeister, 1993, 1998; Baumgardner, 1990; Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1991; Nezlek et al., 1997; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Instead, they find some means of fending off such threats and enhancing the self (see Baumeister, 1998, for a review). For instance, high self-esteem individuals compensate for intellectual self-doubts by embellishing their interpersonal strengths (Brown & Smart, 1991; Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995).

Our correlational findings raise the possibility that a partner's reflected appraisals may function as a chronically accessible resource for self-affirmation for individuals high in self-esteem. Unlike low self-esteem individuals, high self-esteem individuals typically anticipate others' acceptance (Leary et al., 1995) and view this acceptance as unconditional in nature (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Roberts et al., 1996). This interpersonal template or schema might facilitate their use of relationships as a self-affirmation resource, preventing self-doubts from turning into relationship insecurities. In terms of the sociometer model, high self-esteem individuals might soothe self-doubts by affirming a sense of social or relational inclusion. Accordingly, we expected high self-esteem individuals to compensate for their own personal disappointments or failures by becoming even more convinced of their partners' continued acceptance and by enhancing the value of their relationships.

Overview of the Present Studies

Our research was the first to experimentally explore the dynamics linking self-esteem, perceived reflected appraisals, and well-being in dating relationships. We hypothesized that low self-esteem poses a vulnerability in relationships because acute self-doubt activates anxieties about a partner's continued positive regard and acceptance. Low self-esteem individuals then defend against these heightened insecurities by devaluing their partners and distancing themselves from their relationships (the

contamination hypothesis). In contrast, high self-esteem might act as a resource or strength in relationships. Rather than doubting their partners' affections, high self-esteem individuals might compensate for self-threats by embellishing their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance (the compensation hypothesis).

In each experiment, we first posed a threat to self-esteem to trigger the hypothesized self-regulatory dynamics. In Experiments 1 and 2, we reactivated feelings of guilt over a past, seemingly isolated transgression to manipulate self-threat. In Experiment 3, we again activated a relational self-doubt by leading individuals to wonder if they really do treat their partners considerably. In Experiment 4, we activated a nonrelational threat to self-esteem by leading individuals to question their own intellectual abilities. We then collected measures of confidence in a partner's positive regard and continued acceptance (i.e., reflected appraisals) and measures of the value individuals place on their relationships. We expected to find that activating these self-doubts would trigger relationship insecurities for low but not high self-esteem individuals. In Experiments 3 and 4, we also included self-esteem boost conditions in an attempt to undo the potentially unwarranted insecurities of low self-esteem individuals.

Experiment 1

No matter how well-intentioned they are, people often transgress in their relationships, acting in some way that hurts or offends their partners' sensibilities. Typically, such transgressions elicit strong feelings of guilt and the motivation to repair the potential threat posed to the relationship (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Tangney, 1995). We designed our initial experiment to see if the feelings of self-castigation elicited by recounting a past transgression might trigger different self-regulatory dynamics as a function of self-esteem. We expected low self-esteem individuals to react to this evidence of their own past frailties by questioning their partners' regard for them and valuing their partners less (a contamination effect). In contrast, we expected high self-esteem individuals to react to this same evidence of their own frailties by exaggerating their partners' regard (a compensation effect).

Overview

In this first experiment, we posed a relationship-based threat to self-esteem—feelings of guilt over a past transgression. Experimental participants first vividly described an important time in their relationships when they disappointed their partners. They then completed measures designed to tap their perceptions of their partners' regard (i.e., reflected appraisals), their perceptions of their partners, and mood. Control participants completed these dependent measures before they described a transgression.

Method

Participants

Sixty-one individuals (28 men, 33 women) involved in established dating relationships averaging 21.2 months in length participated in exchange for Introductory Psychology credit at the University of Michi-

gan. Seven individuals could not describe a disappointment episode, leaving a sample of 54 participants.² Participants were randomly assigned to a condition.

Procedure

Upon their arrival at the laboratory, a female experimenter provided participants with a questionnaire that she described as tapping their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their relationships. Participants first completed the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others"). The next page of the questionnaire instructed experimental participants to think back on and vividly describe an important time in their relationships when they disappointed their partners. They then completed dependent measures, which tapped reflected appraisals, perceptions of the partner, mood, and perceptions of the disappointment episode. Control participants first completed the measures of reflected appraisals, perceptions of the partner, and mood. They then also described a time when they disappointed their partners and rated this event on the appraisal dimensions. All participants were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Reflected appraisals scale. This 3-item scale ($\alpha = .55$) tapped individuals' confidence in their romantic partners' continued, positive regard and acceptance (i.e., "I am confident that my partner will always want to look beyond my faults and see the best in me"; "I couldn't do anything that would make my partner think less of me"; "My partner loves me just as I am; he/she wouldn't want to change me in any way"). Participants responded to these items on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all true* to 9 = *completely true*).

Perceptions of partner scale. This 4-item scale ($\alpha = .74$) tapped individuals' perceptions of their partners' basic goodness or value (e.g., "My partner is an extremely lovable person"; "I love my partner just as he/she is; I wouldn't want to change him/her in any way"; "My partner couldn't do anything that would make me think less of him/her"). Participants responded to these items on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all true* to 9 = *completely true*).

Mood scale. This 9-item scale ($\alpha = .93$) tapped participants' current mood (e.g., guilty, angry, happy, ashamed, content, sad). Participants responded to these items on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all guilty*, 7 = *very guilty*). Positive moods were reverse scored in the overall mood index.

Appraisals of the transgression. This 3-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .77$) tapped individuals' construal of their transgression, including lasting impact on the relationship (i.e., "How much of an effect did this have on your relationship?") and impact on the partner (i.e., "How upset was your partner by your actions?" "How angrily or negatively did your partner act?").

Results

Did low self-esteem intimates react to thoughts of their past sins with increased relationship insecurities, and did high self-esteem intimates react to these same guilty thoughts with increased confidence? To explore these hypothesized dynamics, we first divided participants into low and high self-esteem groups using a median split on their Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scores ($Mdn = 3.5$ on a 4-point scale). We then conducted 2 (low vs. high self-esteem) \times 2 (experimental vs. control condition) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on the dependent measures.^{3,4} We followed up any significant interactions

with planned contrasts comparing the responses of experimental and control participants within low and high self-esteem groups. Table 1 contains the results.

Reflected Appraisals

The 2 \times 2 ANOVA on the reflected appraisal scale revealed a main effect for self-esteem and the anticipated Self-Esteem \times Condition interaction. As Table 1 illustrates, low self-esteem individuals reacted to this reminder of their past transgressions by expressing less confidence in their partners' continued positive regard as compared with low self-esteem controls, $t(51) = 2.85, p < .01, \eta^2 = .14$. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' regard did not significantly waver, $t(51) = -1.18$. Instead, they showed a slight tendency to react to these same self-doubts by expressing greater confidence in their partners' positive regard and acceptance as compared with high self-esteem controls.

Perceptions of Partner Scale

The 2 \times 2 ANOVA on this index revealed a main effect for self-esteem and the anticipated Self-Esteem \times Condition interaction. Low self-esteem individuals reacted to thoughts of their own past transgressions by seeing their partners less positively, $t(51) = 3.07, p < .01, \eta^2 = .16$. In contrast, this reminder of their own past sins did not significantly tarnish high self-esteem individuals' generous perceptions of their partners, $t(51) < 1$.⁵

Warranted (In)securities?

These results suggest that low self-esteem individuals reacted to thoughts of their own past sins by questioning their partners' regard for them and by valuing their partners less (a contamination effect). In contrast, thoughts of their own transgressions

² The results remained consistent when we included those participants who did not provide a story (2 experimental participants, 5 control participants).

³ Keeping within the tradition of most experiments exploring the effects of low versus high self-esteem, we analyzed the results of all experiments using an ANOVA rather than regression approach. As we hope the reader will see, the ANOVA approach provided a compelling and intuitive set of results, especially in the more complicated 3 \times 2 designs used in later studies. We also conducted all of our analyses using a regression approach (where we treated self-esteem as a continuous variable), and we found a virtually parallel pattern of results. We discuss the two minor exceptions that arose (in Experiments 1 and 2) in Footnotes 5 and 7.

⁴ We also conducted 2 (low vs. high self-esteem) \times 2 (experimental vs. control condition) \times 2 (men vs. women) ANOVAs. However, no consistent gender effects emerged in any of the experiments. Therefore, we collapsed across gender in reporting the results.

⁵ In the regression analysis, the Self-Esteem \times Condition interaction was reduced to nonsignificance ($p = .13$). We suspect this occurred because omnibus tests of interactions are not particularly sensitive to interaction patterns like the one in Table 1, where one mean differs significantly from all others (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985). Fortunately, this partner derogation effect is replicated in Experiments 3 and 4 (using the ANOVA and regression approach).

Table 1

Reactions of Low and High Self-Esteem Individuals to Thoughts of Past Transgressions in Experiment 1

Variable	Low self-esteem		High self-esteem		Self-esteem		Conditions		Interaction	
	Threat (<i>n</i> = 17)	Control (<i>n</i> = 12)	Threat (<i>n</i> = 12)	Control (<i>n</i> = 13)	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>
Reflected appraisals	4.33**	5.78	6.39	5.64	5.96*	1, 50	0.79	1, 50	7.78**	1, 50
Perceptions of partner	4.19**	6.06	6.58	5.96	5.94*	1, 50	1.77	1, 50	7.03**	1, 50

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions. Significant treatment versus control constraints within low and high self-esteem groups are indicated by asterisks.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

did not significantly undermine high self-esteem individuals' security in their partners' affections.

Were the insecurities of low self-esteem individuals warranted? Maybe they recalled a more serious, hurtful transgression than did high self-esteem individuals, one that elicited greater feelings of guilt. If that was the case, their heightened doubts might be a reasonable reaction to an actual threat to their relationships. To explore this possibility, we conducted 2×2 ANOVAs on the mood and event appraisal items. As expected, experimental participants ($M = 5.34$) reported greater feelings of guilt than did control participants ($M = 2.08$), $F(1, 50) = 57.11$, $p < .001$. Experimental participants ($M = 4.60$) also reported more negative overall mood than controls ($M = 2.00$), $F(1, 50) = 90.53$, $p < .001$. However, low and high self-esteem individuals did not differ significantly in their vulnerability to these feelings (all interaction F s < 1). Furthermore, ratings of the impact of the event on the partner and relationship did not differ significantly by self-esteem or condition (all F s < 1).

