

Self-Esteem and Perceived Regard: How I See Myself Affects My Relationship Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT. The authors explored the relations among self-esteem, perceived regard, and satisfaction in dating relationships. On the basis of the dependency regulation model (T. DeHart, B. Pelham, & S. Murray, 2004), the authors hypothesized that self-esteem would influence individuals' self-perceptions and views of how their partners perceive them (metaperception). They also hypothesized that perceived regard (self-perception minus metaperception) would predict relationship satisfaction. Regression analyses indicated that for moderate relationship-relevant traits (i.e., caring, loving), high self-esteem was associated with self-enhancement (idealization), whereas low self-esteem was associated with self-deprecation. For low relationship-relevant traits (i.e., quiet, reserved), both low and high self-esteem individuals self-enhanced. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that self-esteem and perceived regard for moderate relationship-relevant traits predicted satisfaction. The authors discuss the implications of idealization, self-verification, and self-deprecation for the perceivers and their relationships.

Keywords: perceived regard, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem

THE THEORY OF THE LOOKING GLASS SELF posits that individuals see themselves from the perspective of others and integrate these perceptions into their existing self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). This is important because the amount of perceived acceptance obtained from others might be incorporated into an individual's personal feelings of self-worth (i.e., self-esteem; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). According to the dependency regulation model (DeHart, Pelham, & Murray, 2004), when an individual feels secure in her or his partner's love and acceptance, the individual will allow her- or himself to become attached to the partner. This theory postulates that individuals with low self-esteem underestimate their partners' love and the positive perceptions that their partners may hold of them (DeHart et al.). However, people with high self-esteem

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more accurately perceive how their partners actually view them (DeHart et al.). Therefore, self-esteem, or individuals' feelings of self-worth, should influence how individuals perceive themselves (i.e., "I see myself positively"), their perceptions about how their dating partners view them (i.e., "I think my partner sees me positively"), and their overall relationship quality. However, little research has been conducted regarding the influence of self-esteem on how individuals believe their dating partners perceive them (metaperceptions) or how these metaperceptions and self-esteem affect relationship satisfaction.

Research by Murray et al. (2000) supported the dependency regulation model's prediction that an individual's self-esteem endorses the confidence that the individual has in her or his partner's regard, which is crucial for satisfaction in attachments to one's partner. When dating and married couples were asked how they wanted their partner to view them and how they thought their partner actually perceived them on a number of general traits, low self-esteem individuals underestimated how optimistically their partner viewed them, and that underestimation was related to lower relationship well-being. In contrast, high self-esteem individuals overestimated how optimistically their partner viewed them, and that overestimation was related to higher relationship satisfaction.

Although Murray et al.'s (2000) research indicated that self-esteem is related to perceptions of how the partner sees the self (metaperceptions) and relationship satisfaction, one limitation is that they only examined general traits. According to Neff and Karney (2002), perceivers and targets are motivated by global self-enhancement and specific self-verification of the target. These targets' motives are relevant to our research. The target seeks favorable partner evaluations (self-enhancement) to maximize self-esteem and simultaneously wants her or his self-views to be verified as an indicator of being understood (Neff & Karney). Murray et al.'s findings for ratings of general traits indicated that high self-esteem individuals believe that their partners are fulfilling the self-enhancement function, whereas low self-esteem individuals do not believe this. Do these beliefs hold across all types of traits? In the present study, to test this question, we examined the influence of self-esteem on self-ratings and perceptions of how the partner perceives the self on low and moderate relationship-relevant traits. In addition, we tested whether self-esteem and these metaperceptions influence relationship satisfaction.

Self-Esteem and Interpersonal Relationships

Self-esteem refers to "people's evaluations of their own self-worth—that is, the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent, and decent" (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Fehr, 2001, p. 19; see also Aronson, 1999; Baumeister, 1993). Self-esteem is conceptualized as an important component of the self-concept (Cast & Burke, 2002). High self-esteem individuals generally feel worthwhile as human beings and respect themselves, yet they are aware of their faults. However, low self-esteem individuals feel deficient, unworthy, and inad-

equate as human beings and allow their perceived weaknesses to dominate how they feel about themselves (Owens, 1994).

