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# Self-Esteem and Communal Responsiveness Toward a Flawed Partner: The Fair-Weather Care of Low-Self-Esteem Individuals

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*Three studies provide evidence that people with low self-esteem, but not those with high self-esteem, distance themselves from a flawed partner in situations in which the flaws seem likely to reflect negatively on them. Participants with low (but not high) self-esteem reduced their motivation to care for the partner's needs when they felt they might share a partner's salient flaws (Study 1), when they were primed to focus on similarities between themselves and a socially devalued partner (Study 2), and when they learned that their partner was socially incompetent (Study 3). In Study 3, individuals with low (but not high) self-esteem provided less emotional support and experienced more public image threat when they learned that partners were socially incompetent. In addition, all three studies provided evidence that participants' distancing reduced their confidence in the partner's motivation to care for them, suggesting that distancing involves a cost to the self.*

**Keywords:** *reflection; basking in reflected glory; cutting off reflected failure; self-esteem; social support; perceived partner responsiveness; projection*

A defining characteristic of communal relationships is that members are motivated to respond supportively to the other's needs (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). However, because people often believe that their relationship partners reflect on them, a partner's weaknesses or failings may threaten the self-concept and motivate people to distance from the partner. The present research addresses the issue of whether people maintain or reduce communal motivation when a partner appears flawed

or socially undesirable. That is, how do people respond when a friend tells a joke that falls flat, a child throws a tantrum at the supermarket, a roommate is romantically rejected, or a family member is arrested for public intoxication? We predicted that low-self-esteem individuals, but not high-self-esteem individuals, would distance from flawed partners in the form of reducing motivation to respond to needs, reducing feelings of care and closeness, and reducing provision of support. We further predicted that this distancing process would occur primarily when low-self-esteem individuals believe that the partner's flaws reflect negatively on them.

## Distancing From Partners to Cope With Reflection Threat

Many studies suggest that people experience threat to their own private feelings of self-worth and their social images when groups in which they belong appear socially undesirable or low in status (e.g., Cialdini et al.,

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1976; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Such *reflection threat* is often thought to be addressed by “cutting off” the source of the threat (Snyder et al., 1986; see also Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). That is, people disavow the importance of group membership and publicly hide its existence when such membership has negative implications for self-evaluation or public image.

In the current research, we extend this prior research by examining an interpersonal form of this cutting-off process. Just as people appear threatened by membership in low-status or undesirable social groups, so too do they seem to experience reflection threat when their relationship partner appears flawed or socially undesirable (Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992; Sigall & Landy, 1973; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). When they do, we suspect that they cope with this threat by distancing from the partner. As Goffman (1963) noted, “The tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to his close connections provides a reason why such relations tend either to be avoided or to be terminated, where existing” (p. 30). One way of ensuring that a partner’s flaws do not “spread” to the self, we predicted, is by reducing motivation to respond to the partner’s needs, feelings of closeness, and the provision of support, all hallmarks of close, intimate relationships (see Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004).

We extend early work on cutting-off sources of negative reflection by examining the moderating roles of self-esteem and of situational factors that heighten reflection threat. Both individual differences in self-esteem and situational factors may determine whether people believe that a partner’s flaws will spread to them and, in turn, whether people cut off their partners.

### Moderating Role of Trait Self-Esteem

As people with high self-esteem are adept at maintaining their feelings of self-worth (Brown et al., 1992) and are confident about their social inclusion (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), they often may not feel strong reflection threats. Instead of focusing on themselves and protecting their self-concepts by cutting off flawed partners, their self-evaluative resources and sense of security regarding others’ acceptance may allow them to focus on attending to the partner’s needs. Hence, they may maintain communal bonds with their relationship partners and provide support to them even when those partners appear flawed. This prediction is consistent with other research suggesting that people who are high in self-esteem or who are otherwise secure in their attachments respond to a partner’s anxieties (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) and more general relationship threats (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006) with efforts and

desires to support the partner and maintain the relationship.