These results suggest that threatened low self-esteem individuals' greater insecurities did not simply result from their recalling more serious, more hurtful, or more guilt-inducing transgressions than did high self-esteem individuals. Nor did their insecurities seem to stem from their partners' reacting to past transgressions in an angrier, more punitive fashion than the partners of high self-esteem individuals. In fact, the reflected appraisal and partner perception effects remained consistent and significant even when we conducted another set of analyses and controlled for feelings of guilt, overall mood, and appraisals of the event. By their own reports, then, the transgressions of low self-esteem individuals did not differ significantly from the transgressions of high self-esteem individuals. Unfortunately though, they reacted to the self-doubts posed by these past sins by expressing greater, but seemingly unwarranted, insecurities about their relationships in the present.

A Mediation Model?

Why did the contamination effect occur for low self-esteem individuals? We originally hypothesized that individuals regulate perceptions in a self-protective way, valuing their partners only when they feel confident that their partners also see positive qualities in them. If this dependency-regulation dynamic occurred, reflected appraisals should mediate the interactive effect of self-esteem and acute self-doubt on perceptions of the partner in Experiment 1.

Four effects are necessary to support a mediational model according to Baron and Kenny (1986). First, the Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction term needs to predict the outcome (partner perceptions), as it did (see Table 1), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .11$, $F(1, 50) = 7.03$, $p < .01$. Second, the interaction term needs to predict the mediator (reflected appraisals), as it did (see Table 1), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .12$, $F(1, 50) = 7.78$, $p < .01$. Third, the mediator (reflected appraisals) needs to predict the outcome (partner perceptions), controlling for the hypothesized cause (the interaction term). And fourth, when the mediator (reflected appraisals) is included in the analysis, the direct effect of the interaction term on perceptions of the partner needs to be reduced to near zero (for a complete rather than partial mediational model to be supported). To explore the third and fourth conditions, we again conducted the original analysis on the perceptions of partner scale, but this time we included the reflected appraisal measure as a covariate. This analysis supported our mediational logic. Reflected appraisals significantly and uniquely predicted perceptions of the partner, $\beta = .658$, $t(49) = 6.16$, $p < .01$, controlling for self-esteem, condition, and the Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction term. However, the direct effect of the interaction term on perceptions of the partner was reduced to nonsignificance, $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .01$, $F < 1$. The results of the first experiment, then, suggest that confidence in a partner's regard regulates the value individuals place on their partners.

Discussion

For low self-esteem individuals, anxieties about a past transgression seemed to spill into the present, heightening their insecurities and tarnishing impressions of their partners (a contamination effect). For high self-esteem individuals, however, similar self-doubts remained locked in the past. Thoughts of their past sins did not significantly shake high self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' regard. Instead, they showed a nonsignificant tendency to compensate for these transgressions by affirming their partners' regard. Such results are particularly striking considering that high self-esteem individuals reported transgressions that were similarly grievous and guilt-inducing as those of low self-esteem individuals.

Experiment 2

We conducted Experiment 2 to replicate and further explore the dynamics observed in the initial study. Feelings of guilt over

a past transgression again served as the self-threat. In this study, we incorporated expanded, more reliable measures of reflected appraisals and relationship-valuing to better understand the internal dialogue of low and high self-esteem individuals in response to self-doubt. For instance, we included new items that tapped the perceived positivity of the partners' regard for the self to broaden our original reflected appraisals scale. We also asked participants to vividly imagine a new scenario in which they transgressed and to predict whether their partners would react in an accepting or rejecting way to provide a more specific index of reflected appraisals. Next, we broadened our relationship-valuing indexes to provide a more sensitive test of the notion that low self-esteem individuals devalue and reduce their dependency on their relationships to ward off the insecurities posed by self-doubt. We included a new measure that directly tapped the tendency to depend on the relationship as a resource for self-affirmation. Further, we asked individuals to describe their partners on a variety of virtues and faults as well as to indicate their optimism about their partners' future relationship behaviors.

Our focus on interpersonal perceptions might seem unusual in that recruiting evidence of a partner's love and acceptance to buffer the effects of self-threats is a relatively indirect means of self-enhancement (although it is consistent with the tenets of the sociometer model). After all, an individual troubled by a poor evaluation at work might affirm herself much more directly simply by deciding her supervisor is incompetent or by affirming another aspect of her character (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Baumgardner, Kaufman, & Levy, 1989; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Steele, 1988). Similarly, intimates might quell any self-doubts raised by their past transgressions by affirming their generally kind and compassionate nature. But we did not examine these means of self-affirmation in Experiment 1. In some ways, such thoughts might be a more satisfying means of affirming the self because they effectively deny or compartmentalize the self-doubt. Perhaps then, guilty low self-esteem individuals might take this more direct, intrapersonal route to self-affirmation given their uncertainties about their partners' regard. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals might not need to embellish other virtues if recruiting evidence of their partners' affections has already satisfied their self-affirmational needs. We included two direct measures of self-enhancement in Experiment 2, paralleling the perceptions of partner measures, to explore these possibilities.

Overview

We again posed a relationship-based threat to self-esteem—feelings of guilt over a past transgression. Experimental participants first vividly described an important time in their relationships when they disappointed their partners. They then completed an expanded set of dependent measures that tapped their partners' willingness to forgive a specific transgression, global reflected appraisals, dependence on the relationship for self-definition, optimism about their partners' and their own future behavior, perceptions of themselves and their partners, and mood. Control participants completed these dependent measures before they described a transgression.

Method

Participants

Seventy-four individuals (35 men, 39 women) involved in dating relationships averaging 18.5 months in length participated in exchange for Introductory Psychology credit at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Three individuals could not describe a disappointment episode, leaving a sample of 71 participants.⁶ Participants were randomly assigned to a condition.

Procedure

Upon their arrival at the laboratory, a female experimenter provided participants with a questionnaire that she described as tapping their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their relationships. Participants first completed the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .88$) and a 3-item ($\alpha = .85$) measure of relationship satisfaction (e.g., "I am perfectly satisfied in my relationship"). The next page of the questionnaire asked experimental participants to think back on and to vividly describe an important time in their relationships when they disappointed their partners. They then completed dependent measures that tapped perceptions of their relationships, self-perceptions, mood, and perceptions of the disappointment episode. Control participants first completed the primary dependent measures. They then also described a time when they disappointed their partners and rated this event on the appraisal dimensions. All participants were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Forgiving a transgression scale. This 6-item ($\alpha = .85$) scale first asked participants to spend a moment vividly imagining a new, hypothetical scenario in which they had transgressed in a particular way (i.e., lying to their partner or criticizing their partner in public). Participants then described their partners' likely reaction to this transgression on 7-point dimensions that tapped anticipated acceptance versus rejection (e.g., 1 = *not at all forgiving* to 7 = *extremely forgiving*; 1 = *not at all angry* to 7 = *extremely angry*; 1 = *not at all betrayed* to 7 = *extremely betrayed*; 1 = *rejecting* to 7 = *accepting*; and 1 = *close to me* to 7 = *distant from me*). Rejection items were reverse scored in computing the forgiveness index.

Reflected appraisals scale. This 9-item scale ($\alpha = .74$) tapped individuals' overall confidence in their partners' continued, positive regard and unconditional acceptance (e.g., "My partner makes me feel very secure and confident about myself"; "I am confident that my partner will always want to look beyond my faults and see the best in me"; "My partner is less critical of my faults than I am"; "My partner sees special qualities in me, qualities that other people might not see"; "I couldn't do anything that would make my partner think less of me"; "My partner overlooks most of my faults"). Participants responded to these items on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all true* to 9 = *completely true*).

Dependence scale. This 6-item scale ($\alpha = .78$) tapped individuals' dependence on their romantic relationships as a resource for self-affirmation and identity (e.g., "I wouldn't be myself without my partner"; "If I couldn't be in this relationship I would lose an important part of myself"; "I rely on support and encouragement from my partner to feel better about myself"). Participants responded to these items on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all true* to 9 = *completely true*).

⁶ The results remained consistent when we included those participants who did not provide a transgression (2 experimental participants, 1 control participant).

Optimism scale. This 19-item scale tapped participants' optimism about the future of their relationships. Participants rated the likelihood of their partners ($\alpha = .67$) or themselves ($\alpha = .42$) engaging in different positive and negative behaviors (e.g., "My partner will do something that really upsets and angers me"; "My partner will forgive me if I disappoint him/her"; "I will act selfishly and ignore my partner's feelings"; "I will solve a serious problem my partner is having"). Participants rated the likelihood of these events on 7-point scales (1 = *rarely, if ever* to 7 = *frequently*). Negative behaviors were reverse scored in computing the self and partner optimism subscales.

Perceptions of partner scale. This 19-item scale ($\alpha = .84$) tapped individuals' overall impressions of their partners (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b). Participants described their partners on a series of interpersonally oriented virtues and faults (e.g., warm, responsive, critical, demanding, intelligent, lazy, tolerant and accepting, open and disclosing, thoughtless). Participants responded to these traits using 9-point scales (1 = *not at all characteristic* to 9 = *completely characteristic*). Negative traits were reverse scored in computing the overall index.

Perceptions of self scale. This 19-item scale ($\alpha = .80$) asked participants to describe themselves on the identical series of virtues and faults used to describe their partners. Again, participants responded to these traits using 9-point scales. Negative traits were reverse scored in computing the overall index of self-perceptions.

Mood scale. This 9-item scale ($\alpha = .73$), identical to that used in Experiment 1, tapped current mood (e.g., guilty, angry, happy, ashamed, content, sad). Positive moods were reverse scored in the overall mood index.

Appraisals of the transgression. This 3-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .79$), identical to that used in Experiment 1, tapped individuals' construal of their transgressions, including lasting impact on the relationship and impact on the partner.