People's sense of their own self-worth is also bound up in the quality of their relationships with others so that signs of rejection can threaten self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). At the same time, self-esteem can influence an individual's self-perceptions, perceptions of her or his partner, and metaperceptions. Individuals with low self-esteem have an overall history of feeling rejected in their relationships with others, whereas high self-esteem individuals have a history of feeling accepted (DeHart et al., 2004). People with high self-esteem report feeling that they are more likable and attractive, make better impressions on people, and generally have better relationships than do those with low self-esteem (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). High self-esteem individuals also report higher degrees of happiness, despite the presence of stress or other circumstances (Baumeister et al.). Thus, high self-esteem individuals generally fare better than do their low self-esteem counterparts.

The dependency regulation model posits that in a dating relationship, an individual's self-esteem plays a vital role in relationship quality (DeHart et al., 2004). For example, if Jane perceives that risk of rejection from her partner is low, she will allow herself to become dependent on her partner, thus regulating attachment to others in a self-protective way. In addition, the more Jane feels loved and positively viewed by her romantic partner, the more positively she views her partner. In contrast, if Peter does not feel accepted and loved by his romantic partner, he is likely to distance himself and devalue his partner. DeHart et al. found that during difficult times in a relationship, individuals with low self-esteem distanced themselves from the relationship to protect themselves from rejection. However, when things were going well, low self-esteem individuals adored their partners. High self-esteem individuals, however, maintained favorable evaluations of their partners through the relationships' good and bad times. In general, low self-esteem individuals underestimate how positively their partners view and love them, whereas high self-esteem individuals more accurately view their partners' positive perceptions and love for them. These findings also indicate that individuals' self-esteem is related to their feelings of acceptance by their romantic partner. Although low self-esteem is related to, but not isomorphic with, depression, it is not necessarily related to accuracy (for reviews, see Baumeister et al., 2003). Therefore, both high and low self-esteem individuals may be accurate or inaccurate in their beliefs about their own worth, success, or competencies (Baumeister et al.) and in their beliefs about how positively their partners view them (DeHart et al.; Murray et al., 2000).

On the basis of the effects of self-esteem on self-perceptions and metaperceptions, in the present study we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): For moderate relationship-relevant traits, high self-esteem individuals would idealize or self-enhance (metaperceptions are

more positive than self-perceptions), but low self-esteem individuals should self-verify (metaperceptions are the same as self-perceptions) or deprecate (metaperceptions are more negative than self-perceptions).

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): In contrast, for low relationship-relevant traits, both high and low self-esteem individuals would idealize.

Hypothesis 3 (H_3): Self-esteem would positively predict relationship satisfaction.

Murray et al.'s (2000) research is consistent with dependency regulation. When individuals feel more positively regarded by their partners, they, in turn, view their partners more positively. Both high and low self-esteem individuals have romantic partners who usually view them more positively than the individuals see themselves (Murray et al.). However, low self-esteem individuals have more negative and conflicted views of themselves and may assume that their partners also see them negatively, whereas high self-esteem individuals believe their partners view them positively (Murray et al.). For low self-esteem individuals, there is a higher incongruity between a partner's actual regard (how the partner actually viewed the individual) and the participant's perceived regard (how the individual perceived the partner's thinking of him or her). In addition, actual regard is more positive than how the low self-esteem individual views her- or himself, suggesting self-deprecation on the perceiver's part. The higher one's self-esteem, the more similarity there is between self-perceptions and actual regard. The unprovoked insecurities of low self-esteem individuals predicted more disparaging perceptions of their partners and lower relationship satisfaction, compared with high self-esteem individuals (Murray et al.). Low self-esteem individuals' distrust of their partners' expressions of support and love for fear of rejection or abandonment illustrates that self-esteem affects perceptions and relationship satisfaction. On the basis of the aforementioned relations, we predicted that perceived regard (self-perception minus metaperception) would influence relationship satisfaction. In addition, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 4 (H_4): Idealization and self-verification would be related to high relationship satisfaction, whereas deprecation would be related to low satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5 (H_5): Perceived regard would mediate the self-esteem–satisfaction relation.