In contrast, people low in self-esteem may be prone to cutting off their flawed partners. Low-self-esteem individuals are chronically concerned about their acceptance by others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) and have difficulty regulating their feelings of self-worth in response to their own or an associated partner’s failures (Brown et al., 1992). Thus, an association with a flawed person is especially likely to threaten low-self-esteem individuals’ feelings of self-worth and security about their general social acceptance, and they are likely to focus on this reflection threat and manage it through cutting in lieu of attending to the welfare of the partner or relationship.

### Moderating Role of Situational Factors

If low-self-esteem individuals’ concerns about reflection drive their tendencies to distance from flawed partners, they should adopt this distancing strategy in situations that pose a reflection threat, that is, those in which the partner’s undesirable social status might apply to themselves or be perceived as applying to themselves by third parties. For instance, a situational focus on sharing flaws with a partner or, more generally, of being similar to the partner, may cause low-self-esteem individuals to feel threatened (see Brown et al., 1992; Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002; Mussweiler, Ruter, & Epstude, 2004) and may motivate them to cut off their partner. Moreover, public displays of a relationship with a flawed partner may exacerbate low self-esteem individuals’ feelings of threat.

Indeed, prior research has revealed greater distancing from socially undesirable others when similarity to those others is perceived (Novak & Lerner, 1968). Participants who were first led to believe that another participant had similar beliefs, goals, and aspirations desired to interact with the other participant more than did those who believed that they were different from the participant—the classic similarity–attraction effect. However, the effect reversed when participants believed that the other had a stigmatizing condition (mental illness), such that those in the similar condition desired to interact with the stigmatized other less than did those in the different condition (see also Lerner & Agar, 1972). The effect appears mediated, in part, by fear of possessing the undesirable attribute (Taylor & Mettee, 1971). Directly manipulating fears about possessing an undesirable attribute also elicits distancing from people who possess that attribute (Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O’Mahen, & Arndt, 2000). Similarly, people appear to be more punitive toward socially undesirable ingroup members, who share a bond with the self, than to equally

undesirable outgroup members, who do not share a bond (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). In addition, research on basking in reflected glory and other forms of indirect self-presentation (Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder et al., 1986) suggests that public display of one's association with a socially devalued individual can threaten one's self-perceived social image. These findings suggest the contingent operation of reflection and reflection-based distancing—people seem to feel threatened by and distance from flawed partners primarily when those individuals have the potential to reflect negatively on them, that is, when a unit relationship (Heider, 1958) or similarities between self and others are salient. The current research adds to this literature by examining the additional moderating role of self-esteem and by examining effects of reflection threat on communal motivation toward existing partners.

### An Interpersonal Consequence of Distancing From Partners

Partners who are frequently cut off are likely to have a contingent sense of being cared for, which is likely to undermine their relationship security and satisfaction. We also predicted that the act of distancing oneself from one's partner by reducing communal motivation would have some negative consequences for the person doing the cutting. Lemay, Clark, and Feeney (2007) and Lemay and Clark (2008) presented evidence that people project their own levels of communal responsiveness toward partners onto perceptions of those partners' responsiveness toward them, coming to see their partners as being responsive when they themselves are responsive to those partners and, more pertinent to the current research, coming to see their partners as unresponsive when they themselves are unresponsive. In the present work we predicted that once people distance themselves from partners by reducing their own motivation to care for their partners, they would project their sentiments onto those partners, seeing partners as being less communally responsive to them as well. Evidence supporting such a process would suggest that distancing is at best a double-edged sword, providing low-self-esteem participants with some subjective protection from reflection threat while undermining their security in the particular partner's responsiveness.

### Overview and Summary of Hypotheses

Our predictions are tested in three studies. In Studies 1 and 2, we attempted to induce reflection threat by asking participants to describe ways their partners were flawed or socially devalued. In Study 3, we provided participants with false feedback that their friends were

socially incompetent. Our predictions were that people with low self-esteem would show distancing (i.e., reduced communal motivation) when they feared possessing the salient partner flaws (Study 1), when they first focused on similarity to a devalued partner (Study 2), or when they believed they were associated with a socially incompetent partner (Study 3). When people distanced from partners by reducing their caring for their partners, we predicted that they would project those feelings and motives, perceiving those partners as less responsive to them as well (Studies 1 through 3).

