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What is This?

Perceived Regard Explains Self-Esteem Differences in Expressivity

Danielle Gaucher[1], Joanne V. Wood[2], Danu Anthony Stinson[3], Amanda L. Forest[2], John G. Holmes[2], and Christine Logel[2]

Abstract

Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton proposed that individuals with low self-esteem (LSEs) adopt a more cautious, self-protective self-presentational style than individuals with high self-esteem (HSEs). The authors predicted that LSEs' self-protectiveness leads them to be less expressive—less revealing of their thoughts and feelings—with others than HSEs, and that this self-esteem difference is mediated by their perceptions of the interaction partner's regard for them. Two correlational studies supported these predictions (Studies 1 and 2). Moreover, LSEs became more expressive when their perceived regard was experimentally heightened—when they imagined speaking to someone who was unconditionally accepting rather than judgmental (Study 3) and when their perceptions of regard were increased through Marigold, Holmes, and Ross's compliment-reframing task (Study 4). These findings suggest that LSEs' expressiveness can be heightened through interventions that reduce their concerns about social acceptance.

Keywords

Sharing one's thoughts, feelings, and desires with close others is fundamental to the development of relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973). High levels of self-disclosure and of emotional expressivity are associated with greater relationship satisfaction (e.g., Clark, Fitness, & Brisette, 2001), stability (Sprecher, 1987), and intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; for a review, see Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001), as well as greater physical and emotional health (e.g., Harrist, Carlozzi, McGovern, & Harrist, 2007; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 2003). Yet revealing one's thoughts and feelings to others is not always easy, and hence not everyone is able to reap the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of expressivity. We use the term *expressivity* broadly to refer to both self-disclosure and emotional expressivity. Self-disclosure refers to sharing self-relevant information with others, regardless of the content, whereas emotional expressivity refers to communicating emotion specifically. The more expressive people are, the more they reveal their thoughts and feelings to others.

In the present research, we propose that dispositional self-esteem—one's global feeling of self-worth—is a key determinant of expressivity because expressive behavior leaves one vulnerable to interpersonal rejection. Because individuals with low self-esteem (LSEs) are particularly averse to social rejection, we suggest that they are typically less expressive than individuals with high self-esteem (HSEs). However, if LSEs' concerns about interpersonal rejection

are reduced, their expressivity should increase. Hence, in the present research, we investigate why self-esteem differences in expressivity arise, and in doing so identify factors that can increase LSEs' expressivity.

In a seminal paper, Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton (1989) proposed that HSEs and LSEs differ in their self-presentational styles. HSEs act in a *self-promoting* fashion, boldly calling attention to their positive qualities, whereas LSEs act in a cautious, *self-protective* fashion, trying to avoid revealing their deficiencies. Baumeister et al. reviewed research demonstrating that LSEs' self-protective interpersonal style manifests in cautious self-presentational behaviors. For example, compared to HSEs, LSEs are (a) more likely to comply and yield to peers (McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984), (b) more likely to avoid social comparisons (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984), and (c) less likely to boast of future success (McFarlin & Blascovich, 1981). We extend Baumeister et al.'s theorizing regarding self-esteem differences beyond superficial self-presentations to strangers

[1]University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
[2]University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
[3]University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Danielle Gaucher, 515 Portage Ave., University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 2E9
Email: d.gaucher@uwinnipeg.ca

to how people express their thoughts and feelings to close others in their everyday lives.

Very little research has documented self-esteem differences in expressivity. On self-report measures, relative to HSEs, LSEs say they are less expressive of positive emotions (Gross & John, 1997) and are less willing to express negative emotions (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008). LSEs are more likely than HSEs to report "masking" or suppressing their emotions (e.g., "I suppress my anger, rather than showing it"; Gross & John, 1998, 2003). In the present research, rather than using general self-report scales, we ask respondents about their expressivity with specific targets in their everyday lives. However, because people's theories about themselves can contaminate their self-reports (e.g., Conner, Wood, & Barrett, 2003), we corroborate self-report data with behavioral evidence in one of our experiments.

We also examine precisely why self-esteem differences in expressivity exist. We hypothesize that LSEs' self-protectiveness manifests in lower expressivity with close others because expressing oneself can be a double-edged sword: Although expressivity can heighten closeness (Reis & Shaver, 1988), it also leaves people vulnerable to rejection. With any expression there is the possibility that the interaction partner may act in a rejecting way, dismissing the discloser's feelings as illegitimate, disapproving of the discloser, or even dissolving the relationship. LSEs are especially concerned about avoiding interpersonal rejection. Leary's (2005) sociometer theory and research that supports it (e.g., Anthony, Wood, & Holmes, 2007; Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz, & Balchen, 2010) demonstrates that LSEs worry more about social rejection than do HSEs and often regulate their interpersonal behavior based on their desire to protect themselves from rejection (Park & Maner, 2009). In contrast, HSEs' social behavior is relatively unaffected by potential social rejection. Thus, it is likely that self-esteem differences in expressivity stem from LSEs' and HSEs' differing concerns about rejection: Because HSEs are relatively unconcerned about rejection, they express themselves more freely with friends and family than do LSEs.

Many factors may influence the potential for rejection in response to a self-disclosure, such as characteristics of the interaction partner and the nature of the disclosure. In the current research, we focus on perceived regard—the extent to which people believe that others value and accept them. Perceived regard may influence the potential for rejection in two ways. First, by definition, highly accepting people are less likely to reject one because of what one expresses. Second, feeling generally valued by an interaction partner may act as a buffer, lessening the sting of any one rejecting experience. For both of these reasons, then, we hypothesize that when people interact with someone who values and accepts them, they should express themselves more fully.