Comparing an individual's self-perceptions with metaperceptions indicates the individual's sense of perceived regard. The outcome of this comparison, perceived regard, can be idealization, self-verification, or deprecation. Therefore, we review each of these outcomes.

Idealization

Murray and colleagues (Murray & Holmes, 1997, 1999; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a) have referred to idealization as a “positive illusion . . . fantasies in which we convince ourselves that we have the most wonderful partner and the most wonderful relationship in the world—regardless of the facts” (Murray & Holmes, 1997, p. 404). Short- and long-term relationship satisfaction are partly determined by these generous perceptions of the couple. For example, when individuals see virtues in their partners that the partners do not see in themselves, the intimates are more content with their relationship, and this predicts continued satisfaction through the duration of the relationship (Murray et al., 2000). Similarly, when an individual perceives the partner as idealizing her or him, these individuals have higher relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996a), and these relationships are likely to last longer, with satisfaction increasing as time passes (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b).

Murray et al. (1996b) coined the term *reflected illusions effect*, which indicated that when participants’ partners idealized them, or saw past their flaws and focused on their positive aspects, the individuals had greater relationship satisfaction. Dating satisfaction was rarely predicted when a participant’s partner had a correct understanding of the participant’s negative self-views (Murray et al.). In contrast, the higher the level of idealization between intimates, the more satisfied intimates initially were with their relationship and the higher the likelihood that the relationship would last. In addition, relationship satisfaction is not predicted by the participant’s feeling accurately understood by his or her partner (i.e., self-verification). In fact, over time, couples are not as happy when they are accurately understood by their partners as they are when they idealize each other (Murray et al.).

In summary, when intimates idealize each other, their relationships are longer lasting, more satisfying, and less distressing than they are when intimates accurately understand each other’s faults. Although there is no research on the effects of self-esteem on perceptions of idealization or self-verification, individuals with high self-esteem most commonly perceive that their partners idealize them (e.g., Murray et al., 2000).

Self-Verification

Self-verification takes place when there is correspondence or support between meanings in an identity and meanings in social situations (Cast & Burke, 2002). Self-verification theory hypothesizes that individuals want self-confirming information from their partners about their self-views (Katz & Beach, 1997; Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990). That is, individuals want others to view them similarly to how they view themselves. Katz and Beach describe the level of consistency between self-evaluation and perceived evaluation by a partner as *perceived self-verification*. In addition, when an individual’s identity is verified, feelings of

worth and capability increase the individual's self-esteem because confirmation of one's identity symbolizes approval and acceptance of the self by others (Cast & Burke; Neff & Karney, 2002).

According to self-verification theory, individuals are attracted to people who confirm preexisting self-conceptions (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Geisler, 1992). Self-verifying relationships provide individuals with opportunities for personal development and growth. Thus, self-verifying relationships have high levels of relationship satisfaction (Katz & Beach, 1997; Katz & Joiner, 2002). For example, Katz and Joiner found that when individuals perceived that their partners evaluated them similarly to how they evaluated themselves (self-verification), these individuals were more intimate and committed to their partners and relationships. This occurred for both individuals who had positive self-views and those who had negative self-views. In fact, self-verification is positively related to the quality of dating relationships, relationship satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy (Katz & Beach).

Although self-verification is important in relationship satisfaction, this research contradicts Murray et al.'s (1996a, 1996b, 2000) finding that idealization has more beneficial effects on a dating relationship. In the present study, we examined idealization and self-verification for low and moderate relationship-relevant traits to determine their relation to self-esteem and relationship satisfaction.