Results

Did low self-esteem individuals again react to thoughts of their past sins with increased relationship insecurities, and did high self-esteem individuals react to these same guilty thoughts with increased feelings of security? Again, we first divided the participants into low and high self-esteem groups using a median split on their Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scores ($Mdn = 5.8$ on a 7-point scale). We then conducted 2 (low vs. high self-esteem) \times 2 (experimental vs. control condition) ANOVAs on the dependent measures. We followed up any significant interactions with planned contrasts comparing the responses of experimental and control participants within low and high self-esteem groups. Table 2 contains the results of these analyses. For the sake of brevity, we focus simply on the anticipated, significant Self-Esteem \times Condition interactions.

Reflected Appraisal Indexes

The 2 \times 2 ANOVAs on the forgiving a transgression and global reflected appraisal scales both revealed significant Self-Esteem \times Condition interactions. As Table 2 illustrates, low self-esteem individuals in the experimental condition reacted to a reminder of their past sins with heightened anxieties that their partners might reject them if they transgressed in the future, $t(68) = 2.26, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$. For low self-esteem individuals, the threat also triggered greater doubts about their partners' continued positive regard and acceptance on the global reflected appraisal scale, $t(68) = 2.11, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. In contrast to this evidence of contamination, high self-esteem individuals

actually reacted to these same self-doubts with greater confidence in their partners' forgiveness if they transgressed in the future, $t(68) = -2.12, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$.

Encouraged by these results, we created an overall reflected appraisals composite by summing standardized (i.e., z) scores for each index. As Table 2 illustrates, the 2 \times 2 ANOVA on this composite also revealed a significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction. Across both indexes, past transgressions seemed to spill into and contaminate the present for low self-esteem individuals, raising fears of their partners' rejection, $t(68) = 2.72, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$. However, high self-esteem individuals appeared to use their partners' regard as a self-affirmational resource in buffering themselves from the self-threat posed by their past sins, $t(68) = -1.86, p = .07, \eta^2 = .05$. On subsequent measures, we expected low self-esteem individuals to self-protectively distance themselves from their relationships (and the prospect of rejection). In contrast, we expected high self-esteem individuals to increase their sense of connection to and the value of their relationships by embellishing the importance of their partners' regard.

Relationship-Valuing Indexes

The 2 \times 2 ANOVAs on the dependence and perceptions of partner scales revealed Self-Esteem \times Condition interactions consistent with these predictions.⁷ On the dependence scale, high self-esteem individuals fended off thoughts about their past sins by affirming the importance of their partners' affections for self-definition, $t(68) = -2.27, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$. In contrast, low self-esteem individuals did not take significant advantage of this potential self-affirmational resource in counteracting self-doubt. Instead, low self-esteem individuals reacted to thoughts of their own past frailties by finding less evidence of virtue in their partners, $t(68) = 1.75, p = .08, \eta^2 = .04$. In contrast, this reminder of their own transgressions did not significantly tarnish high self-esteem individuals' generous perceptions of their partners. Encouraged by these results, we created a relationship-valuing composite by summing standardized scores for the dependence, optimism, and perceptions of partner scales. The 2 \times 2 ANOVA on this composite index yielded a parallel, but marginally significant, interaction pattern.⁸

Self-Perception Indexes

The analyses on the perceptions of self and optimism for the self scales did not yield any significant main effects for condition or any significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interactions in this (or any subsequent) experiment. For the sake of brevity,

⁷ In the regression analysis, the Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction predicting perceptions of the partner was reduced to nonsignificance ($p = .13$).

⁸ Examining the reflected appraisal or relationship-valuing composite occasionally obscured the significant contrast effects evident on a component of the index. We do not devote much attention to these inconsistencies when they occur because the meta-analysis we present at the end of Experiment 4 provides the best test of the strength and consistency of our results.

Table 2

Reactions of Low and High Self-Esteem Individuals to Thoughts of Past Transgressions in Experiment 2

Variable	Low self-esteem		High self-esteem		Self-esteem		Condition		Interaction	
	Threat (<i>n</i> = 18)	Control (<i>n</i> = 17)	Threat (<i>n</i> = 16)	Control (<i>n</i> = 20)	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>
Reflected appraisals										
Forgiving a transgression	2.96*	3.71	3.86*	3.13	0.42	1, 66	0.00	1, 66	9.66**	1, 66
Reflected appraisal	5.09*	5.95	6.15	5.66	1.79	1, 67	0.39	1, 67	5.55*	1, 67
Reflected appraisal composite	-0.47**	0.27	0.39†	-0.14	1.36	1, 67	0.30	1, 67	10.83**	1, 67
Relationship-valuing										
Dependence	5.24	5.80	5.55*	4.47	2.08	1, 67	0.53	1, 67	5.40*	1, 67
Optimism for partner	5.30	5.47	5.37	5.49	0.06	1, 67	0.65	1, 67	0.02	1, 67
Perceptions of partner	6.14†	6.76	6.78	6.56	0.75	1, 67	0.65	1, 67	2.73†	1, 67
Relationship-valuing composite	-0.18	0.22	0.12	-0.13	0.01	1, 67	0.15	1, 67	2.91†	1, 67

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions. Significant treatment versus control contrasts within low and high self-esteem groups are indicated by asterisks.

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

then, we do not discuss these measures in subsequent *Results* sections.

Warranted (In)securities?

Just as in Experiment 1, low self-esteem individuals reacted to thoughts of their own past transgressions by questioning their partners' positive regard and by finding less evidence of virtue in their partners (a contamination effect). In contrast, high self-esteem individuals seemed to compensate for this self-threat by embellishing and embracing the importance of their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance (a compensation effect).

But again, it might be the case that low self-esteem individuals were recalling more serious, more guilt-inducing transgressions than were high self-esteem individuals, past sins their partners have never actually forgiven. As in Experiment 1, threatened participants ($M = 4.66$) reported greater feelings of guilt than did control participants ($M = 2.50$), $F(1, 64) = 19.57$, $p < .001$. Experimental participants ($M = 4.37$) also reported more negative overall mood than did control participants ($M = 2.98$), $F(1, 65) = 41.70$, $p < .001$. However, low and high self-esteem intimates did not significantly differ in their vulnerability to these feelings (interaction $F_s < 1$). On the appraisal items, low self-esteem individuals ($M = 4.23$) did report that their transgressions had more impact on their relationships than did high self-esteem individuals ($M = 3.06$), $F(1, 67) = 6.37$, $p < .05$. However, ratings of how much the transgression angered or hurt the partner did not significantly differ by self-esteem or condition (all $F_s < 1$). Most critical, all of the effects remained consistent and significant when we repeated the analyses and controlled for feelings of guilt, overall mood, and the perceived impact of the event. These results suggest that low self-esteem individuals' accentuated insecurities did not simply result from their recalling more serious, more hurtful, or more guilt-inducing behavior.

Perhaps, however, low and high self-esteem individuals

were reacting to very different realities in their relationships. After all, low self-esteem individuals are typically involved in less satisfying relationships than are high self-esteem individuals. Maybe the moderating effect of self-esteem was simply a proxy for the effects of satisfaction (i.e., a third variable model). To explore this possibility, we repeated all of the analyses and used the premeasure of satisfaction as a covariate. All of the reported effects remained strong and significant. Furthermore, in this sample, low ($M = 7.15$) and high ($M = 6.68$) self-esteem individuals did not significantly differ on satisfaction, $t(69) = 1.07$. These results suggest that low self-esteem intimates' heightened fears did not simply reflect a realistic forecast for a poorly functioning relationship.

A Mediation Model?

The results of Experiment 1 suggested that reflected appraisals mediated the interactive effects of chronic self-esteem and acute self-doubt on perceptions of the partner. To see if a similar regulatory dynamic emerged in Experiment 2, we repeated the original analysis on the relationship-valuing composite, but this time we included the reflected appraisal composite as a covariate. All four conditions for mediation again appeared to be satisfied. First, the Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction term predicted the relationship-valuing composite (see Table 2), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .04$, $F(1, 68) = 2.91$, $p < .10$. Second, the interaction term predicted the reflected appraisals composite (see Table 2), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .14$, $F(1, 68) = 10.83$, $p < .01$. Third, reflected appraisals significantly and uniquely predicted relationship-valuing in the covariance analysis, $\beta = .798$, $t(67) = 9.21$, $p < .01$; and fourth, the direct effect of the interaction term on relationship-valuing was reduced to nonsignificance in the covariance analysis, $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .01$, $F < 1$. These findings again suggest that

individuals regulate the value they place on their relationships to reflect their confidence in their partners' regard.⁹

Discussion

Low self-esteem individuals' anxieties about a past transgression again came back to haunt them, both priming uncertainties about their partners' regard and tarnishing perceptions of their partners (a contamination effect). In contrast, high self-esteem intimates actually compensated for seemingly similar frailties by affirming and exaggerating the importance of their partners' regard (a compensation effect). Such divergent responses would not be surprising if low self-esteem participants recalled more serious or more guilt-inducing transgressions or if they were involved in less satisfying relationships. But neither was the case. Instead, troubled by self-doubt, low self-esteem intimates constructed realities that affirmed their fears, whereas high self-esteem intimates constructed realities that affirmed their relationships and soothed self-doubts.

It was somewhat surprising that neither low nor high self-esteem individuals took significant advantage of the opportunity to affirm their self-concepts more directly by embellishing their many interpersonal virtues or by affirming their commitment to future good behavior. The self-perception measures revealed no main or moderating effects of condition. Perhaps for high self-esteem individuals embellishing their partners' regard effectively quelled their self-affirmational needs. But even though guilty, low self-esteem intimates were unable to find solace in their partners' regard, they did not even take the seemingly direct route to self-affirmation, maybe because the necessary, positive self-aspects (e.g., "I am loving, caring, and a good partner") were less available to them (e.g., Steele et al., 1993), especially after a fault had been primed.

A critic might argue that Experiments 1 and 2 provided too liberal a test of the self-regulatory model. Although low and high self-esteem individuals apparently did not feel any differently about their transgressions, we cannot rule out the possibility that their past experiences differed in some way that warranted low self-esteem individuals' greater concerns. In Experiment 3, we created a novel self-doubt in the laboratory to control for this possibility and to provide a more conservative test of our hypotheses.