Perceived regard is similar to, but not the same as, contingent acceptance (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Contingent acceptance refers to whether another person's acceptance of oneself is conditional on specific criteria or not, which directly affects perceived regard. For example, interacting with a highly contingent person would likely decrease one's perceived regard (i.e., one's feelings of how much the other values oneself). Diminished perceived regard, in turn, reduces one's expressivity, we propose, in the same way that being liked unconditionally reduces people's self-esteem defenses (Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001).

The disclosure itself can also vary in riskiness. In most interpersonal contexts, it is more risky to express negatively valenced information (e.g., anger at a partner for not cleaning the house) than positively valenced information (e.g., sharing happiness about a promotion). Expressing negativity makes people especially vulnerable to rejection because it can offend one's interaction partner or convey one's personal flaws. Admittedly, expressing positivity can be risky; one could be construed as boastful by sharing highly positive news. Nonetheless, expressing positivity is much less interpersonally risky than expressing negativity (Howell & Conway, 1990; Taylor & Belgrave, 1986). Negative and positive expressivity indices are tested separately in the present research to determine whether negative expressivity is more highly tied to social acceptance (i.e., perceived regard).

Because LSEs generally perceive poorer regard from their friends and loved ones than do HSEs (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001), we expect that LSEs are generally less expressive than HSEs, particularly with respect to negative expressivity. Following this logic, if LSEs' concerns about social rejection are reduced by increasing their perceptions of their interaction partner's regard, then LSEs should shed their usual self-protectiveness and become more expressive.

It is worth clarifying our theoretical model here. Self-esteem is likely just one individual difference variable that is part of a family of dispositions that reflect concerns about social acceptance. Other constructs such as rejection sensitivity, attachment security, and social anxiety are also related to concerns about social acceptance. Thus, substituting one of these constructs into the proposed model may well show similar effects. Given that the main inspirations for the current hypothesis come from the self-esteem literature, however, our focus is on self-esteem and expressivity. Our focus is not on whether self-esteem is uniquely related to expressivity but rather on why self-esteem differences in expressivity emerge, and how they may be ameliorated.

In the current research, we first test our mediation model (i.e., self-esteem → perceived regard → expressivity) in two correlational studies (Studies 1 and 2). We then manipulate the proposed mechanism, perceived regard, in two experiments, first by varying an interaction partner's regard by framing the partner as generally rejecting or accepting (Study 2), and second by varying participants' perceptions of a friend's regard. We predict that in each of these experiments, increasing perceived regard will increase LSEs' expressiveness.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables Assessed In Study 1

		2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Self-esteem	.40**	.27*	.37**	.31**	.27*	.45**
2.	Perceived regard with friend	—	.49**	.58**	.41**	.28*	.39*
3.	Negative expressivity with friend	—	—	.48**	.02^{ns}	.27*	.18^{ns}
4.	Positive expressivity with friend	—	—	—	.19^{ns}	.27*	.40**
5.	Perceived regard with romantic partner	—	—	—	—	.48**	.62**
6.	Negative expressivity with romantic partner	—	—	—	—	—	.58**
7.	Positive expressivity with romantic partner	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note: *ns* = not significant.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

We assess expressivity with items ranging in specificity and method, with both self-report and objective indicators. Taken together, the results of our studies will add to the literature documenting systematic self-esteem differences in social behavior, will provide unique support for Baumeister et al.'s (1989) theory of self-esteem differences in self-presentation by testing the theory in a new domain (expressivity with close others), and will identify methods for increasing LSEs' expressive behavior, which in the long term could help to improve LSEs' well-being and close relationships.

Study 1

This first study seeks correlational evidence that HSEs and LSEs differ in expressivity in their everyday relationships because of baseline differences in perceived regard. Participants were asked to complete a self-esteem scale, and several weeks later, to report how expressive they were of positive and negative emotions with two targets: their friends and their romantic partner. They also reported their perceived regard for the same targets in the second questionnaire.

Method

Participants. Seventy-two introductory psychology students participated in exchange for partial course credit (85% female, 15% male; $M^{age} = 19$, $SD = 4.0$; 64% Caucasian, 24% Asian, 4% East Indian, 3% Middle Eastern, 4% Other).

Procedure and measures. During a mass-testing session a few weeks before the current study, introductory psychology students completed the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, using 9-point response scales, rather than the original 4-point scales ($M = 6.70$; $SD = 1.27$). Individuals who were currently in a romantic relationship were invited to complete an online survey on "Communication Styles" and were asked to complete items assessing their expressivity and perceived regard with their friends and romantic partner. Questions pertaining to friends and romantic partners were presented in two sections and the section orders were counterbalanced.

Participants' expressivity of their emotions and of aspects of themselves was assessed for each of two targets—friends (defined as the general friends people currently had, but whom they did not consider to be their best friend) and romantic partner. Six items assessed participants' negatively valenced expressivity: "How freely do you talk about your negative emotions other than anger (e.g., sadness) with [target]?" "How freely do you let your negative emotions other than anger (e.g., sadness) show with [target]?" "How freely do you talk about your anger with [target]?" "How freely do you let your anger show with [target]?" "How openly do you reveal unfavorable aspects of yourself with [target]?" and "How openly do you express disagreement with [target]?" Participants' positively valenced expressivity was assessed with three items: "How freely do you talk about positive emotions (e.g., happiness) with your [target]?" "How freely do you let your positive emotions show with [target]?" and "How openly do you reveal favorable aspects of yourself with [target]?" All items were rated on 6-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *extremely*). Internal consistencies were high ($\alpha = .90$ for negative expressivity with romantic partner; $\alpha = .70$ for positive expressivity with romantic partner; $\alpha = .93$ for negative expressivity with friend; and $\alpha = .84$ for positive expressivity with friend).