Deprecation

Owens (1994) defined self-deprecation as the negative component of self-esteem in which an individual criticizes her or his worth and efficacy. Self-deprecation develops out of an individual's awareness of personal actions that he or she considers to be inept or unsuccessful (Owens, 1993). Little research has been conducted on self-deprecation in relationships. Murray et al. (1996b) found that when an individual's partner has a deprecating view of the individual, relationship satisfaction decreases. Lack of stability in relationships is also likely to occur if verification of identity and enhancement of self-esteem does not occur (Cast & Burke, 2002). Related to our research, low self-esteem individuals tend to underestimate how positively their dating partners perceive them (Murray et al., 2000), and that underestimation suggests that low self-esteem individuals may perceive deprecation from significant others.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 191 introductory psychology students (96 men, 95 women; *M* age = 19.80 years, *SD* age = 2.90 years) who participated in our study for

course credit. Their dating partners' mean age was 20.29 years (SD age = 4.00 years). The average length of the relationship was 17.16 months (SD = 17.49 months). The majority of participants were Caucasian (65%) and reported being in a steady dating relationship (78%).

Procedure

We required that individuals had been in a dating relationship for at least 3 months at the time of the study. We chose this minimum length of time because we considered it to be a sufficient period of time for partners to get to know each other, for the relationship to establish, and for self-esteem to influence perceptions. (On average, our participants had been dating for 17 months, and, therefore, this minimum requirement was not really necessary.) We told participants that we were investigating predictors of relationship satisfaction and that they would complete scales about themselves, their partners, and their relationships. Self-esteem and relationship satisfaction were rated from the participants' points of view. We rated the trait measure from the participants' points of view and their perceptions of how their partner perceived them. Participants also responded to demographic questions (age, relationship length, relationship status, and ethnic background). Scales were randomly ordered across participants.

Materials

Self-Esteem. We used Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale to assess each participant's level of trait self-esteem. We coded responses on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Items were recorded so that higher ratings reflected higher self-esteem (M = 3.14, SD = 0.53; Cronbach's α = .88).

Relationship Satisfaction. Hendrick's (1988) seven-item Relationship Assessment scale was used as a measure of relationship satisfaction. Ratings were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not well, not satisfied*) to 7 (*very well, very satisfied*). We reverse-scored two items and calculated a mean score (M = 5.59, SD = 1.01; Cronbach's α = .86).

Traits. We included Gill and Swann's (2004) scale to measure low and moderate relationship-relevant traits for dating relationships; we could not use high relationship-relevant traits because they are idiosyncratic to each relationship. Participants rated themselves and their metaperceptions (the participant's perception of how the partner sees the participant) on 20 low-relevance traits (e.g., quiet, reserved, talkative) and 20 moderate-relevance traits (e.g., caring, loving, affectionate). The instruction for the self was "For each of the following characteristics, please indicate how well the characteristic describes you, where 1 = *not*

at all characteristic and 9 = completely characteristic.” For the metaperceptions, we revised this to read, “For each of the following characteristics, please indicate how you think your partner would rate you on each characteristic.” We reverse-scored 10 low relationship-relevant traits and 5 moderate relationship-relevant traits. Cronbach’s alphas for the moderate relationship-relevant traits were .79 for self-ratings ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 0.76$) and .83 for metaperceptions ($M = 6.54$, $SD = 0.56$). For the low relationship-relevant traits, Cronbach’s alphas were .66 for self-ratings ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 0.575$) and .70 for metaperceptions ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 0.60$).

Results

Table 1 indicates the zero-order correlations among variables. In each analysis that we report, we also include the participant’s race, relationship status, relationship length, gender, and Self-Esteem \times Gender interaction. Relationship status predicted satisfaction, so that engaged and married individuals reported higher satisfaction than did steadily dating individuals, but this effect did not influence any reported results. With one exception that we note for participant’s gender, none of the other variables had a significant effect.