Experiment 3

In this study, we attempted to fuel a latent anxiety that most individuals may experience from time to time—the fear that they are not being as attentive and as considerate of their partners as they ought to be. We expected low self-esteem individuals to react to this potential self-doubt with the fear that their partners' continued positive regard and affections were at risk. These heightened feelings of vulnerability should result in low self-esteem individuals devaluing their partners and relationships. However, high self-esteem intimates' confidence should not be so easily shaken. Instead, they might even compensate for the self-threat by accentuating their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance.

Initially, we described how security in a partner's affections stems in part from individuals' own subjective sense of self-

esteem. We suspected that high self-esteem individuals more accurately appreciate their partners' positive regard and affections because they project the many virtues they see in themselves onto the image of themselves they see in their partners' eyes. Even occasional self-doubts may do little to challenge such positive reflected appraisals because high self-esteem individuals typically see their partners' regard as unconditional in nature (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). For low self-esteem individuals, though, a more mixed store of self-knowledge and a more conditional sense of others' regard may not as easily justify another's devotion—especially when new faults are made salient (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Baumeister, 1993, 1998).

If this is the case, it might be possible to increase low self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' regard by providing a boost to their self-esteem—that is, by providing the beginnings of a rationale for their own worthiness of a partner's love and admiration. We included a self-boost condition in Experiment 3 that paralleled the self-threat to see if we could undo low self-esteem individuals' insecurities. In the boost condition, we provided information that might confirm individuals' hopes that they were being extremely considerate partners. If an impoverished sense of their own virtues is the only barrier to security, low self-esteem individuals might react to this potential boost to self-esteem with greater confidence in their partners' regard and by placing greater value on their relationships.

Overview

We first posed a relationship-based threat or boost to self-esteem—either the fear of being an inconsiderate partner or the hope of being a considerate partner. Experimental participants first completed a considerateness inventory that was biased to elicit either low or high considerateness scores. Control participants completed an unbiased inventory. All participants then completed the set of dependent measures, including perceptions of their partners' willingness to forgive a specific transgression, global reflected appraisals, dependence on the relationship for self-definition, optimism about their partners' and their own future behavior, mood, perceptions of their partners, and self-perceptions.

Method

Participants

Seventy-six individuals (35 men, 41 women) involved in dating relationships averaging 19.2 months in length participated in exchange for Introductory Psychology credit at the State University of New York at Buffalo. We preselected low and high self-esteem individuals on the basis of their scores on a Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale administered during a mass-testing session at the beginning of the semester (low self-esteem = bottom 40%; high self-esteem = top 40%). Participants

⁹ Consistent with these hypothesized regulatory dynamics, the reflected appraisals and relationship-valuing measures in Experiment 2 were moderately intercorrelated (average $r = .43$). These dependent measures were similarly correlated in Experiment 3 (average $r = .42$) and Experiment 4 (average $r = .41$).

were randomly assigned to a condition (self-threat, self-boost, or control).

Procedure

Upon their arrival at the laboratory, a female experimenter provided participants with a questionnaire that she described as tapping their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their relationships. Participants first completed the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .93$) and the 3-item measure of relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .88$). All participants then completed a considerateness inventory that purportedly measured their level of considerateness in their romantic relationships.

Participants in the self-threat condition completed a biased 10-item scale designed to elicit low considerateness scores (e.g., "How often do you feel a little bit impatient with your partner?"; "How often do you say something that ends up irritating or hurting your partner a bit?"). Participants in the self-boost condition completed a parallel 10-item scale designed to elicit high considerateness scores (e.g., "How often do you remain patient with your partner?"; "How often does your partner end up feeling flattered and pleased by something you've said?"). Participants responded to these considerateness items on 7-point scales (1 = *never* to 7 = *once or more a week*). Self-threat and self-boost participants then scored their own questionnaires and completed a feedback sheet that linked particular score ranges to different levels of considerateness (low, moderate, or high). Participants in the self-threat condition learned that their score suggested they behaved inconsiderately toward their partners fairly often, whereas participants in the self-boost condition learned their score suggested they almost always behaved considerately in their relationships. Control participants completed a considerateness scale that contained an equal mixture of considerate and inconsiderate items, but they did not receive any feedback.

Measures

All participants then completed a set of dependent measures identical to those used in Experiment 2, including perceptions of their partners' willingness to forgive a transgression ($\alpha = .85$), global reflected appraisals ($\alpha = .77$), dependence on the relationship for self-definition ($\alpha = .75$), optimism about their partners' ($\alpha = .76$) and their own ($\alpha = .52$) future behaviors, mood ($\alpha = .86$), perceptions of the partner ($\alpha = .91$), and self-perceptions ($\alpha = .85$). They were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

Results

Did low self-esteem individuals react to fears of being an inconsiderate partner with increased insecurity, and did high self-esteem intimates react to these same potential doubts with increased confidence in their partners' regard? Could providing a self-esteem boost alleviate low self-esteem individuals' concerns? We first divided participants into low and high self-esteem groups using a median split on their Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scores ($Mdn = 5.8$ on a 7-point scale).¹⁰ We then conducted 2 (low vs. high self-esteem) \times 3 (self-threat vs. control vs. self-boost condition) ANOVAs on the dependent measures. We followed up any significant interactions with planned contrasts comparing self-threat with control participants and self-boost with control participants within low and high self-esteem groups. Table 3 contains all the results. For the sake of brevity, we focus here simply on the anticipated, significant Self-Esteem \times Condition interactions.

Reflected Appraisal Indexes

The 2 \times 3 ANOVA on the global reflected appraisal scale revealed the anticipated Self-Esteem \times Condition interaction. Mirroring the prior results, low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts about their considerateness by doubting their partners' positive regard and continued acceptance on the global reflected appraisals scale, $t(71) = 2.58, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$. In contrast, the specter of this fault did not significantly shake high self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' positive regard ($t < 1$). Unexpectedly, in the boost condition, even the thought of being a highly considerate partner left low self-esteem individuals doubting their partners' continued tolerance, perhaps because of anxieties about continuing to live up to such high standards, $t(71) = 3.24, p < .01, \eta^2 = .13$. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals seemed to revel in this affirmation, becoming even more confident of their partners' continued positive regard, $t(71) = -1.85, p = .07, \eta^2 = .05$.

As Table 3 illustrates, the 2 \times 3 ANOVA on the overall reflected appraisal composite also revealed a significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction. Across both indexes, the activation of self-doubt primed low self-esteem individuals' anxieties about the conditions underlying their partners' regard, $t(71) = 2.13, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. In fact, even contemplating a more virtuous self-image seemed to prime their doubts, $t(71) = 2.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. On subsequent measures, we expected low self-esteem individuals to self-protectively distance themselves from their relationships and the prospect of their partners' disaffection.¹¹

Relationship-Valuing Indexes

Low self-esteem individuals' apparent efforts to regulate their anxieties surfaced on the scales tapping their overall impressions of their partners and their predictions about their partners' future behaviors. Replicating the prior studies, low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts about their own considerateness by finding less evidence of virtue in their partners, $t(70) = 2.16$,

¹⁰ Pretest self-esteem scores were highly correlated with self-esteem measured at the beginning of the session, $r(74) = .72$. The results are parallel whether we used the pretest or the session measure of self-esteem.

¹¹ Low self-esteem controls expressed greater confidence in their partners' positive regard and acceptance than did high self-esteem controls. A nearly identical effect appears in Experiment 4. At first blush, these results might appear counter to our general theoretical framework. But in the process of trying to account for their partners' affections, low self-esteem intimates might have entertained the hope and even tentatively concluded that their partners saw them in a more forgiving way than they saw themselves (e.g., "My partner is less critical of my faults than I am"). After all, this might have been the only way they could account for the seeming mystery of their partners' affections. This effect is also consistent with our prior work suggesting that low self-esteem individuals are more dependent on their partners for affirming hoped-for or ideal selves (Murray et al., 1997). As it turns out though, this hope is easily dashed by experiences that activate low self-esteem individuals' self-doubts or insecurities.

Table 3

Reactions of Low and High Self-Esteem Individuals to Self-Threat and Self-Boost in Experiment 3

Variable	Low self-esteem			High self-esteem			Self-esteem		Condition		Interaction	
	Threat (<i>n</i> = 14)	Control (<i>n</i> = 12)	Boost (<i>n</i> = 13)	Threat (<i>n</i> = 13)	Control (<i>n</i> = 13)	Boost (<i>n</i> = 11)	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>
Reflected appraisals												
Forgiving a transgression	3.05	3.39	3.32	3.81	3.59	3.89	5.12*	1, 70	0.22	2, 70	0.54	2, 70
Reflected appraisal	5.51*	6.75	5.15**	6.08	5.73	6.71†	1.66	1, 70	0.87	2, 70	6.73**	2, 70
Reflected appraisal composite	-0.39*	0.25	-0.39*	0.21	-0.04	0.48	4.95*	1, 70	0.45	2, 70	3.76*	2, 70
Relationship-valuing												
Dependence	5.63	5.89	5.51	4.99	5.10	5.53	1.65	1, 70	0.14	2, 70	0.44	2, 70
Optimism for partner	5.07	5.50	4.44**	5.70	5.48	5.80	11.37**	1, 70	1.21	2, 70	3.99*	2, 70
Perceptions of partner	5.83*	6.89	5.35**	7.23	6.57	7.39	15.12**	1, 69	0.57	2, 69	6.85**	2, 69
Relationship-valuing composite	-0.20	0.25	-0.58**	0.22	0.00	0.41	5.15*	1, 69	0.50	2, 69	4.29*	2, 69

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions. Significant treatment versus control contrasts within low and high self-esteem groups are indicated by asterisks.

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

$p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$.¹² Rather than fostering generosity, the intended boost to their self-regard also left low self-esteem individuals less generous in their depictions of their partners' attributes, $t(70) = 3.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$, and future behaviors, $t(71) = 2.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .11$. In contrast to these contamination effects, neither the boost nor the threat to their self-esteem significantly influenced high self-esteem individuals' perceptions of their partners' attributes or future behaviors. As Table 3 illustrates, this general interaction pattern also emerged on the overall relationship-valuing composite.

Warranted (In)securities?

Replicating the results of Experiments 1 and 2, low self-esteem individuals responded to fears of being an inconsiderate partner by doubting their partners' positive regard and continued acceptance and by devaluing their partners (a contamination effect). Unexpectedly, even the intended boost to their self-esteem left low self-esteem individuals with similar insecurities. In contrast, potential doubts about their own considerateness did not significantly shake high self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' positive regard or character.