Participants' perceptions of each target's regard for them was assessed with 14 items adapted from Holmes and Cameron (2005; for example, "My [target] think[s] that I am a valuable person," "My [target] care[s] about me," and "My [target] [are/is] accepting of me"), each rated on 6-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *extremely*). Items were averaged to form indices of perceived regard ($\alpha = .91$ for romantic partners and $\alpha = .90$ for friends).

Results and Discussion

Correlations between variables assessed in Study 1 are presented in Table 1.[1]

We hypothesized that the higher one's self-esteem, the greater one's expressivity. Moreover, we expected that self-esteem would be associated with greater expressivity precisely because people who have higher self-esteem perceive that others have higher regard for them. As Table 2 shows, self-esteem was positively correlated with expressing both positive and negative emotions with both friends and romantic partners. Self-esteem was also positively associated with

Table 2. Results of Mediation Analyses Testing the Hypothesis That Perceived Regard Explains the Association Between Self-Esteem and Expressivity in Study 1

Explaining negative expressivity with romantic partner		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .27*	$t(67) = 2.37, SE = .10$
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .31*	$t(67) = 2.68, SE = .08$
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .43*	$t(66) = 3.85, SE = .15$
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .14	$t(66) = 1.23, SE = .10$
Explaining negative expressivity with friends		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .27*	$t(68) = 2.29, SE = .11$
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .40*	$t(68) = 3.60, SE = .07$
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .47*	$t(67) = 4.10, SE = .17$
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .08	$t(67) = 0.69, SE = .11$
Explaining positive expressivity with romantic partner		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .45*	$t(67) = 4.10, SE = .07$
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .31*	$t(67) = 2.68, SE = .08$
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .57*	$t(66) = 6.20, SE = .10$
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .27*	$t(66) = 2.93, SE = .10$
Explaining positive expressivity with friends		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .37*	$t(67) = 3.3, SE = .08$
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .40*	$t(67) = 3.60, SE = .07$
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .54*	$t(66) = 5.11, SE = .12$
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .16	$t(68) = 1.49, SE = .07$

Note: Degrees of freedom vary because not all people completed all of the measures.
*$p < .05$.

perceived regard for both targets. Sobel's tests confirmed that perceived regard explained the association between self-esteem and negative expressivity for romantic partners, Sobel's $z = 2.19, p = .03$, and for friends, $z = 2.75, p = 01$. We obtained similar results for positive expressivity with romantic partners, $z = 2.37, p = .02$, and with friends, $z = 3.19, p = 001$.

These results are consistent with our hypothesis that expressivity varies as a function of self-esteem because of baseline differences in perceived regard. In Study 2, we provide evidence that perceived regard is associated with assessments of the potential for social rejection and replicate the mediating role of perceived regard in self-esteem differences in expressivity using a nonuniversity sample.

Study 2

In Study 2, participants completed measures identical to those in Study 1, only this time we assessed people's

expressivity with just one target: a close same-sex friend. We also added a previously validated measure assessing people's perception of the risk of being hurt or rejected by their friend. We hypothesized that the more people think that their friends value and accept them, the less chance of rejection they perceive. Again, we expected perceived regard to mediate the association between self-esteem and expressivity.

Method

One hundred people participated in our online study (44% female, 56% male; $M^{age} = 33, SD = 12.17$; 82% Caucasian, 5% Black, 5% Asian, 8% Other). Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform and were invited to participate in an online survey on "Communication Styles with Friends." First, participants completed the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale using

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlations Between Variables Assessed in Study 2

		2	3	4
I.	Self-esteem	.40**	.21*	.41**
2.	Perceived regard with friend	—	.35**	.65**
3.	Negative expressivity with friend	—	—	.58**
4.	Positive expressivity with friend	—	—	—

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 4. Results of Mediation Analyses Testing the Hypothesis That Perceived Regard Explains the Association Between Self-Esteem and Expressivity in Study 2

Explaining negative expressivity with friend		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .21*	$t(98) = 2.15$, SE = .12
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .40*	$t(97) = 4.31$, SE = .07
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .32*	$t(96) = 3.06$, SE = .12
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .09	$t(96) = 0.82$, SE = .12
Explaining positive expressivity with friend		
Step 1		
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .40*	$t(98) = 4.42$, SE = .09
Step 2		
Self-esteem predicts perceived regard	β = .40*	$t(97) = 4.31$, SE = .07
Step 3		
Perceived regard predicts expressivity	β = .57*	$t(96) = 6.90$, SE = .10
Self-esteem predicts expressivity	β = .18*	$t(96) = 2.22$, SE = .08

*p < .05.

7-point scales ($M = 5.69$; $SD = 1.08$) and demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity). Next, they were asked to think of a same-sex close friend and to complete items assessing their own expressivity, perceived regard, and the risk of being rejected or hurt by this close friend. Expressivity and perceived regard measures were identical to those in Study 1. Participants' perceptions of the chance of being hurt or rejected within the friendship were assessed using nine items, adapted from Pilkington and Richardson (1988): "I'm afraid to get really close to this person because I might get hurt," "To be close to this person is to be vulnerable," "This relationship will end with hurt feelings with one or more parties," "Being close to this person makes me feel afraid," "Being close to this person is risky business," "The most important thing to consider in my relationship with this person is whether I might get hurt," "I worry that this person will not want to be friends with me if I tell him or her something he/she doesn't like or agree with," "It would be dangerous to get really close to this person," "I prefer that this person keeps his/her distance from me." An additional item was added: "I worry that this person will reject me." All items were answered on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; α = .91).

Results and Discussion

Correlations between variables are presented in Table 3. Degrees of freedom vary because not all people completed all of the measures. Consistent with our theorizing, perceived regard was associated with perceptions of the chance of being hurt or rejected, $r(99) = -.60$, $p < .05$, even when controlling for self-esteem, $r(98) = -.54$, $p < .05$; the more people thought that their friend values them, the less chance they perceived that the friend would hurt or reject them.