Perceived Regard: Idealization, Self-Verification, or Deprecation

H_1 and H_2 involve three forms of perceived regard: self-deprecation, self-verification, and idealization. Self-deprecation would be found if self-ratings

TABLE 1. Zero-Order Correlations Among all Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Low relevant–self	—	-.18*	.68**	.23**	.43**	.38**
2. Low relevant–metaperception		—	.09	.34**	.03	-.12
3. Moderate relevant–self			—	.53**	.42**	.36**
4. Moderate relevant–metaperception				—	.39**	.08
5. Satisfaction					—	.24**
6. Self-esteem						—

Notes. Low relevant refers to low relationship-relevant traits, and moderate relevant refers to moderate relationship-relevant traits. Self refers to self-ratings, and metaperception refers to the participant’s perception of how the partner sees the participant.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

minus metaperceptions resulted in a positive score. Self-verification would be found with a score of zero. Idealization would be found with a negative score. Therefore, we created a difference score for each trait and then calculated relative mean difference scores for the low ($M = -0.09$, $SD = 0.49$; range = -1.85 to 1.20) and moderate ($M = 0.06$, $SD = 0.47$; range = -1.35 to 2.85) relationship-relevant traits. We then conducted regression analyses for the low and moderate traits separately, using trait self-esteem as the predictor variable.

H_1 was that for moderate relationship-relevant traits, low self-esteem individuals would perceive self-verifying or deprecating views from their partners, whereas high self-esteem individuals would perceive idealization. For moderate relationship-relevant traits, trait self-esteem predicted perceived regard, $\beta = -.13$, $t(189) = -1.82$, $p < .07$, $R^2 = .02$. Figure 1 displays these results for low (2 SD s and 1 SD below the mean), medium (mean), and high (1 SD and 2 SD s above the mean) self-esteem individuals. As seen in the figure, low self-esteem individuals were self-deprecating; they believed their partners viewed them more negatively than they viewed themselves (positive difference score). As self-esteem increased, this perceived regard moved toward self-verification (zero difference score) and then to self-enhancement (negative difference scores).

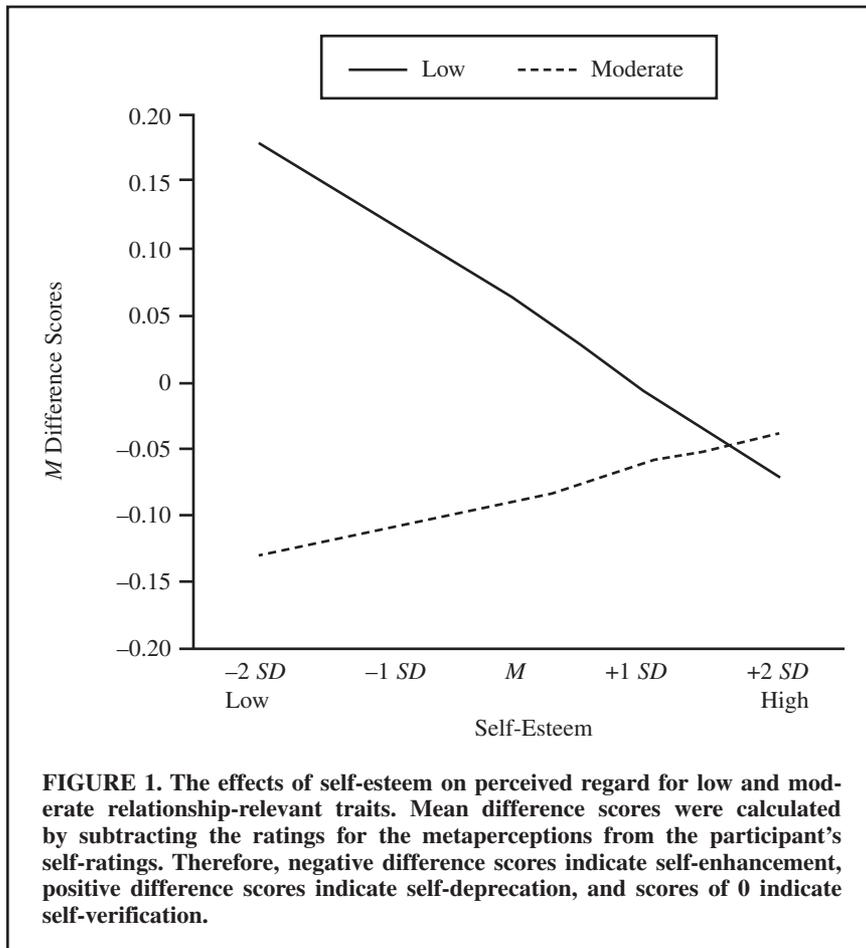
H_2 was that for low relationship-relevant traits, high and low self-esteem individuals would perceive idealization (self-enhance; H_2). Trait self-esteem did not predict trait ratings (ns), indicating that regardless of self-esteem, individuals self-enhanced on the low relationship-relevant traits (see Figure 1).