## STUDY 1: REACTING TO A PARTNER'S FLAWS THAT ONE MIGHT POSSESS

In the first study we tested the hypothesis that participants with low (but not those with high) self-esteem would distance themselves from their friends by reducing communal motivation after bringing to mind the friend's flaws if those flaws were seen as ones that might apply to the self. In addition, we tested the hypothesis that distancing by reducing communal motivation would be projected onto the friend, resulting in a perception that the friend has reduced communal motivation toward the self.

For exploratory purposes, we included a condition designed to bring to mind the friend's positive qualities to determine whether people low in self-esteem also were likely to increase communal motivation when positive qualities were salient. We did not have firm predictions regarding this effect, however, as both those high and low in self-esteem might benefit from positive reflection when a friend's strengths are salient.

### Method

#### *Participants and Procedure*

Sixty-eight college students (37 men and 31 women; *M* age = 21.33 years) completed a questionnaire on a campus green in exchange for a beverage and a snack. After a manipulation in which they listed a friend's traits, they completed measures of communal motivation and perceived friend communal motivation and then they rated the self-descriptiveness of the traits they listed. They completed a self-esteem measure either at the start or at the end of the study.<sup>1</sup>

Participants randomly assigned to the flaws condition were asked to list three of their friend's greatest weaknesses or negative attributes. Those randomly assigned to the strengths condition were asked to list three of their friend's greatest strengths or positive attributes. Those randomly assigned to the control condition were asked to list three of their friend's characteristics without instructions specifying whether positive or negative.

**TABLE 1:** Effects of Experimental Conditions, Self-Esteem, and Trait Self-Descriptiveness on Communal Motivation and Perceived Friend's Communal Motivation (Study 1)

	<i>Communal Motivation</i>	<i>Perception of Friend</i>
Step 1		
Flaws condition	.13	.31 <sup>†</sup>
Strengths condition	.13	.15
Self-esteem	.27*	.29*
Trait self-descriptiveness	.17	.21
Step 2		
Flaws × Self-Esteem	-.10	.16
Strengths × Self-Esteem	-.25	-.02
Flaws × Trait Self-Descriptiveness	-.13	-.32
Strengths × Trait Self-Descriptiveness	-.31	-.54*
Trait Self-Descriptiveness × Self-Esteem	.20	.30 <sup>†</sup>
Step 3		
Flaws × Self-Esteem × Trait Self-Descriptiveness	.71**	.41 <sup>†</sup>
Strengths × Self-Esteem × Trait Self-Descriptiveness	.12	.07