As Table 4 shows, self-esteem was associated with both positive and negative expressivity as well as with the proposed mediator, perceived regard. When perceived regard was entered into the regression with self-esteem to predict positive and negative expressivity (in separate analyses), perceived regard emerged as a strong predictor, whereas the association between self-esteem and expressivity was reduced. Sobel's tests confirmed that perceived regard explained the links between self-esteem and positive and negative expressivity, $z = 3.67$, $p < .001$ and $z = 2.50$, $p = .01$, respectively.

Although Studies 1 and 2 provide evidence for self-esteem differences in expressivity in people's everyday real-life relationships and for the underlying role of perceived regard, the correlational nature of the data makes it impossible to determine causality. Studies 3 and 4 address this issue.

Study 3

In Study 3, we sought to manipulate perceived regard directly via qualities of the interaction partner and to determine whether doing so would make LSEs more expressive. Participants were asked to think of either someone who was unconditionally accepting (high regard) or someone who cares for them but can sometimes be judgmental (low regard) and then to report how likely they would be to share their emotions with that target. We hypothesize that LSEs, who are extremely sensitive to social cues that connote the possibility of rejection (e.g., Anthony, Holmes et al., 2007), will be strongly affected by our experimental manipulation and thus will report greater expressiveness with the unconditionally accepting other than with the "sometimes judgmental" other. In contrast, we anticipate that HSEs, who are relatively insensitive to cues regarding rejection, will not vary their expressiveness as a function of our experimental manipulation.

Method

Participants. Sixty-three participants (43% female, 57% male; M^{age} = 20, *SD* = 2.0; 62% Caucasian, 29% Asian, 2% other) were recruited from a public venue on campus and participated in exchange for a chocolate bar.

Procedure. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire about "communication styles" on site. The first page in the questionnaire was Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, on which participants responded to each item on a 9-point scale (*M* = 7.15; *SD* = 1.3). Next was our manipulation of perceived regard. Participants in the *high-regard condition* read the following:

> Please think about a person in your life who loves/cares for you unconditionally. This person is someone who you feel comfortable and secure around. Please write the initials of this person here: _____.

Participants in the *low-regard condition* read the following:

> Please think about a person in your life who loves/cares for you. This person is someone who tries to make you feel comfortable, but does not always succeed in doing so. In fact, sometimes this person comes across as judgmental. Please write the initials of this person here: _____.

On the same page as the target manipulation, participants were asked how they were related to the target person (romantic partner, mother, father, sister, brother, close friend, or other). They were then instructed to imagine that the target was beside them right now and to write down what they would say to him/her.[2] After writing their narrative, on the

Table 5. Zero-Order Correlations Between Variables Assessed in Study 3

		2	3
1.	Self-esteem	.17	.46*
2.	Negative expressivity	—	.53
3.	Positive expressivity	—	—

*$p < .05$.

following page, participants read four hypothetical situations: (a) "Suppose something wonderful happened to you one day (e.g., you won a contest or someone did something nice for you). Later that night you meet up with ___ (the person that you wrote about on the previous page)"; (b) "Imagine that you came home to find that _____ (the person you wrote about on the previous page) had planned a special day for you, consisting of all of your favorite activities. He/she had done this because it was your birthday and he/she wanted to make sure that you had a special day"; (c) "Suppose that something bad happened to you one day (e.g., you failed a test or had an unpleasant conversation with someone). Later that night you meet up with _____ (the person you wrote about on the previous page)"; and (d) "Imagine that you spent over 1 hour cooking a nice dinner for ____ (the person you wrote about above) and you finished eating the meal and he/she gets up from the table without offering to help clear the dishes."

Immediately after reading each scenario, participants were asked how likely they would be to "express their [positive/negative] emotions around him/her," "tell him/her that you are [happy/unhappy]," "show your [happiness/unhappiness] around him/her," "disclose all aspects of the experience," "divulge your 'true' feelings," and "keep your feelings to yourself" (reverse scored). Participants responded to all items on 7-point scales (1 = *not at likely* to 7 = *very likely*). The average of these six items for each emotional valence, averaged across all of the scenarios, served as our positive (α = .87) and negative expressivity measures (α = .88). Finally, participants completed questions regarding their age, gender, and ethnicity.

Results and Discussion

Correlations between variables are presented in Table 5. We ran two regressions, one to predict positive expressivity and another to predict negative expressivity from dummy coded condition (0 = *high regard*, 1 = *low regard*), mean-centered self-esteem, and the interaction between these variables. All main effects were entered into Step 1 and the interaction into Step 2.[2]

No significant interaction emerged on positive expressivity. In contrast, the negative expressivity regression revealed a significant Condition × Self-Esteem interaction, β = .47, $t(59) = 2.31$, $p = .024$, which is graphed in Figure 1. To test
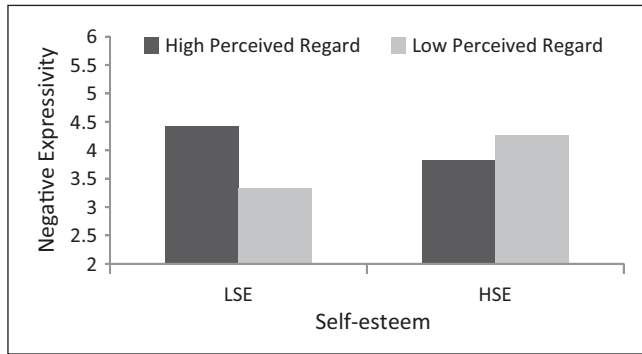
Figure 1. Mean self-reported negative expressivity as a function of condition and self-esteem (Study 3)
Note: Self-esteem was graphed for values one standard deviation below the mean (LSEs) and one standard deviation above the mean (HSEs).