Self-Esteem, Perceived Regard, and Relationship Satisfaction

Consistent with H_3 , regression analysis indicated that self-esteem predicts relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .24$, $t(189) = 3.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .06$; the higher an individual's trait self-esteem was, the higher the level of reported relationship satisfaction was. It should be noted that participants' sex was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, $\beta = -.20$, $t(189) = -2.88$, $p < .004$, but this did not change the effect of self-esteem, $\beta = .22$, $t(189) = 3.06$, $p < .003$; $R^2 = .10$, $p < .001$.

H_4 was that perceived regard would predict relationship satisfaction, and H_5 was that perceived regard would mediate the self-esteem–relationship satisfaction relation. To test H_4 , we used both the low and moderate traits as predictors of satisfaction. Consistent with our hypothesis, self-enhancement on the moderate relationship-relevant traits was a significant predictor of satisfaction (for moderate traits, $\beta = -.21$, $t(188) = -3.00$, $p < .003$; for low traits, $p = ns$, $R^2 = .05$, $p < .006$). That is, the more negative the difference score (self-enhancement) was, the higher the participant's relationship satisfaction was.

To test H_5 , we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediational analyses. We conducted regression analyses, entering trait self-esteem in the first block and the difference scores in the second block. We found that although self-esteem predicted



satisfaction, $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$, $t(189) = 3.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$, self-enhancement on the moderate relationship-relevant traits added to this prediction: (a) for self-esteem, $\beta = .22$, $t(187) = 3.18$, $p < .01$; (b) for moderate traits, $\beta = -.24$, $t(187) = -2.44$, $p < .001$; (c) for low traits, *ns*; $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .12$, $p < .001$. Contrary to H_5 , the Sobel z test ($z = 1.64$, $p = .10$) indicated no mediation.

Discussion

We examined the relations among self-esteem, perceived regard, and relationship satisfaction in dating relationships. Extending past research, we looked at whether the types of traits measured (moderate or low relationship relevance) influenced perceived regard (idealization, self-verification, or deprecation) experienced by high and low self-esteem individuals. We found not only that

self-esteem affects an individual's self-perceptions and metaperceptions, but also that this effect depends on the type of trait being measured. For moderate relationship-relevant traits, high self-esteem individuals self-enhanced (perceived idealization), whereas low self-esteem individuals self-deprecated. For the low relationship-relevant traits, both high and low self-esteem individuals self-enhanced. Perceived regard on the moderate relationship-relevant traits added to the prediction of self-esteem on relationship satisfaction. Thus, the highest satisfaction was found among high self-esteem individuals who perceived idealization on the moderate relationship-relevant traits.

Self-Esteem and Perceived Regard

The dependency regulation model (DeHart et al., 2004) indicated that self-esteem influences how individuals believe their partners actually view them: Low self-esteem individuals should underestimate their partners' positive perceptions, whereas high self-esteem individuals should more accurately estimate their partners' positive perceptions. Consistent with the dependency regulation model, Murray et al. (2000) found that low self-esteem individuals self-deprecated and high self-esteem individuals self-enhanced (idealized) when rating general traits. In contrast, we hypothesized and found that these effects vary on the basis of the type of traits being measured.