Perhaps the fear of being an inconsiderate partner primed insecurities for low but not high self-esteem individuals simply because the threat was more effective for low self-esteem individuals and they actually received much higher inconsiderateness scores on the initial inventory. But the scores of low ($M = 4.56$) and high self-esteem ($M = 4.25$) individuals did not differ significantly ($t < 1$), suggesting that memories of inconsiderate behaviors were similarly accessible for low and high self-esteem individuals. Similarly, perhaps the self-boost affirmed high but not low self-esteem individuals because highs received much higher considerateness scores on this initial inventory. But again, the scores of low ($M = 5.80$) and high self-esteem individuals ($M = 6.29$) did not significantly differ, suggesting that memories of considerate behaviors were simi-

larly accessible for low and high self-esteem individuals, $t(22) = -1.31$, *ns*.

Of course, fears of being inconsiderate and doubts surrounding their own considerateness were probably more poignant for low than high self-esteem individuals. Perhaps, then, low self-esteem individuals in the experimental conditions experienced a more dejected mood than did high self-esteem individuals, which then clouded their perceptions of their relationships. However, a 2×3 ANOVA on the mood scale only revealed a main effect for self-esteem, such that low self-esteem individuals reported more negative mood ($M = 3.49$) than did high self-esteem individuals ($M = 2.50$), $F(1, 70) = 16.83$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, all of the reported effects remained strong and significant when we controlled for reports of mood. Maybe, though, low self-esteem individuals were involved in less satisfying relationships in which their partners' comfort and acceptance had not been forthcoming in the past. In this study, low self-esteem individuals ($M = 6.37$) did report being less happy in their relationships than did high self-esteem individuals ($M = 7.40$), $t(74) = -2.38$, $p < .05$. But when we repeated all of the analyses and used the satisfaction premeasure as a covariate, all of the effects remained significant. Taken together, these results suggest that low self-esteem individuals' heightened doubts did not simply reflect the contaminating effect of a more dejected mood or a poorly functioning relationship. Instead, low self-esteem individuals seemed to project their own personal insecurities onto their partners, anticipating and defending against a potential rejection that might not have materialized.

¹² The perceptions of the partner scale included two attributes (tolerant and accepting, critical and judgmental) that might be seen as indirectly tapping perceptions of the partner's regard for the self. To ensure that the results on the partner perception scale indexed something more than reflected appraisals, we computed a new partner perceptions measure that did not contain these traits. We found an identical pattern of results with these analyses in both Experiments 3 and 4.

A Mediation Model?

To see if the regulatory dynamics we observed in the first two experiments also emerged in Experiment 3, we repeated the original analysis on the relationship-valuing composite and included the reflected appraisal composite as a covariate. All four conditions for mediation again appeared to be satisfied. First, the Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction term predicted the relationship-valuing composite (see Table 3), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .10$, $F(2, 69) = 4.29$, $p < .05$. Second, the interaction predicted the reflected appraisals composite (see Table 3), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .09$, $F(2, 69) = 3.76$, $p < .05$. Third, reflected appraisals significantly and uniquely predicted relationship-valuing in the covariance analysis ($\beta = .612$), $t(69) = 6.52$, $p < .01$; and fourth, the direct effect of the interaction on relationship-valuing was reduced to nonsignificance in the covariance analysis, $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .02$, $F(2, 69) = 1.37$.

Discussion

Low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts posed by the specter of being an inconsiderate partner with heightened doubts about the security of their partners' regard and by valuing their partners less. In contrast, potential doubts about their own considerateness did not significantly undermine high self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' affections—even though high self-esteem individuals received just as low considerateness scores as did low self-esteem individuals. Moreover, their involvement in less satisfying relationships was not sufficient to account for low self-esteem individuals' greater vulnerabilities. Instead, they seemed to project this new personal insecurity onto their partners, contaminating a resource they might have used to bolster their self-esteem.

Unexpectedly, low self-esteem individuals reacted to an intended boost to self-esteem by questioning their partners' regard and by devaluing their partners, even though they received just as high considerateness scores as high self-esteem individuals. Somehow, the process of entertaining this possible self only exacerbated low self-esteem individuals' insecurities, rather than affirming their worthiness of love (as it did for high self-esteem individuals). Perhaps this intended affirmation actually functioned as a self-threat for low self-esteem individuals because it activated conditionality rules linking their partners' acceptance to the possession of virtues, an appraisal process that, once initiated, would be likely to remind low self-esteem individuals of self-perceived faults. For now, we suspend further speculations about the mechanisms underlying this effect until replicating it in Experiment 4.

The results of Experiments 1 through 3 yielded impressive support for the hypothesized self-regulatory dynamics. Lacking the self-concept resources to fend off a threat, low self-esteem individuals reacted to doubts about themselves with heightened insecurities about their relationships. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals reacted to manifestly similar self-doubts with unwavering or even greater confidence in their partners' regard. A critic might resist these conclusions by arguing that we have provided too liberal a test of our hypotheses. In each study, the self-threat we posed might also be construed as a threat to the relationship. As a result, low self-esteem individuals' heightened

insecurities might in some sense be realistic. There is probably more than a kernel of truth to low self-esteem individuals' apparent fear that if they continue to behave badly in their relationships (by transgressing or by being inconsiderate), their partners might reject them. Of course, this possibility only attests to the power of the self-enhancement motive for high self-esteem individuals, who still used their partners' regard as a resource for self-affirmation even though their own behavior seemed to be posing a threat to their relationships.

Apart from this issue, potentially equating a threat to the self with a threat to the relationship also left us unable to precisely pinpoint whether participants were attempting to repair a threat to the self or to the relationship. For instance, high self-esteem individuals might embellish their partners' regard when they are troubled by their own inconsiderateness or transgressions to reaffirm the security of the relationship more than to repair a threat to the self. Leary et al. (1995) argued that self-threats and relationship threats are naturally confounded because personal failures activate anxieties about social inclusion. In romantic relationships in particular, such threats are likely to be entangled because close intimates include their partners and relationships as part of their own self-concepts (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Despite these natural confounds, we decided to disentangle these dynamics in Experiment 4 to see if self-doubts that had little direct relationship relevance would trigger the dependency-regulation dynamics we observed with relationship-based self-threats.

Experiment 4

In this final experiment, we posed a non-relationship-based threat to the self—poor performance on a purported intelligence test. We expected low self-esteem individuals to react to nagging uncertainties about their intellectual abilities by questioning their partners' affections and by valuing their partners less. Conversely, we expected high self-esteem individuals to compensate for similar self-doubts by using the relationship as a self-affirmational resource and embellishing their partners' continued positive regard and acceptance. We also included a self-boost condition to see if a newly discovered virtue—success on a purported intelligence test—would again have the paradoxical effect of heightening low self-esteem individuals' insecurities.

Overview

We first posed a non-relationship-based threat or boost to self-esteem—either the fear of being unintelligent or the hope of being extremely intelligent. Experimental participants completed either an easy or a difficult version of a test of integrative complexity, a purported measure of intelligence (see Brown & Dutton, 1995; Dunning et al., 1995). Individuals in the self-boost condition then received success feedback, whereas individuals in the self-threat condition received failure feedback. Control participants completed a nondiagnostic test containing a mixture of easy and difficult items. All participants then completed the set of dependent measures that tapped perceptions of their partners' willingness to forgive a specific transgression, global reflected appraisals, dependence on the relationship for self-definition, optimism about their partners' and their own

future behavior, mood, perceptions of the partner, and self-perceptions.

Method

Participants

Ninety-one individuals (40 men, 51 women) involved in dating relationships averaging 18.9 months in length participated in exchange for Introductory Psychology credit at the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada. We preselected low and high self-esteem individuals on the basis of their scores on a Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale administered during a mass-testing session at the beginning of the semester (low self-esteem = bottom 33%; high self-esteem = top 33%).

Procedure

Upon the participants' arrival at the laboratory, a male experimenter explained that the study examined dating individuals' thoughts and feelings about their relationships. He then gave participants a brief demographic questionnaire and the measure of relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .90$) and left the laboratory. After returning, the experimenter asked each participant to do a small favor for Jack, a fellow PhD student. In the self-threat and self-boost conditions, he explained that Jack was involved in a project commissioned by the Psychology Department to examine students' level of integrative ability—the capacity to perceive interconnections among diverse pieces of data. He described integrative ability as a stable, immutable component of intelligence which predicts academic achievement and career success. The experimenter then explained that Jack needed to complete his data collection that day and was wondering if the participant would complete a well-established test of integrative ability. All participants agreed. The experimenter explained that the test involved identifying the concept (e.g., memory) that links three other concepts (e.g., elephant–lapse–vivid). Individuals in the self-threat condition completed a difficult version of the test and received failure feedback (i.e., that they scored at the 30th percentile). Individuals in the self-boost condition completed an easy version of this test and received success feedback (i.e., that they scored at the 85th percentile).¹³

In the control condition, the experimenter again explained that Jack was involved in a project commissioned by the Psychology Department to examine students' level of integrative orientation style. The experimenter again described integrative ability as the capacity to see interconnections among different kinds of information or concepts. He explained that the department was developing a new test of integrative style and simply needed to collect normative data on individuals' spontaneous associations to a series of word triads. The experimenter then provided control participants with a mixture of easy and difficult items and asked them to provide whatever word happened to come to mind. He stressed that the items were nondiagnostic of ability and that it might be impossible to generate a linking word for some of the triads.

Measures

All participants then completed dependent measures nearly identical to those used in Experiments 2 and 3, including perceptions of a partner's willingness to forgive a specific transgression ($\alpha = .82$), global reflected appraisals ($\alpha = .62$), dependence on the relationship for self-definition ($\alpha = .63$), optimism about their partners' ($\alpha = .73$) and their own ($\alpha = .46$) future behaviors, mood ($\alpha = .85$), perceptions of the partner ($\alpha = .83$), and self-perceptions ($\alpha = .77$). They were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

Results

Did doubts about their intellectual abilities also spill into low self-esteem individuals' relationships, contaminating their

perceptions, and did high self-esteem individuals compensate for similar self-doubts by embellishing their partners' regard? Did providing a self-esteem boost to low self-esteem individuals again heighten, rather than alleviate, their concerns? We again conducted 2 (low vs. high self-esteem) \times 3 (self-threat vs. control vs. self-boost condition) ANOVAs on the primary dependent measures. We followed up any significant interactions with planned contrasts comparing self-threat with control participants and self-boost with control participants within low and high self-esteem groups. Table 4 contains all of the results. For the sake of brevity, we again focus simply on the anticipated, significant Self-Esteem \times Condition interactions.