the simple effects, we used Aiken and West's (1991) recommended method. In the low-regard condition, LSEs were less expressive than HSEs, $\beta = .37$, $t(59) = 2.36$, $p = .022$. This result replicates the findings from Studies 1 and 2. An especially interesting finding emerged in the high-regard condition: LSEs not only reported that they would be more expressive of their negative emotions than did LSEs in the low-regard condition, $\beta = -.43$, $t(59) = -2.32$, $p = .024$; they also said that they would be as expressive of their negative emotions as HSEs said they would be, $\beta = -.23$, $t(59) = -1.11$, $p = .271$. As predicted, HSEs were not affected by the manipulation, $\beta = .173$, $t < 1$. These results suggest that the self-esteem differences in expressivity observed in Studies 1 and 2 are not immutable—indeed, LSEs are capable of being as expressive as HSEs if the situation allows.

Study 4

In Study 4, we set out to manipulate perceived regard in a different way. Rather than investigating perceived regard as a property of an interaction partner (i.e., accepting or rejecting), we sought to increase feelings of security from within, by heightening LSEs' confidence in the other's regard. In addition, we examined the dependent variable of expressivity not only through participants' self-reports but also by observing their expressive behaviors. Thus, we address the possibility that self-esteem differences in expressivity are merely a function of differences in self-perception, and we answer Baumeister, Vohs, and Funder's (2007) call for more behavioral measures.

To manipulate feelings of perceived regard, we use an abstract compliment reframing manipulation created by Marigold, Holmes, and Ross (2007, 2010). Typically, LSEs are resistant to efforts to increase their perceptions of loved ones' regard (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Marigold et al.'s manipulation, however, has been shown to have strong effects, increasing LSEs' feelings of perceived regard

both in the immediate lab session and two weeks later (Marigold et al., 2007). In the present study, we asked participants in the experimental condition to complete the reframing task targeting their perceptions of a friend's regard. After the reframing task (or no such task, in the control condition), we asked participants to film a video, ostensibly for the same friend who was the target of the reframing task. Observers' impressions of participants' expressivity in this video was the main dependent variable. If perceptions of perceived regard drive self-esteem differences in expressivity, then Marigold et al.'s (2007) reframing manipulation, which enhances feelings of perceived regard, should diminish those self-esteem differences. When LSEs' perceptions of their friend's regard increases, they should become more expressive. In previous studies, this manipulation did not lead to increases in HSEs' perceived regard (Marigold et al., 2007), which is presumably already quite high, so we did not expect any differences in expressivity between the conditions for HSEs.

Method

Participants. Forty-three female introductory psychology students participated, for which they received either partial course credit or US$10.00.[3]

Procedure. Participants were invited to take part in a study about "Communication in Friendships." During a mass-testing session, a few weeks before the current study, students completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), on which participants responded to items using 9-point scales ($M = 6.75$; $SD = 1.24$). When they arrived at the lab, they were told that they would film a short video in which they would describe some of their experiences at university. They were told that the video would be shown at a later date to a friend whom they nominated.

Next, participants completed a background survey. The first page asked participants to nominate a same-sex friend for whom they would make the video and to provide contact information for said friend. Then participants reported their relationship satisfaction and feelings of closeness with the friend. Satisfaction was assessed with the following four items: "I am extremely happy with our friendship," "I have a very strong relationship with my friend," "My relationship with my friend is very rewarding (i.e. gratifying, fulfilling)," and "I do not feel that our friendship is successful (reverse-coded)," each rated on a 9-point scale (1 = *not true* to 9 = *very true scale*). Closeness was assessed with the item "Relative to all your other relationships (both same sex and opposite), how would you characterize your relationship with your friend?" on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all close* to 9 = *extremely close*. The last two pages of the questionnaire contained our manipulation of perceived regard. Following Marigold et al.'s (2007) procedure, participants in both conditions read the following instructions:

Think of a time when your close friend told you how much she liked something about you. For example, a personal quality or ability you have that she thinks very highly of, or something you did that really impressed her. When you have thought of such an occurrence, please write a few cue words that will identify that memory to you (e.g., "said I was thoughtful"). You will be asked to describe the event more fully on the next page.

When they turned the page to describe the event in more detail, participants in the *control condition* were asked to simply "describe the event in the space below." Participants in the *high-regard condition* were instead asked to "explain why your close friend admired you. Describe what it meant to you and its significance for your relationship." The term "admired" encourages participants to generalize the friend's praise and to consider its implication in a more abstract frame (Marigold et al., 2007). Because the manipulation came at the very end of the booklet and the booklets were randomly compiled, the experimenter was blind to condition.

Once participants had completed the booklet, the experimenter handed them a sheet listing two topics to discuss on the videotape with their friend: "Describe a positive experience you've had since being at university" and "describe a negative experience you've had since being at university." The order of these topics was counterbalanced across conditions. The experimenter reminded participants that the video would be sent to their friend and left the room. Participants were given 5 min to create the video.

Upon re-entering the room, the experimenter asked participants to fill out one last questionnaire. Six items asked participants how expressive they thought they were while talking to their friend (e.g., "I was intimate in my responses" and "I readily divulged my feelings" on 7-point response scales [1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*]). Items were averaged to form an index of self-reported expressive behavior (α = .77).