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

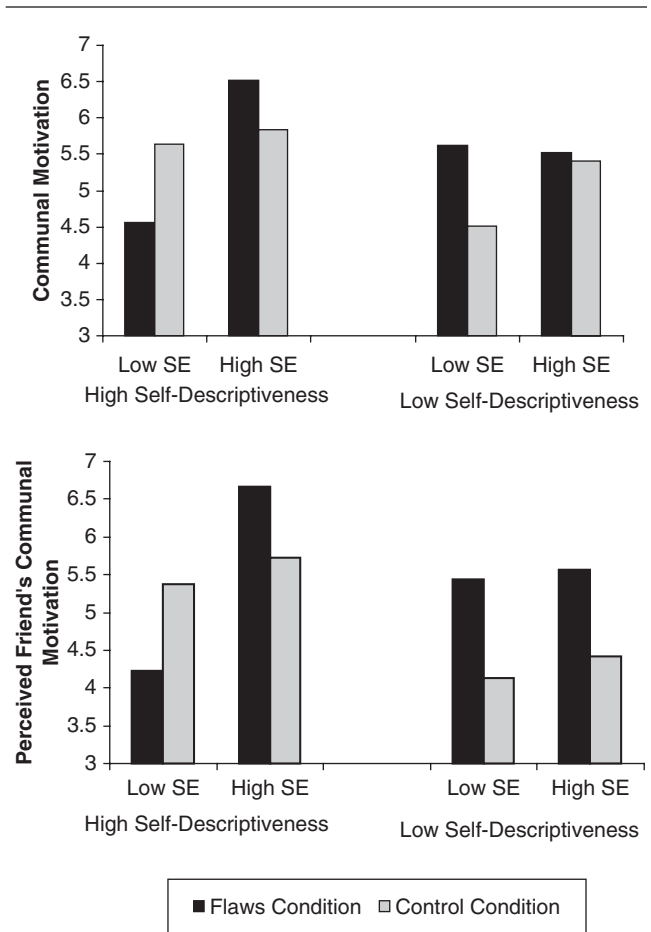
### Measures

**Self-esteem.** Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) on 6-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; alpha = .87).

**Communal motivation.** Using identical response scales, participants responded to three items assessing their valuation of their friend's welfare and their motivation to respond to their friend's needs (i.e., "I care about this person"; "I would go out of my way to help this person"; "I value and like this person"; alpha = .79).

**Perceived friend communal motivation.** Using identical response scales, participants responded to three analogous items assessing perceptions of the friend's communal motivation (e.g., "This person cares about me"; alpha = .90).

**Trait self-descriptiveness.** Following completion of the measures described previously, participants were asked to refer to the attributes they listed and indicate their agreement to the statement, "I have attribute X," with X corresponding to one of the line numbers on which they indicated a friend's trait (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). The three responses were averaged to create an index of the degree to which participants felt that they also possessed the friend's characteristics (alpha = .70).



**Figure 1** Effects of flaws condition, trait self-descriptiveness, and self-esteem (SE) on communal motivation and perceived friend's communal motivation (Study 1).

### Results and Discussion

Hierarchical regression analyses tested effects of the experimental conditions (flaws vs. control and strengths vs. control), self-esteem (continuous), and trait self-descriptiveness in Step 1; two-way interactions in Step 2; and three-way interactions in Step 3. Results are presented in Table 1. The anticipated Flaws Condition × Self-Esteem × Trait Self-Descriptiveness interaction was significant for predicting own communal motivation and approached significance for predicting perceived friend communal motivation,  $p = .091$ . Predicted values are displayed in Figure 1.<sup>2</sup>

We tested conditional effects of the flaws condition for each combination of low (1 SD below the mean) and high (1 SD above the mean) levels of self-esteem and trait self-descriptiveness (see Aiken & West, 1991). For participants high in self-esteem, no evidence of distancing as a result of thinking about a friend's flaws emerged.

For such participants, relative to the control condition, thinking about friend flaws that might apply to the self (when trait self-descriptiveness was high) did not predict communal motivation,  $p = .70$ , but did predict increased perceptions of the friend's communal motivation,  $\beta = .72$ ,  $p < .01$ . Also, relative to the control condition, thinking about a friend's flaws that did not apply to the self (when trait self-descriptiveness was low) did not predict high self-esteem participants' communal motivation,  $\beta = .60$ ,  $p = .20$ , or perceptions of the friend's motivation,  $\beta = .59$ ,  $p = .19$ .

For participants low in self-esteem, some evidence of distancing did emerge and, as expected, the effect was dependent on whether the flaws were seen as applying to the self. Relative to the control condition, thinking about flaws that were judged as not applying to the self (when trait self-descriptiveness was low) increased communal motivation,  $\beta = .99$ ,  $p < .01$ , and perceived friend responsiveness,  $\beta = .82$ ,  $p < .05$ . In contrast, thinking about flaws that were seen as also descriptive of self (when trait self-descriptiveness was high) decreased communal motivation,  $\beta = -.96$ ,  $p = .07$ . However, it did not significantly decrease perceptions of the friend's responsiveness,  $\beta = -.71$ ,  $p = .17$ . Although not all of the conditional effects reached conventional significance levels, the interaction patterns were consistent with predictions. Only low-self-esteem participants who recalled friend traits that may also be characteristic of themselves responded to the flaws manipulation with reduced communal motivation and perceptions of the friend's communal motivation.<sup>3</sup> Low-self-esteem individuals reacted quite differently—increasing communal motivation and perceived friend communal motivation—when they were confident they did not share the friend's flaws.