Reflected Appraisal Indexes

The anticipated, significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction emerged on both the forgiving a transgression and global reflected appraisal scales. As Table 4 illustrates, low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts about their intellectual abilities with greater fears that their partners might reject them if they were to transgress in their relationships (and perhaps provide further evidence of their frailties), $t(86) = 2.31, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. For low self-esteem individuals, doubts about their intellectual abilities also triggered reservations about their partners' overall devotion and affections, $t(86) = 1.75, p = .08, \eta^2 = .03$. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals actually compensated for these same self-doubts by embellishing their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance on the global reflected appraisals scale, $t(86) = -2.03, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$. Furthermore, even thoughts of their own intellectual virtues left low self-esteem individuals doubting their partners' forgiveness of future transgressions, $t(86) = 2.27, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. However, this self-boost left high self-esteem individuals feeling more confident of their partners' positive regard, $t(86) = -1.72, p = .09, \eta^2 = .03$.

As Table 4 illustrates, the 2 \times 3 ANOVA on the overall reflected appraisal composite also revealed a significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interaction. Across both indexes, low self-esteem individuals reacted to self-doubts—frailties that would seemingly have little importance for their relationships—by anticipating their partners' disaffection, $t(86) = 2.48, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals seemed to compensate for doubts about their intellectual abilities by using

¹³ Unfortunately, we cannot present the results for the number of test items successfully solved in each condition because a research assistant mistakenly discarded the test sheets. Fortunately, we recently conducted another experiment using the integrative ability testing paradigm with low and high self-esteem individuals involved in dating relationships at the University of Waterloo. In this comparable sample, individuals in the self-doubt condition answered significantly fewer of the test items correctly and were significantly more dissatisfied with their performances than individuals in the self-boost condition. It is critical that neither of these effects were moderated by chronic self-esteem. Other investigators have used these exact materials to manipulate college students' self-perceptions (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Dunning et al., 1995). In these studies, failure participants again solved far fewer problems than success participants and were much less satisfied with their performances. Thus, we feel confident concluding that the manipulations had the intended effect for both low and high self-esteem individuals.

Table 4

Reactions of Low and High Self-Esteem Individuals to Self-Threat and Self-Boost in Experiment 4

Variable	Low self-esteem			High self-esteem			Self-esteem		Condition		Interaction	
	Threat (<i>n</i> = 13)	Control (<i>n</i> = 12)	Boost (<i>n</i> = 13)	Threat (<i>n</i> = 18)	Control (<i>n</i> = 17)	Boost (<i>n</i> = 18)	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>dfs</i>
Reflected appraisals												
Forgiving a transgression	3.42*	4.33	3.44*	3.56	3.42	3.79	0.47	1, 85	1.18	2, 85	3.41*	2, 85
Reflected appraisal	5.05†	5.93	5.60	5.93*	5.06	5.80†	0.07	1, 85	0.26	2, 85	3.48*	2, 85
Reflected appraisal composite	-0.31*	0.49	-0.09†	0.10	-0.31	0.16†	0.07	1, 85	0.47	2, 85	4.74*	2, 85
Relationship-valuing												
Dependence	4.42*	5.94	5.54	5.28	4.82	5.11	0.48	1, 85	1.06	2, 85	3.07*	2, 85
Optimism for partner	5.12**	5.91	5.08**	5.24	5.64	5.73	1.02	1, 85	4.25*	2, 85	2.47†	2, 85
Perceptions of partner	5.75**	6.84	6.28	7.00	6.90	6.62	7.82**	1, 84	2.45†	2, 84	3.38*	2, 84
Relationship-valuing composite	-0.58**	0.43	-0.17*	0.07	0.10	0.10	1.62	1, 84	3.64*	2, 84	3.20*	2, 84

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions. Significant treatment versus control contrasts within low- and high-self-esteem groups are indicated by asterisks.

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

their partners' regard as a self-affirmational resource, although this composite contrast was no longer significant. Even the intended boost to self-esteem seemed to prime lows' anxieties, $t(86) = 1.80$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .04$, whereas high self-esteem individuals reacted to this self-affirmation by expressing greater confidence in their partners' regard, $t(86) = -1.72$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .03$. On the subsequent measures, we expected to find evidence of low self-esteem individuals self-protectively distancing themselves from their partners' anticipated disaffection.

Relationship-valuing indexes. The anticipated significant Condition \times Self-Esteem interactions emerged on the dependence, optimism, and perceptions of partner scales. Low self-esteem individuals responded to doubts about their intellectual abilities by reporting less need for their relationships (although they could have fended off these concerns by relying on their partners as a source of comfort and self-affirmation), $t(86) = 2.44$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Low self-esteem individuals also reacted to self-doubts with less optimistic predictions for their partners' future behaviors, $t(86) = 2.52$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$, and by finding less evidence of virtue in their partners, $t(85) = 2.93$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Even the boost to self-esteem dampened their optimism, $t(86) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Parallel and significant contamination effects for lows also emerged on the overall relationship-valuing composite (see Table 4). In contrast, neither the boost nor the threat to self-esteem significantly influenced the value high self-esteem individuals placed on their partners and relationships.¹⁴

Warranted (In)securities?

Conceptually replicating the results of the prior experiments, low self-esteem individuals responded to fears of being somewhat intellectually weak by questioning their partners' positive regard, deemphasizing its importance, and derogating their partners (a contamination effect). Replicating the results of Experiment 3, even the self-boost left low self-esteem individuals with similar insecurities. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals

compensated for these newly found doubts about their intellectual abilities by embellishing their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance (a compensation effect).

As in Experiment 3, the greater insecurities of low self-esteem individuals did not stem from their experiencing a more dejected mood in response to the self-esteem boost and threats. A 2×3 ANOVA on the mood scale revealed a main effect only for self-esteem, such that low self-esteem individuals reported more negative mood ($M = 2.92$) than high self-esteem individuals ($M = 2.33$), $F(1, 85) = 6.84$, $p < .01$. And all of the reported effects remained significant when we controlled for reports of mood.¹⁵ Moreover, all of the reported effects remained significant when we repeated all of the analyses while controlling for the premeasure of satisfaction.

A Mediational Model?

Paralleling the results of prior studies, only confidence in the partner's regard (i.e., the reflected appraisals composite) appeared to mediate the effects of the experimental manipulations on the relationship-valuing composite. All four conditions for mediation again appeared to be satisfied. First, the Condition

¹⁴ For each study, we also conducted separate analyses on the positive and negative items in the partner perceptions and optimism scales. These analyses on these subscales yielded results comparable with those presented for the overall scales.

¹⁵ Even though the experimental effects we observed attest to the strength of our manipulations (e.g., Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990), some readers might be troubled because we did not find main effects of condition on mood in either Experiment 3 or 4. We never intended for the mood scale to serve as a check on these manipulations (because it is difficult to predict what specific mood state should be affected). Instead, we considered participants' actual scores on the considerateness and integrative complexity tests the most appropriate, objective manipulation check. We return to this issue in the General Discussion section.

× Self-Esteem interaction term predicted the relationship-valuing composite (see Table 4), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .06$, $F(2, 84) = 3.20$, $p < .05$. Second, the interaction term predicted the reflected appraisals composite (see Table 4), $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .10$, $F(2, 84) = 4.74$, $p < .05$. Third, reflected appraisals significantly and uniquely predicted relationship-valuing in the covariance analysis, $\beta = .628$, $t(84) = 7.64$, $p < .01$; and fourth, the direct effect of the interaction on relationship-valuing was reduced to nonsignificance in the covariance analysis, $R^2_{\text{interaction}} = .01$, $F < 1$. Taken together, the mediational analyses across studies suggest that valuing a romantic partner or relationship depends in part on confidence in a partner's reciprocated affections.¹⁶

Discussion

Even frailties that would seem to have little bearing on the well-being of their romances triggered relationship insecurities for low self-esteem individuals. They responded to qualms about their intellectual prowess by doubting their partners' positive regard and continued affections, by distancing themselves from their relationships, and by valuing their partners less, perhaps to defend against the impending rejection. Although they found so little solace in their partners' regard or the value of their relationships, they did not take a more direct route to self-affirmation by embellishing another aspect of their character. In contrast, high self-esteem intimates used their relationships as a resource for self-affirmation. They compensated for similar self-doubts by embellishing, rather than doubting, their partners' positive regard and continuing acceptance.

Troubled by thoughts about a seemingly irrelevant fault, low self-esteem intimates again constructed relationship realities that affirmed their fears, whereas high self-esteem individuals constructed realities that soothed self-doubt and affirmed their relationships. Even providing a boost to self-esteem again did little to increase low self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners. Instead, the boost again seemed to function as a self-threat. Low self-esteem individuals reacted to thoughts about a newly discovered virtue by questioning their partners' regard and by derogating their partners.

Why did this contamination effect occur? Perhaps the self-booster that were intended to heighten low self-esteem individuals' self-perceived worthiness of affection had the unintended effect of activating a sense of entitlement. Low self-esteem individuals normally feel inferior to their partners, seeing far more virtues in their partners than they see in themselves. Maybe entertaining a more virtuous self raised their comparison level for alternative partners, leading low self-esteem individuals to reevaluate their partners and decide that they no longer deserved to be put on such a pedestal. But the fact that low self-esteem individuals did not embellish their own qualities on the self-perception measures in Experiments 3 or 4 argues against this entitlement explanation. Alternatively, activating this virtuous, possible self might have triggered self-verification pressures for low self-esteem individuals. Feeling unsettled by the affirmation, they might have turned to their partners as private audiences for confirmation of their more negative qualities (e.g., Swann & Predmore, 1985). According to Swann et al. (1994), however, finding this confirmation in perceived reflected appraisals should

have left low self-esteem individuals evaluating their partners more positively, not less, as we found.