Objective measures of expressivity. We assessed the amount of time that participants talked on the video as well as how long they spoke about their positive experiences, negative experiences, and neutral topics (e.g., what they did the night before). We transcribed all of the participants' responses and had two coders, blind to condition, rate the transcriptions using the following items: "Overall, how expressive was the participant?" "Overall, how self-revealing was the participant?" "How disclosing was the participant of her experiences?" "How detailed were the participants' descriptions of her experiences?" "How hesitant was the participant to share her experiences? (reverse-coded)" "How [positive/negative] was the experience the participant described?" and "How much [positive/negative] feeling did the participant express about the experiences?" All items were rated using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal*). The correlations between coders' ratings ranged between .63 and .86. We averaged the two coders' ratings and then averaged across
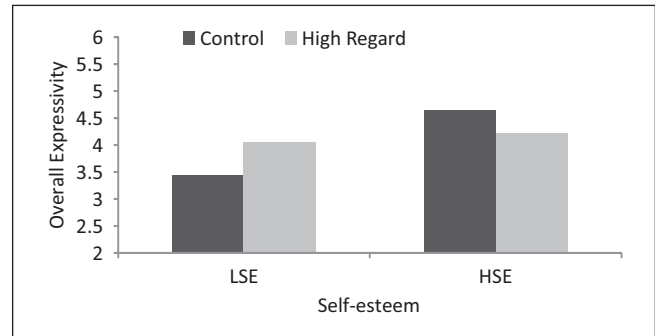
Figure 2. Self-reported expressivity as a function of condition and self-esteem (Study 4)
Note: LSEs = individuals with low self-esteem; HSEs = individuals with high self-esteem. Self-esteem is graphed for values one standard deviation below the mean (LSEs) and one standard deviation above the mean (HSEs).

the seven ratings to form positive expressivity (α = .97) and negative expressivity (α = .94) indices.

Results and Discussion

In all analyses, we used hierarchical regression analyses, in which we entered dummy-coded condition (0 = *control* and 1 = *high regard*) and mean-centered self-esteem in Step 1 and the interaction term at Step 2. To test the simple effects, we again used Aiken and West's (1991) recommended method.

Self-reported expressivity. We predicted that LSEs would become more expressive when their perceptions of their friend's regard were heightened with the abstract compliment-reframing task. On the composite of participants' self-reported expressivity, a Self-Esteem × Condition interaction emerged, β = −.60, *t*(39) = −1.98, *p* = .055, and is graphed in Figure 2. Consistent with the previous studies, LSEs reported being less expressive than HSEs in the control condition, β = .66, *t*(39) = 2.19, *p* = .035, but this self-esteem difference was eliminated in the high-regard condition, β = .10, *t* < 1. The condition effect for LSEs was not significant, though the means were in the predicted direction: LSEs in the high-regard condition tended to report greater expressiveness than LSEs in the control condition, β = .36, *t*(39) = 1.44, *p* = .159. There was no significant effect of condition for HSEs, β = −.35, *t*(39) = −1.53, *p* = .135.

Time spent talking. We analyzed the time participants spent talking about their positive, negative, and neutral experiences separately. No effects emerged in the analyses of positive or neutral experiences. However, the hypothesized Self-Esteem × Condition interaction did emerge for negative experiences, β = −.91, *t*(37) = −2.62, *p* = .013, as shown in Figure 3. Consistent with our predictions, HSEs spoke longer than LSEs in the control condition, β = .69, *t*(37) = 1.99, *p* = .054, but this self-esteem difference was eliminated, or even reversed, in the high-regard condition, β = −.32, *t*(37) = −1.94, *p* = .061. LSEs in the high-regard condition
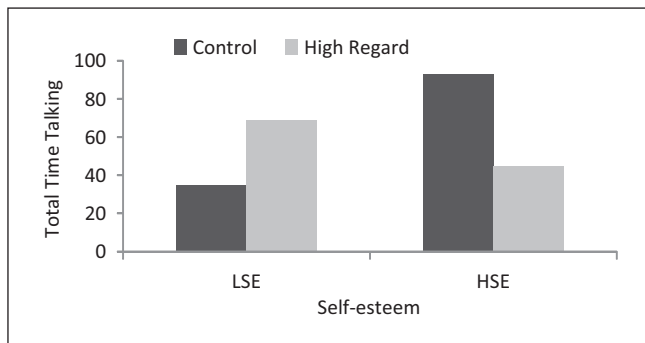
Figure 3. Time participants spent talking about their negative experiences as a function of condition and self-esteem (Study 4)
Note: LSEs = individuals with low self-esteem; HSEs = individuals with high self-esteem. Self-esteem is graphed for values one standard deviation below the mean (LSEs) and one standard deviation above the mean (HSEs).
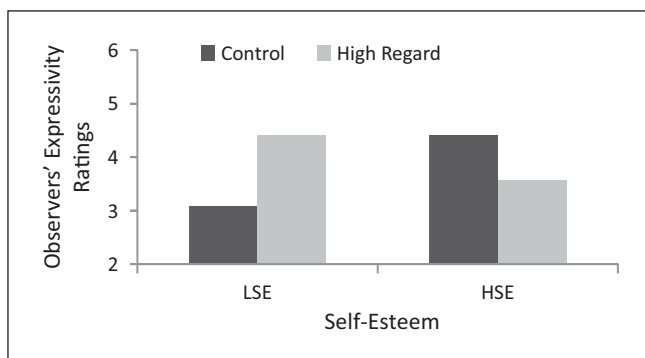
Figure 4. Observers' ratings of participants' negative expressivity (Study 4)
Note: LSEs = individuals with low self-esteem; HSEs = individuals with high self-esteem. Self-esteem is graphed for values one standard deviation below the mean (LSEs) and one standard deviation above the mean (HSEs).

tended to talk more about their negative experiences than LSEs in the control condition, although this difference was not significant, $\beta = .44$, $t(37) = 1.56$, $p = .128$. A significant condition effect for HSEs did emerge, $\beta = -.64$, $t(37) = -2.833$, $p = .010$, such that HSEs talked less in the high-regard condition than in the control condition.[4]