#### *Mediation Analysis:*

##### *Testing the Projection Model*

According to the projection model, reducing communal motivation should be projected, resulting in perceiving the friend as reducing communal motivation in return. If this is the case, communal motivation should explain (mediate) the effects of the flaws condition on perceived friend communal motivation.

We found that controlling for participants' own communal motivation toward their friends eliminated the three-way interaction effect on perceived friend communal motivation,  $p = .83$ . Controlling for all predictors and interactions, own communal motivation was a significant predictor of perceived friend communal motivation,  $\beta = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also found that controlling for communal motivation eliminated the conditional effects of the flaws condition on perceived

friend communal motivation for participants low in self-esteem and low in trait self-descriptiveness,  $p = .50$ , and for participants low in self-esteem and high in trait self-descriptiveness,  $p = .80$ . Sobel tests (Baron & Kenny, 1986) of indirect paths were significant for mediating the interaction term,  $z = 2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ , and for mediating the conditional effect for low self-esteem, low trait self-descriptiveness,  $z = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ , and it approached significance for mediating the conditional effect for low self-esteem, high trait self-descriptiveness,  $z = 1.74$ ,  $p = .08$ . Thus, participants with low self-esteem saw their friends as more responsive when they recalled negative friend traits that they were sure were not characteristic of themselves largely because they felt more responsive to their friends. Likewise, participants with low self-esteem saw their friends as less responsive when they recalled negative friend traits that might be characteristic of themselves largely because they felt less responsive to their friends.<sup>4</sup>

## STUDY 2: REACTING TO A SIMILAR AND DEVALUED PARTNER

In Study 2, we tested the hypothesis that participants low in self-esteem would be more likely than participants high in self-esteem to distance themselves from a partner (by reducing communal motivation and felt closeness) when they focused on similarities to the partner and when the partner's social inadequacies were salient. Perceiving oneself as *generally* similar to a socially devalued relationship partner should serve as a vulnerability to reflection threat, as it intensifies the perception that one shares a "unit relationship" with the partner or implies similarities in inadequacies. In addition, we tested the hypothesis that communal distancing would be projected onto partners such that they would be perceived as less communally responsive to the self.

### Method

#### *Participants and Procedure*

One hundred and ninety-six participants (55 men and 141 women;  $M$  age = 28 years) were recruited for participation in an electronic survey via advertisements on electronic bulletin boards. They completed a measure of self-esteem and identified a relationship partner (a romantic partner if they were romantically involved or a close friend if not) before undergoing orthogonal similarity and devalued partner manipulations. After these manipulations, they completed measures of communal motivation, perceived partner communal motivation, and closeness.

Participants randomly assigned to the similarity condition were asked to “list three important ways in which the two of you are similar.” Participants randomly assigned to the nonsimilar control condition were not asked to do this. Participants randomly assigned to the devalued partner condition were asked to “provide the initials of two people (not including yourself) who do not (or would not) like this person.” They were informed that they also could list types of people or groups of people who might not like this person if they did not know of specific people. They were then asked to list three characteristics of the partner that others might not like. Participants randomly assigned to the nondevalued control condition did not complete this task. Thus, participants either did or did not list similarities and then did or did not describe the partner’s socially devalued attributes and others who might reject the partner.

### Measures

*Self-esteem.* Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) using 6-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; alpha = .91).

*Communal motivation.* Using identical response scales, participants completed four items assessing their concern for their partner’s welfare and their motivation to care for their partner’s needs (i.e., “I care for this person”; “I would go out of my way to help this person”; “I would give up a lot to help this person”; “I don’t care about this person”; alpha = .88).

*Perceived partner communal motivation.* Using identical response scales, participants completed analogous items assessing their perceptions of their partner’s concern for their welfare and motivation to care for their needs (e.g., “This person cares about me”; alpha = .92).

*Closeness.* Participants completed the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), a single-item pictorial measure of closeness. From seven pairs of progressively overlapping circles, participants indicated the degree of closeness between themselves and the relationship partner.