For moderate relationship-relevant traits, we predicted that individuals with high self-esteem would perceive idealization and that low self-esteem individuals would perceive self-verification or deprecation. In fact, we found that high self-esteem individuals self-enhanced and that low self-esteem individuals self-deprecated. These findings suggest that high self-esteem individuals are motivated by global self-enhancement (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2002) but that low self-esteem individuals' feelings of being deficient, unworthy, and inadequate (e.g., Owens, 1994) lead to self-deprecation; they believe their partners see them as having fewer of these moderate relationship-relevant traits. This self-deprecation on moderate relationship-relevant traits is not good relative to self-verification. Verification provides individuals with feelings of being understood (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987) and signals the partner's approval and acceptance (Cast & Burke, 2002; Neff & Karney, 2002). In contrast, by being enhanced (i.e., idealization), individuals feel more positive affect (Swann et al., 1987), have more contentment with the relationship (Murray et al., 2000), have longer lasting relationships, have fewer doubts and concerns about the relationship (Murray et al., 1996b), and—as we found—report greater satisfaction. Therefore, for the moderate relationship-relevant traits, only high self-esteem individuals are accruing benefits based on perceived regard. As hypothesized, we also found that high and low self-esteem individuals self-enhanced on the low relationship-relevant traits.

When examining them together, we found that high self-esteem individuals reported having characteristics important for the success of their relationship and

were able to accrue the benefits of idealization on moderate and low relationship-relevant traits. In contrast, low self-esteem individuals reported having relatively unimportant characteristics, by self-enhancing on the low relationship-relevant traits, and received fewer benefits by self-deprecating on the moderate relationship-relevant traits. Unfortunately, the doubts and concerns that low self-esteem individuals have about themselves and their relationships lead to more negative relationship experiences and lower relationship satisfaction than do those of high self-esteem individuals.

Relations Among Self-Esteem, Perceived Regard, and Relationship Satisfaction

We hypothesized that self-esteem and perceived regard would significantly predict relationship satisfaction. We found that perceived regard on the moderate relationship-relevant traits predicted relationship satisfaction. This effect added to but did not mediate the relation between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, paralleling Murray et al.'s (1996a, 1996b, 2000) results, higher self-esteem and greater idealization predicted higher relationship satisfaction among dating couples. In contrast, perceived regard on the low relationship-relevant traits did not predict relationship satisfaction. It appears then that both self-esteem and the relevance of the traits for the relationship are important for predicting relationship satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present research used introductory psychology students, who tend to be young (18–19 years of age) and in short-term relationships. The impact of self-esteem on relationships among older individuals and on longer term relationships may or may not be the same. A variety of life events (e.g., children, work) may change the relations that we found in the present sample. Before generalizing our findings, it is important for researchers to replicate the present research with participants who vary in age and life events.

We also only examined one individual in the dating relationship, yet the two individuals in such a relationship may have differing self-esteems and perceptions that could affect the relationship. If both individuals experience low self-esteem, their negative self-perceptions and relationship beliefs would suggest that they would experience very little relationship satisfaction. In contrast, a relationship involving two high self-esteem individuals should experience high levels of satisfaction. Perhaps of more interest is the relationship in which one individual experiences low self-esteem and the other individual experiences high self-esteem. In this case, the high self-esteem individual may experience less satisfaction because he or she needs to constantly deal with the low self-esteem individual's doubts and concerns. In contrast, although filled with doubts and concerns, the low self-esteem individual may experience more satisfaction than

the high self-esteem individual because the high self-esteem individual tries to work at the relationship. Future researchers should examine the influence of both intimates' self-esteem on relationship outcomes.