Observers' ratings of expressivity. Were self-esteem differences in expressivity apparent to impartial observers? We ran separate regressions predicting observers' ratings of the participants' expressivity while talking about positive experiences and about negative experiences. No effects emerged for positive experiences. However, the hypothesized Self-Esteem × Condition interaction emerged for participants' negative experiences, $\beta = -.89$, $t(39) = -3.158$, $p = .003$, and is graphed in Figure 4. Consistent with prediction, in the control condition, coders rated HSEs as more expressive of their negative experiences than LSEs, $\beta = .69$, $t(39) = 2.42$, $p = .021$, but this self-esteem difference was eliminated, and reversed, in the high-regard condition, $\beta = -.35$, $t(39) = -2.133$, $p = .04$. In the high-regard condition, coders rated LSEs as more expressive of their negative experiences than LSEs in the control

condition, $\beta = .48$, $t(39) = 2.07$, $p = .046$. Again, HSEs showed the reverse pattern. Coders rated HSEs as less expressive about their negative experiences in the high-regard than in the control condition, $\beta = -.61$, $t(39) = -2.82$, $p = .01$. We will discuss these results for HSEs in the general discussion.

Study 4 suggests that when LSEs' feelings of perceived regard are heightened, LSEs' willingness to open up increases, even reaching HSEs' levels. Across both participants' self-reports of their own expressivity and more objective indicators of expressivity, self-esteem differences emerged in the control condition but were eliminated in the high perceived regard condition.

General Discussion

Results across four studies are consistent with the hypothesis that HSEs and LSEs differ in expressivity because of baseline differences in perceived regard. Studies 1 and 2 confirmed that, on average, LSEs report being less expressive with the people in their lives than HSEs, and mediation analyses suggested that this association was explained by self-esteem differences in perceived regard: LSEs were less confident in their romantic partners' and friends' regard, and were consequently less expressive with these people than were HSEs.

Although HSEs are typically more expressive than LSEs, LSEs do let down their guard when perceived regard is heightened. In Studies 3 and 4, we manipulated perceived regard. LSEs were more willing to express themselves when they had higher perceptions of their interaction partner's regard for them—when they imagined speaking to someone they knew who was unconditionally accepting rather than judgmental (Study 3), and when their feelings of perceived regard were experimentally enhanced (Study 4). Interestingly, Studies 3 and 4 suggested that only negative expressivity is guided by perceptions of perceived regard. These findings make sense in light of previous work suggesting that it is more interpersonally risky to express negative emotions, such as sadness, worry, and anger, than positive emotions, such as happiness (e.g., Howell & Conway, 1990; Taylor & Belgrave, 1986). If expressing negativity is especially risky, then people need to be especially confident in their interaction partner's overall regard for them before expressing negative content. People appear to express positive content more freely, with less concern about how much the other person likes oneself, although Studies 1 and 2 suggest that even positive expressivity is regulated by perceptions of perceived regard to some degree.

The findings of the present studies have implications for three literatures: self-esteem, expressivity, and close relationships.

Implications for Self-Esteem Research

Before discussing our self-esteem findings, we should address our use of the term "low" self-esteem. As Baumeister

et al. (1989) argued, what researchers label as low self-esteem may actually represent more moderate levels of self-esteem (i.e., scores above the midpoint of the scale). Although average self-esteem scores were above the midpoint of the scale in each of the current studies, self-esteem scores that fell below the midpoint did emerge (20% were below the midpoint in Studies 1 and 2; 10% in Study 3; and 17% in Study 4). Thus, remaining consistent with the self-esteem literature, we labeled any person one standard deviation below the mean on self-esteem as LSEs. Because the self-esteem categories presented here are relative, care should be taken when generalizing the current results to clinical populations with extremely low levels of self-esteem.

Turning now to our findings, as in previous research (Gross & John, 2003), we documented self-esteem differences in self-reported expressivity. In addition, we obtained self-esteem differences in behavioral coding of expressive behaviors and in length of time talking (Study 4). The behavioral measures confirm that self-esteem differences in expressiveness are real behavioral differences.

These findings support previous theory and evidence concerning self-esteem differences in risk aversion and self-protection (Anthony et al., 2007; Baumeister et al., 1989; Cameron et al., 2010; Heimpel, Elliot, & Wood, 2006). Baumeister et al. (1989) proposed that HSEs and LSEs differ in the riskiness of their self-presentational styles. HSEs act in a self-promoting fashion, whereas LSEs act in a cautious, self-protective fashion. The present studies reveal that these self-esteem differences extend beyond limited means of self-presentation, such as rating oneself near the middle on rating scales, to emotional expressivity and self-disclosure. They also indicate that Baumeister et al.'s thesis applies not only to superficial interactions with strangers but also to interactions with loved ones in everyday life. Moreover, the present research identifies concerns about others' acceptance, operationalized as perceptions of others' regard, as one underlying explanation for LSEs' self-protectiveness. Thus, the present research highlights the behavioral manifestations of self-protectiveness and worry about rejection in the new domain of expressivity.

We also found that self-esteem interacted with risk in Studies 3 and 4: LSEs were affected by our manipulations of interpersonal risk, whereas HSEs were either not affected or displayed effects opposite from those of LSEs. In Study 4, when their feelings of perceived regard with a friend were affirmed, HSEs either showed no effect or became less expressive. This finding resembles recent evidence that, when communicating with a highly responsive partner, HSEs became less expressive or showed no effect than they did when a partner's responsiveness was low or unknown (Forest & Wood, 2012). Why might HSEs reduce their expressivity under conditions of very low risk? We suspect that HSEs already perceive very high regard in general, and especially within their good friendships. When HSEs' feelings of perceived regard are affirmed, it actually may have

the ironic effect of satiating their desire to foster further closeness with their good friends—at least temporarily. This reasoning is consistent with recent work by Cameron et al. (2010), who found that eliminating social risk reduced HSEs' motivation to achieve greater closeness with an interaction partner.