### Results and Discussion

A series of hierarchical regression analyses tested effects of devalued condition (vs. nondevalued control condition), similarity condition (vs. nonsimilar control condition) and self-esteem (continuous) in step 1; two-way interactions in step 2; and the Devalued Condition ×

**TABLE 2:** Effects of Experimental Condition and Self-Esteem on Communal Motivation, Closeness, and Perceived Partner Communal Motivation (Study 2)

	<i>Communal Motivation</i>	<i>Closeness</i>	<i>Perception of Partner</i>
Step 1			
Devalued condition	-.18*	-.11	-.17*
Similarity condition	-.14 <sup>†</sup>	-.04	-.04
Self-esteem	.01	.09	.21**
Step 2			
Devalued × Similarity	-.21**	-.16*	-.21**
Similarity × Self-Esteem	-.04	-.07	-.02
Devalued × Self-Esteem	.13 <sup>†</sup>	.16*	.12 <sup>†</sup>
Step 3			
Devalued × Similarity × Self-Esteem	.03	.11	.13 <sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Similarity Condition × Self-Esteem three-way interaction in Step 3.

Shown in Table 2, the Devalued Condition × Similarity Condition interaction predicted communal motivation, closeness, and perceived partner communal motivation. Predicted values are provided in Table 3. The devalued manipulation did not predict communal motivation, closeness, and perceived partner communal motivation in the nonsimilarity control condition,  $ps > .50$ . In contrast, the devalued manipulation predicted decreases in these variables in the similarity condition: communal motivation,  $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ; closeness,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and perceived partner responsiveness,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, people were especially likely to decrease felt closeness, reduce their communal motivation, and perceive their friend as reducing communal motivation when similarity and the friend’s devalued characteristics were jointly salient. These effects replicate prior research suggesting that perceived similarity magnifies distancing from a socially devalued person (Lerner & Agar, 1972; Novak & Lerner, 1968; Taylor & Mettee, 1971).

Also shown in Table 2, self-esteem moderated effects of the devalued condition on communal motivation,  $p = .07$ , perceived partner responsiveness,  $p = .08$ , and closeness,  $p < .05$ . Predicted values are provided in Table 4. The devalued manipulation did not predict the criterion variables for participants high in self-esteem,  $ps > .47$ . However, for participants low in self-esteem, the devalued manipulation reduced communal motivation,  $\beta = -.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ; closeness,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and perceived partner communal motivation,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The Similarity Condition × Devalued Condition × Self-Esteem three-way interaction approached significance

**TABLE 3:** Predicted Values for Devalued Condition x Similarity Condition Two-Way Interactions (Study 2)

Criterion	Nonsimilar Control Condition		Similar Condition	
	Nondevalued Control Condition	Devalued Condition	Nondevalued Control Condition	Devalued Condition
Communal motivation	5.67	5.73	5.75	5.30
Closeness	4.55	4.80	4.94	4.10
Perception of partner	5.33	5.44	5.60	5.0

**TABLE 4:** Predicted Values for Devalued Condition x Self-Esteem Two-Way Interactions (Study 2)

Criterion	Low Self-Esteem		High Self-Esteem	
	Nondevalued Control Condition	Devalued Condition	Nondevalued Control Condition	Devalued Condition
Communal motivation	5.78	5.42	5.64	5.61
Closeness	4.85	4.01	4.64	4.89
Perception of partner	5.39	4.93	5.54	5.51

only for the perceived partner communal motivation criterion,  $p = .06$ . However, the combination of Self-Esteem  $\times$  Devalued Condition and Similarity Condition  $\times$  Devalued Condition two-way interactions suggests that, at least in an additive manner, the effects of the devalued condition are greatest for low-self-esteem participants in the similar condition. Thus, we examined effects of the devalued condition conditional on both self-esteem level and similarity condition.