Instead, perhaps focusing on either a personal strength or weakness only highlights the perception that a partner's regard might be conditional. Such 'if-then' contingencies for interpersonal acceptance are more easily activated for low than high self-esteem individuals (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Compounding this vulnerability, low self-esteem individuals tend to organize self-knowledge in such a way that their virtues only serve to remind them of their faults (Showers, 1992). They also actively self-verify and recruit evidence of faults to counter self-booster (Swann, 1987). Through such processes, the intended boost to self-esteem could have had the unintended effect of threatening self-esteem by reminding lows of their greater faults. The potential activation of such self-doubts might have then accentuated low self-esteem individuals' anxieties about living up to this new, more virtuous self-image (and possible fears that their partners would grow disillusioned and disinterested if they did not). We return to a discussion of this and other possibilities shortly.

A Meta-Analytic Summary of the Results

Although the results of the present experiments strongly supported our hypotheses, the predicted contamination and compensation contrast effects did not always surface on each dependent measure. Given this potential limitation, we conducted a meta-analysis that assessed the size and consistency of the contrast effects (e.g., threat vs. control effect among lows) for each reflected appraisal and relationship-valuing index. We calculated the average d as a measure of effect size and used the method of combining unweighted ts described by Rosenthal (1984) to assess overall significance of the contrasts. Table 5 presents the results of the meta-analysis on each dependent measure (including the composite indexes). Low self-esteem individuals consistently reacted to self-doubt by questioning their partners' forgiveness and continued positive regard and by valuing their relationships less. Even an intended boost to their self-esteem had a consistent, contaminating influence for low self-esteem individuals. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals consistently reacted to self-doubt by embellishing their partners' forgiveness and continued positive regard.

General Discussion

Romantic relationships might seem to tempt intimates with the hope of unconditional acceptance—the hope of finding that one person who will always look beyond their faults and see the best in them. In satisfying, trusting relationships, this hope actually seems to be fulfilled for low and high self-esteem individuals alike, at least when their partners' actual feelings are considered (Murray et al., 1997). But the results of the present studies point to a sad irony in this romantic quest for unconditional acceptance. Low self-esteem individuals fail to appreciate

¹⁶ We also conducted the mediational analyses reported in Experiments 2 through 4 using the individual indexes of reflected appraisals and relationship-valuing rather than the composites. These further analyses were also consistently supportive of our mediational logic.

Table 5
Meta-Analytic Summary of the Results Across Experiments 1 Through 4

Variable	Low self-esteem				High self-esteem			
	Threat – control		Boost – control		Threat – control		Boost – control	
	Average <i>d</i>	<i>Z</i>	Average <i>d</i>	<i>Z</i>	Average <i>d</i>	<i>Z</i>	Average <i>d</i>	<i>Z</i>
Reflected appraisals								
Forgiving a transgression	-.43	3.16**	-.27	1.74*	.24	1.75*	.20	1.20
Global reflected appraisal	-.58	4.58**	-.46	2.73**	.30	2.48**	.41	2.50**
Reflected appraisal composite	-.63	5.01**	-.44	2.69**	.32	2.61**	.36	2.24**
Relationship-valuing								
Dependence	-.29	2.22*	-.14	0.83	.26	1.69*	.15	0.88
Optimism for partner	-.34	2.59**	-.64	3.93**	.20	0.81	.12	0.72
Perceptions of partner	-.61	4.88**	-.53	3.18**	.19	1.49	.26	0.42
Relationship-valuing composite	-.59	4.72**	-.55	3.37**	.19	1.51	.15	0.85

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed.

their partners' positive regard even when they need this self-affirmational resource the most, whereas high self-esteem individuals appreciate this reality even though they need it less.

The present studies suggest that low self-esteem individuals react to a myriad of self-doubts by questioning their partners' continued tolerance and positive regard and by distancing themselves from their relationships. Doubting themselves, low self-esteem individuals doubt their partners. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals react to similar self-doubts with increased confidence in their partners' positive regard. Doubting themselves, high self-esteem individuals find solace by seeing themselves through their partners' more forgiving eyes. Intriguingly, these divergent responses did not just reflect simple biases toward pessimistic or optimistic responding; low and high self-esteem threatened individuals did not respond significantly differently to the self-perception measures in any of the experiments. Instead, their efforts at self-regulation were confined to relational perceptions.¹⁷

The insecurities of low self-esteem individuals did not seem to be warranted by any reality we could pinpoint. They did not report any more grievous, hurtful, or guilt-inducing behaviors than did high self-esteem individuals. Yet only the transgressions of low self-esteem individuals came back to haunt them in Experiments 1 and 2. And when we experimentally controlled the manifest severity of the frailty in Experiments 3 and 4, low and high self-esteem individuals performed similarly poorly on the considerateness and integrative complexity tests, but only low self-esteem individuals questioned their partners' continued acceptance.

Is it possible that the comparative security of high self-esteem individuals reflected our inability to truly threaten their more resilient sense of self? Refuting the implications of negative feedback is almost a trademark characteristic of high self-esteem individuals (Taylor & Brown, 1988). In Experiment 3, high self-esteem individuals might not have internalized the inconsiderateness feedback, and this might explain why they suffered no ill effects. In Experiments 1 and 2, however, high self-esteem individuals expressed just as much guilt as low self-esteem individuals, yet they affirmed their partners' acceptance. High self-

esteem individuals also experienced just as much dissatisfaction with failure feedback on the integrative complexity test as did low self-esteem individuals (see Footnote 13). But in Experiment 4, high self-esteem individuals still reaffirmed their security in their partners' acceptance in the face of this significant self-doubt.

Even an intended boost to self-esteem did little to increase low self-esteem individuals' confidence in their partners' affections. Contrary to our expectations, they reacted to thoughts of their own possible virtues by doubting their partners' regard and by derogating their partners. In this sense, the self-esteem boosts did not seem to work for low self-esteem individuals. However, this failure did not seem to reflect any necessary weakness in our manipulations. Low self-esteem individuals performed just as well as high self-esteem individuals on the boost version of the considerateness and integrative complexity tests, and high self-esteem individuals reveled in these affirmations. This feedback actually increased high self-esteem individuals' reported security in their partners' affections. As we explore later, the paradoxical responses of low self-esteem individuals may reflect the self-confirming nature of low self-esteem rather than any weakness in our self-boost manipulations (e.g., Swann, 1987).

However, perhaps it was not the self-doubt itself that magnified low self-esteem individuals' anxieties but the threat this imperfection posed to a more fragile relationship. Three of the self-threats we posed could also be construed as signs of relationship difficulties—a potential threat to the relationship. Maybe then it was low self-esteem individuals' insecurities about their relationships that triggered their anxieties about rejection, not their insecurities about themselves. Such causal dynamics are naturally difficult to untangle because only personal failings that threaten social inclusion may activate the self-affirmation motive (Leary et al., 1995).

Fortunately, the current findings shed some light on this issue.

¹⁷ Whether self-doubts contaminate low self-esteem individuals' perceptions of other important relationships, such as close friendships or parent-child relationships, remains an intriguing question for future research.

First, all of the effects remained consistent when we statistically controlled for satisfaction, a well-used proxy for relationship quality. Second, when we conducted a new set of ANOVAs using satisfaction (low vs. high) rather than self-esteem as the vulnerability factor, we did not find any consistent Condition \times Satisfaction interactions. Third, we also found contamination effects using a self-threat, low integrative ability, that had no necessary relation to the well-being of the relationship. These controls suggest that the effects we observed were more a function of the reality of the people involved in the relationship than the reality of the relationship itself. Low self-esteem individuals simply projected personal insecurities onto their relationships, contaminating this potential safe haven by defending against a rejection that might not have materialized.¹⁸

The Internal but Interpersonal Dialogue

Why do self-doubts turn into relationship insecurities for low but not high self-esteem individuals? It seems unlikely that these contamination effects occurred simply because low self-esteem individuals needed relationships less than did high self-esteem individuals. Instead, a weak sense of self-esteem chronically activates the sociometers of low self-esteem individuals, leaving them more needy of others' acceptance and affirmation (Leary et al., 1995; Nezlek et al., 1997). However, the working models that regulate their interpersonal worlds leave low self-esteem individuals less able to find the sense of acceptance and self-affirmation they seek from their romantic partners—even when this resource exists (e.g., Baldwin, 1992).

Rules governing the contingencies of interpersonal acceptance dominate the working models of low self-esteem individuals (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Roberts et al., 1996). They see others' acceptance as critically dependent on their possessing particular virtues and not possessing particular faults. Even imagined failures or successes prime such interpersonal contingencies, resulting in fluctuating feelings of social inclusion versus exclusion (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Leary et al., 1995). In contrast, rules governing the contingencies of acceptance are much less accessible in the working models of high self-esteem individuals. They tend to take others' acceptance for granted, seeing it as relatively unconditional in nature (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Leary et al., 1995). These interpersonal templates may then leave high self-esteem individuals much less dependent on their relationships for a sense of identity and self-esteem but much more likely to find any affirmation they do seek.

Now imagine how these working models may moderate the self-regulation process. According to the sociometer model, the experience of acute self-doubt first activates the need for social inclusion or acceptance (and thus self-affirmation) for both low and high self-esteem individuals (Leary et al., 1995). This need for acceptance may be more pronounced among low self-esteem individuals because their more fragile, uncertain sense of self is more easily undermined (e.g., Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, 1990). For high self-esteem individuals, any self-doubts can be soothed by exaggerating and taking comfort in their sense of their partners' positive and unconditional regard. However, the self-doubts of low self-esteem individuals likely activate contingency rules that link personal failures to others' potential rejection.

How can low self-esteem individuals then find solace in their partners' acceptance when they feel as though evidence of their new frailty has already put these affections in jeopardy? Instead, self-doubt activates fears of the rejection they believe will follow from failing to live up to their partners' perceived standards (e.g., Baldwin & Holmes, 1987; Higgins, 1987). Feeling like they have failed their partners, low self-esteem individuals might even react to evidence of their frailties with feelings of shame that push them to withdraw from their partners rather than relying on them as a source of comfort (e.g., Brown & Dutton, 1995).