More generally, the results of the present studies contradict recent arguments against the utility of self-esteem for predicting meaningful life outcomes (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Studies 1 and 2 suggest that in LSEs' and HSEs' everyday interpersonal lives with people they love, LSEs are consistently less expressive than HSEs. LSEs' self-protectiveness in general and inexpressivity in particular may undermine their close relationships.

Indeed, recent research links expressivity with liking. Across two studies (Stinson, Cameron, Wood, Gaucher, & Holmes, 2009), coders rated women's nonverbal expressivity while they introduced themselves to a new social group. A separate set of coders watching the same videotaped introductions rated how much they liked the participant. In both studies, the more expressive people were, the more others liked them. Similarly, capitalization—sharing positive personal events with others—is associated with increased daily positive affect and well-being (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). However, although positively valenced expressions likely lead to positive intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits, the effects of negative expressivity may be more complicated. On one hand, some research suggests that people who report high willingness to express negative emotions have more intimate relationships than people who are less willing to express negativity (Graham et al., 2008). On the other hand, other research suggests that expressions of negativity over Facebook led strangers to dislike the sender and led to less favorable attention from friends, at least for LSEs (Forest & Wood, 2012). Thus, the link between negativity expressivity and relationship outcomes requires a great deal more research.

Implications for Expressivity Research

It is possible that concerns about interpersonal acceptance are at the root of other individual differences that predict expressivity. If so, our model would provide theoretical coherence to a disparate literature. Socially anxious people are less self-disclosing than their nonsocially anxious counterparts (Meleshko & Alden, 1993), and people who are high in attachment anxiety are less self-disclosing than people who are low in attachment anxiety (e.g., Feeney, 1999). Both socially anxious people and people high in attachment anxiety worry about interpersonal acceptance (Leary, 2005; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003), so it seems likely that perceived regard may guide their expressivity, just as it does for LSEs. If future research confirms that concerns about interpersonal acceptance are at the root of other individual differences in expressivity, it would suggest that our model

has much broader applicability and would highlight the power that concerns about social acceptance have in determining expressivity.

At the same time as we suggest that our findings may unify a disparate literature on individual differences, we acknowledge that our samples across the studies consisted predominately of White, middle-class females. Expressivity is one domain in which culture and sex likely play a role, so the results may not generalize to men, across all socioeconomic groups, or to non-Western cultures. Moreover, given the potential impact and application of the current findings to clinical/therapeutic settings, it is especially important to determine the boundary conditions of the experimental manipulation used in Study 4, with gender differences a good place to start.

In our opinion, the most novel contribution our findings make to the expressivity literature concerns situational influences. By far, expressivity researchers have focused more on individual differences in expressivity than on situational influences. We identified a crucial situational determinant of expressivity: whether one's interaction partner is likely to be accepting or rejecting.

Implications for the Close Relationships Literature

If expressivity generally leads to more relationship-promoting behaviors, then the current research may shed light on the finding that LSEs and their partners report lower relationship satisfaction than do HSEs and their partners (Murray et al., 2005; Wood, Hogle, & McClellan, 2009). LSEs' lack of expressivity may contribute to lower relationship satisfaction because acting expressively fosters closeness, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Clark et al., 2001, Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Inexpressiveness can negatively affect relationship satisfaction at various relationship stages. According to the Social Penetration Model (Altman & Taylor, 1973), there is a natural and optimal progression of getting to know someone. The process starts off with low levels of intimacy, with partners gradually increasing their disclosures in a turn-taking fashion. Inexpressiveness of one interaction partner can freeze further relationship development. Within more established relationships, inexpressiveness could lead to conflict. Inexpressive people leave their interaction partners very little diagnostic information to navigate their interactions. A person with an inexpressive partner may say or do the "wrong" thing simply because he or she is not aware of the other person's feelings. Inexpressiveness may also make partners of inexpressive people feel ignored or distrusted. But as previously mentioned, the positive effects of expressivity on relationship outcomes may be stronger for HSEs, who tend to express more positive than negative thoughts and feelings (Forest & Wood, 2012).

Conclusion

In the present research, we have attempted to better understand the processes underlying self-esteem differences in expressivity. The good news is that expressivity is not a completely fixed attribute. Because perceived regard—the extent to which people feel valued by their interaction partner—is an important determinant of how expressive one is, LSEs' guardedness can be reduced by increasing their feelings of acceptance. Examining the precise type and style of communication used by LSEs when they are encouraged to express is a vital next step. Only then can this knowledge be used to suggest interventions aimed at increasing LSEs' expressivity not only within their personal relationships but other areas in which expression is required to succeed.

Notes

1. Gender neither interacted with self-esteem to predict expressivity (Studies 1 or 2) nor did it interact with condition in Study 3. Thus, it was excluded from the analyses.
2. We examined whether condition, self-esteem, or their interaction moderated the type of relationship partner recalled (i.e., romantic partner, close friend, or family member). They did not. To run this analysis, the target that the participant selected was coded (i.e., participants received a "0" if they did not select a romantic partner and a "1" if they did. The same procedure was used for classifying friends and family members). Each of these three dependent measures was then subjected to a logistic regression analysis in which condition, self-esteem, and their interaction were used as predictors.
3. Six participants who nominated an opposite-sex friend or said that they forgot for whom they were making the video were excluded from the analyses.
4. Degrees of freedom vary because the timer could not determine the beginning or end of the time spent talking about negative or positive events for some participants.

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