Predicted values are plotted in Figure 2. As shown, the greatest evidence of distancing was observed for participants low in self-esteem (1 *SD* below the mean) in the similarity condition. Conditional effects suggested that for such participants, the devalued condition (relative to the nondevalued control condition) reduced communal motivation,  $\beta = -.51, p < .001$ ; closeness,  $\beta = -.50, p < .001$ ; and perceived partner responsiveness,  $\beta = -.58, p < .001$ . In contrast, the devalued condition (relative to the nondevalued control condition) did not have a significant effect on these criterion variables for participants high in self-esteem (+1 *SD*) in the similarity condition,  $ps > .12$ , or for participants high or low in self-esteem in the nonsimilarity control condition,  $ps > .32$ . Thus, only participants who were low in self-esteem and were primed to view their partners as similar to them reacted to thinking about a partner as socially devalued by reducing communal motivation, closeness, and perceived partner communal motivation.

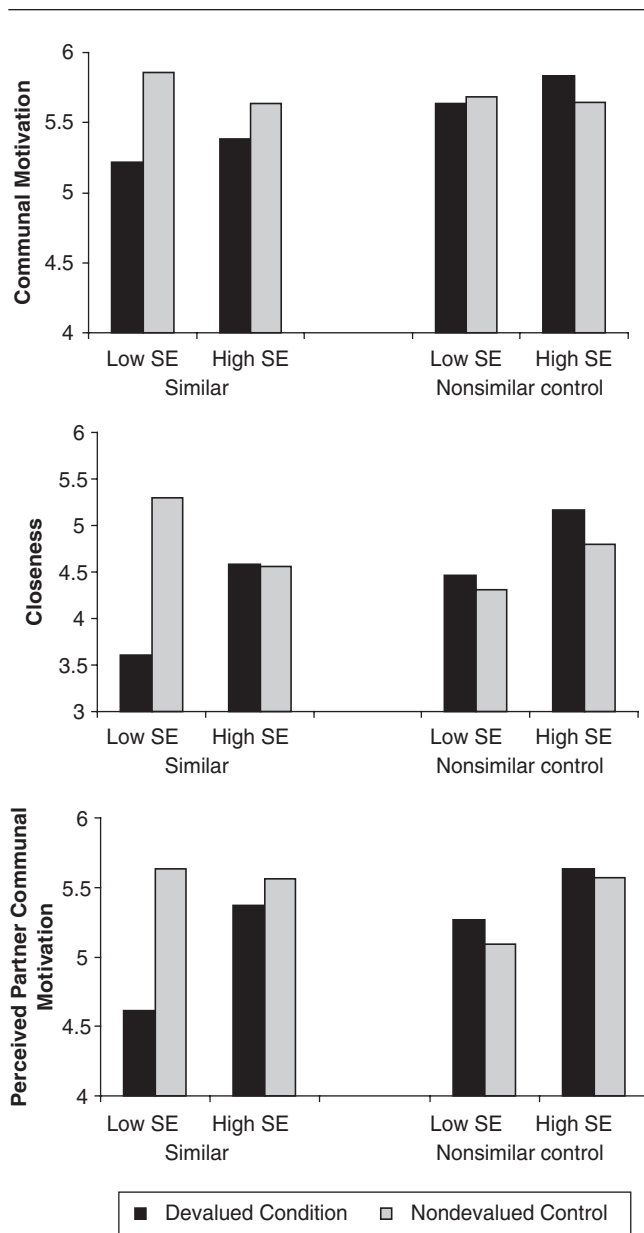
#### Mediation Analysis: Testing the Projection Model

According to our projection hypothesis, distancing by reducing communal motivation indirectly affects perceived partner communal motivation through the projection process. That is, own communal motivation

may mediate the effects of experimental conditions on perceived partner communal motivation. We conducted additional analyses to test these predictions. First, controlling for own communal motivation eliminated effects of both two-way interactions on perceived partner communal motivation,  $ps > .17$ . Own communal motivation was a significant predictor of perceived partner communal motivation,  $\beta = .64, p < .001$ . Second, for low-self-esteem participants in the similar condition, controlling for own communal motivation substantially decreased the conditional effect of the devalued manipulation on perceived partner communal motivation,  $\beta = -.26, p < .05$ . A Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986) of the indirect effect was significant,  $z = 3.71, p < .001$ , suggesting that the devalued manipulation had a significant indirect effect on perceived partner communal motivation via its influence on own communal motivation. These analyses support the projection model. Perceived partner communal motivation appeared to be reduced, in part, because participants projected their own reduced motivation.<sup>5</sup>