These arguments raise a puzzle though. If low self-esteem individuals do possess more conditional working models, why did the boost to self-esteem—a possible rationale for their partners' affections—not increase their confidence in their partners' acceptance? Considerable research suggests that low self-esteem individuals treat and organize self-knowledge in a self-protective, circumspect way that makes it difficult for them to take much comfort in their virtues (e.g., Baumeister, 1993, 1998; Showers, 1992). For instance, they sometimes self-verify and recruit evidence of their faults to counter evidence of virtues (Swann, 1987). Therefore, even entertaining the thought of being smarter or more considerate than they thought they were might only remind lows of more serious faults, thereby threatening, rather than affirming, their sense of self. Because of their contingent sense of others' acceptance, it may simply be too much of a risk for low self-esteem individuals to conclude that their partners' positive regard and acceptance are secure when they can easily think of personal faults that might put this regard in peril.

Regulating Dependency With Acceptance?

Low self-esteem individuals seemed to distance themselves from partners they feared might grow disaffected with them by finding less to admire in their partners. They even reacted to doubts about their intellectual prowess by distancing themselves from their relationships, paradoxically disavowing their dependence on this potential resource for acceptance and self-affirmation. It seems that self-doubt and associated fears of rejection put low self-esteem individuals on the interpersonal offense, leading them to reject their partners before their partners have the opportunity to reject them. Diminishing the value of the relationship in this way likely reduces the significance of the social exclusion they are anticipating. Rather than fostering gen-

¹⁸ Some readers may still resist this particular conclusion and argue that low self-esteem individuals must be responding to some reality in their relationships. After all, the idea that low self-esteem individuals seek out punitive, rejecting, low self-esteem individuals as romantic partners is widespread (at least in popular magazines). Although we cannot rule out this possibility, the partners of low and high self-esteem dating individuals do not seem to differ significantly in self-esteem (Murray et al., 1996a). Not even married intimates are all that similar in terms of basic personality dimensions, such as neuroticism (Lykken & Tellegen, 1993). Given such results, it seems unlikely that low self-esteem individuals are any more likely than high self-esteem individuals to have partners who are likely to reject them (because of their dispositional insecurities of their own).

erosity, even the self-boasts in Experiments 3 and 4 only tarnished low self-esteem intimates' perceptions of their partners. High self-esteem individuals' positive perceptions of their partners never significantly wavered. Instead, in Experiment 2, high self-esteem individuals actually compensated for qualms about past transgressions by increasing the importance of their relationships for self-definition.

Is it really necessary to invoke notions of conditional working models and consequent fears of rejection to account for low self-esteem individuals' apparent disillusionment? Perhaps the results are more easily interpreted in terms of simple self-evaluation maintenance or social comparison dynamics (e.g., Mendolia, Beach, & Tesser, 1996; Tesser, 1988). Low self-esteem individuals might react to acute self-doubts by derogating their partners because they do not want their partners outperforming them on dimensions that are important to their self-concepts (a type of downward social comparison). Similarly, maybe low self-esteem individuals in the boost conditions tried to preserve this precious affirmation of their worth by finding evidence of fault in their partners, effectively sacrificing relationship affirmation for self-affirmation. These pressures might have contributed to the partner derogation (or disillusionment) effects we observed in the studies posing a relationship-based threat and boost to the self.

Even though a comparison with their partners was never made explicit, self-doubts in a relationship domain might have accentuated low self-esteem individuals' existing feelings of inferiority to their partners. Low self-esteem individuals might then have redressed the imbalance posed by their own newly discovered relationship-based frailties by derogating their partners, effectively equalizing their relationship contributions. But diminishing their partners should have reaffirmed lows' self-esteem, according to the tenets of self-evaluation maintenance and social comparison theory. It therefore seems somewhat inexplicable that threatened, low self-esteem individuals still felt less valued in their partners' eyes (relative to low self-esteem individuals in the control condition), suggesting a failure of self-affirmation.

Moreover, self-evaluation maintenance pressures cannot easily account for the cross-domain contamination effects we observed in Experiment 4. Even though low self-esteem individuals had no knowledge of their partners' level of integrative ability (and probably not even any thoughts about it), low self-esteem individuals still reacted to threats (and boosts) to their own intellectual abilities by finding fault in their partners' interpersonal qualities. Finally, self-evaluation maintenance or social comparison pressures cannot explain high self-esteem individuals' tendency to compensate for their own relationship frailties by embellishing their partners' tolerance, generosity, and positive regard. Doing so should only accentuate the self-threat according to these theories.

The present studies suggest that individuals regulate their relationship perceptions in a self-protective fashion, finding virtue in their partners only when they feel confident that their partners also see special qualities in them. The results of the mediational analyses where reflected appraisals were covaried are perfectly consistent with this dependency-regulation dynamic. But these analyses cannot rule out the possibility that the causal dynamic is opposite to the one proposed. That is,

self-doubt might first diminish perceptions of the partner and then undermine confidence in a partner's reciprocated affections. Although we cannot rule this possibility out on empirical grounds, it seems unlikely on conceptual grounds. For low self-esteem individuals, perceiving a fallible partner should increase, rather than decrease, confidence in a partner's reciprocated affections if basic social exchange notions are considered (e.g., Brehm, 1992). The opposite was the case in the present research.

Self-Esteem and Relationship Well-Being: A Summary

Taken together, the present experiments shed light on at least one mechanism underlying the link between self-esteem and relationship well-being. Seeing the best in an intimate partner depends on confidence in the partner's reciprocated positive regard. Without a secure sense of self, individuals are less likely to develop sufficient trust in another's acceptance to foster generous models of others. Furthermore, when the self-system is under threat, models of self and others react and adapt in a mutually confirming fashion. For low self-esteem individuals, acute self-doubt then makes a sense of trust and security an even more elusive goal, perhaps because of an impoverished self-concept that does not provide support for optimistic inferences and working models that stress the contingencies governing close others' acceptance. For high self-esteem individuals, acute self-doubt seems only to secure confidence in their partners' affections, perhaps because of a resource-rich self-concept that can easily sustain positive inferences and working models that stress the unconditional nature of close others' regard.

The Paradoxes of Self- and Relationship Regulation

Low self-esteem intimates seem caught between their hopes and fears, trapped in an approach-avoidance conflict. Low self-esteem individuals want their romantic partners to see them much more positively than they see themselves, suggesting that they see intimates as a potential self-affirmational resource (Murray et al., 1997). Yet, on occasions of self-doubt, anxieties about failing to live up to others' standards leaves this possible safe haven fraught with risk and the potential for rejection. The struggle to resolve the tensions in this approach-avoidance conflict might account for some of the paradoxical or ironic effects of low self-esteem that we observed.

The first irony is that even though low self-esteem individuals needed their partners' affirmation in moments of self-doubt, they were less likely to perceive it. Instead, high self-esteem individuals reaffirmed their partners' regard to counter an isolated self-doubt even though they had a wealth of other positive self-aspects available. The second irony is that low self-esteem individuals responded to self-doubt and the prospect of rejection by finding less virtues in their partners, devaluing an interpersonal resource that they might have used for self-affirmation. The final irony is that even intended boosts to the self-esteem of low self-esteem individuals seemed to exacerbate their insecurities. Such results suggest that an individual's well-meaning attempt to soothe a low self-esteem partner's insecurities—perhaps by pointing to his or her many virtues—might have the unintended effect of exacerbating the insecurities.

Models of Self and Other: The Regulating Role of Reflected Appraisals

Confidence in a partner's reciprocated affections is the essence of trust and felt security (e.g., Berscheid & Fei, 1977; Bowlby, 1982; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley, 1983). But rather than being based on the partner's actual regard or accumulated experiences, as theorists have assumed, this reflected appraisal may in large part be a projection, reflecting self-perceived worthiness of love (Murray et al., 1997). In fact, the present studies illustrate just how tenuous trust in their partners' affections is for low self-esteem individuals. Even doubts about their intellectual abilities left low self-esteem individuals feeling unaffirmed and unloved. For low self-esteem individuals, a more labile sense of self and conditional working models seem to result in a miscalibrated sociometer that oversensitizes them to the prospect of rejection and disrupts relational well-being (e.g., Downey & Feldman, 1996; Leary et al., 1995). The personal insecurities of low self-esteem individuals therefore frustrate their quest for acceptance and felt security, echoing Erikson's (1968) contention that identity needs must be satisfied before trust and intimacy can be secured.

Is there any hope for low self-esteem individuals? Can an affirming partner and a committed relationship restructure their overly pessimistic working models and alleviate their insecurities? Perhaps there is some reason for optimism. As romantic relationships develop, a process of self-expansion is believed to occur whereby individuals incorporate features of their partners and relationships into their self-representations (Aron et al., 1991). This process of including the other in the self is associated with increases in self-esteem (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Further, being valued and affirmed by a romantic partner also predicts increases in self-esteem as dating relationships develop (Murray et al., 1996b).

Ironically, high self-esteem individuals seem much more likely than low self-esteem individuals to benefit from this process of self-expansion. Consider the experiences that are likely to be incorporated into the self-representations of low and high self-esteem individuals. Apart from including a romantic partner's actual qualities, intimates are also likely to incorporate this private audience's perspective on the self (i.e., perceived reflected appraisals). For high self-esteem individuals, this inclusion will only affirm the self because they correctly assume their partners see them as generously as they see themselves. For low self-esteem individuals, however, this inclusion only limits the self because they incorrectly assume their partners see them no more generously than they see themselves (Kenny, 1994; Murray et al., 1997).

Moreover, our research suggests that these dynamics are only exacerbated when a threat (or even a boost) to self-esteem is posed. Troubled by self-doubts, high self-esteem individuals embellish and embrace the importance of their partners' positive regard for self-definition—further including the other in the self. Yet under threat, low self-esteem individuals question their partners' regard and disidentify with their relationships—actually excluding the other from the self. Through this process of defensive disidentification, low self-esteem individuals seem to construct a relationship reality that insulates their self-models, frustrating basic needs for belongingness and self-integrity. Dis-

covering the conditions that might disrupt low self-esteem individuals' self-defeating thought processes and promote their more accurate appreciation of their partners' affections remains an important task for future research.

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The premiere issue of *Emotion*, the newest journal from APA, will be published in 2001. The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board has opened nominations for the editorship for the period from September 1999 through December 2006.

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