A third limitation of our research is that the correlational nature does not allow us to determine causality. It is possible that perceived regard affects self-esteem, which affects relationship satisfaction, or that satisfaction may affect self-esteem, which affects perceived regard. Researchers have examined self-esteem as a predictor (e.g., DeHart et al., 2004; Murray et al., 2000) and as a criterion (e.g., Cast & Burke, 2002; Kito, Morry, Stevens, & Marchylo, 2005; Neff & Karney, 2002). In general, researchers can conclude that self-esteem is positively related to relationship satisfaction (Baumeister et al., 2003; Hendrick, 1988). Manipulating perceived regard, self-esteem, or satisfaction would be useful to determining the causal direction. For example, Morry (2005) manipulated satisfaction by having individuals write about their most positive or negative interaction with a friend. This manipulation influenced participants' concurrent satisfaction and their perceptions of their friends. A similar manipulation with dating couples could be done to test the direction of causality.

Self-esteem's effects are not limited to relationship quality and perceived regard; self-esteem's effects are related to a variety of psychological and health outcomes. For example, high self-esteem individuals report less depression, more optimism, and fewer physical symptoms (Baumeister et al., 2003; DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Scheier & Carver, 1985). Unfortunately, negative dimensions of relationships (i.e., marital functioning) also have an indirect effect on health through depression (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001), and higher relationship satisfaction predicts lower levels of depression and fewer physical symptoms (Kito et al., 2005). Because low self-esteem individuals tend to distrust partners' expressions of love and support and to act as if they expect the partner to reject or abandon them (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002), these low self-esteem individuals may be even more susceptible to depression and health problems. The influence of self-esteem and relationship perceptions on depression and health needs to be tested.

Murray et al.'s (2000) and DeHart et al.'s (2004) dependency regulation model postulates that an individual's self-esteem will influence perceptions of the partner's love and how positively the partner views that individual. The model proposes these effects as relying on the individual's feeling secure in the partner's love and acceptance. With this definition, it is surprising that this model has not been related to attachment styles (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). According to Griffin and Bartholomew, the attachment model of self is correlated with a positive self-concept, one component of which is self-esteem. Self-esteem, however, is not related to the attachment model of other. In addition, Bartholomew and Horowitz found that attachment styles with a positive self-model (i.e., secure and dismissing) were positively correlated with self-esteem, whereas attachment styles with a negative self-model (i.e., fearful

and preoccupied) were negatively correlated with self-esteem. Future researchers should examine whether the model of self is a better predictor of the metaperceptions and perceived regard than is self-esteem alone. Although the relations between self-esteem and self-concept and the relations between self-concept and the model of self would suggest that this is the case, Griffin and Bartholomew's self-concept measure includes subjective distress and self-acceptance, neither of which is discussed in the dependency regulation model. It is possible that these variables are not related to the individual's feeling secure in the partner's love and acceptance of the self.

Conclusion

High self-esteem individuals strategically use perceived regard from their relational partners to obtain additional benefits in their relationships. We found that high self-esteem individuals perceived idealization on moderate and low relationship-relevant traits. Perceived idealization should provide positive affect, relationship contentment, relationship satisfaction, and longer relationships. In contrast, low self-esteem individuals self-deprecated on the moderate relationship-relevant traits and self-enhanced on the low relationship-relevant traits. Although these individuals may feel understood by their partner on certain traits, they are not receiving the numerous other benefits associated with idealization on moderate relationship-relevant traits. Unfortunately, the doubts and concerns that low self-esteem individuals harbor lead to more negative relationship experiences, and both their low self-esteem and these negative dimensions of relationships suggest that they will experience a number of negative psychological and health outcomes.

AUTHOR NOTES

Antonella Sciangula has a Master of Arts degree in school psychology from the University of Manitoba and currently practices as a school psychologist at a local school division. She provides psychological support and services to schools, children, and their families. **Marian M. Morry** is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Manitoba. Her research interests include (a) how individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles differ in their reactions to social comparisons of their dating relationships; (b) social cognitions within one's dating relationship in which the individual enhances the partner relative to the self and to the general other; and (c) how the individual's relational interdependent self-construal influences his or her behavior, cognition, and affect in new and ongoing relationships.

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