### STUDY 3: REACTING TO A SOCIALLY INCOMPETENT PARTNER

In Study 3, we examined effects of false feedback regarding a partner's social competence. Whereas in Studies 1 and 2 we measured and manipulated perceived similarity to examine its effects on distancing, in Study 3 we held feelings of relatedness at a constant high level by requiring all participants to bring a relationship partner to a laboratory session. This public presentation of a relationship with the other was expected to induce



**Figure 2** Effects of devalued condition, similarity condition, and self-esteem (SE) on communal motivation, closeness, and perceived partner communal motivation (Study 2).

reflection threat and reflection-based distancing for low-self-esteem individuals when they were led to believe that their partners were socially incompetent. Again, we tested whether communal distancing would be projected, resulting in reduced perceptions of the partner's communal motivation.

In addition, given that some research indicates that responses on explicit self-esteem measures may diverge from responses on implicit self-esteem measures (e.g., Hetts, Sakuma, & Pelham, 1999; Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003; Kernis, 2003), in Study 3 we examined the possible moderating

effects of both explicit and implicit self-esteem on distancing. In particular, we examined effects of name-letter and birthday-number preferences. A preference for symbols associated with the self, such as letters in one's name and numbers in one's birthday, over symbols that are not associated with the self has been interpreted as an indicator of implicit (i.e., unconscious) self-esteem (Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg, & Hetts, 2002; Koole, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2001). We had similar expectations for the moderating roles of explicit and implicit self-esteem.

Finally, we directly measured emotions indicative of experienced threat to one's public image, expecting that low-self-esteem participants would feel that their own public image was threatened when they believed that their relationship partners were socially incompetent.

## Method

Dyads (mostly nonromantic friends) completed measures of explicit and implicit self-esteem before arriving at a laboratory session. During the laboratory session, each participant was told that his or her study partner was completing a social intelligence test. Participants either received no feedback regarding the other's performance or received false feedback indicating that the other performed poorly on the test or performed well on the test. Following this manipulation, participants wrote a message to the other (which constituted a behavioral measure of supportiveness) and then completed measures assessing their communal motivation, perceptions of the other's communal motivation, and public image threat.

## Participants

One hundred and twenty-two participants (38 men, 83 women, and 1 did not report sex;  $M$  age = 21 years) were recruited via advertisements on electronic bulletin boards, in campus newspapers, and on a psychology participant pool Web site. These participants consisted of 10 all-male dyads, 32 all-female dyads, and 18 mixed-sex dyads. Ten participants indicated they were romantically involved with their study partner. The remaining participants indicated they were friends, roommates, or coworkers.<sup>6</sup>

## Procedure

Participants completed measures of explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem within a computerized questionnaire before arriving at the study session with their study partners. After obtaining informed consent, the experimenter presented the cover story, which included (a) that the study was about effects of social



intelligence on performance during an interview; (b) that social intelligence includes such things as ability to get along with others, knowledge of social norms, understanding of others, and conversation ability; (c) that one of the two participants in the dyad would be randomly assigned to be the interviewee, the other to be assigned interviewer; (d) that the randomly assigned interviewee would take a 10-min social intelligence test before the interview; and (e) that the interview would include written and verbal components so the experimenter could compare different modes of communication.

After describing these details, the experimenter presented answer sheets that ostensibly would be used by the interviewee to record his or her answers to the social intelligence test. These answer sheets included a "Personal Information" section, with a space for the ostensible examinee to write his or her name and with questions regarding sex and year in college. Following this personal information section was a "Test Answers" section, which included a series of 24 lines, each including 5 answer bubbles marked "A" through "E." This created the illusion that the social intelligence test was a 24-item, multiple-choice test. The experimenter explained that both participants should complete the personal information section now so that the randomly assigned examinee would not consume any of his or her 10-min testing time completing that section. This was done to enhance the credibility of the false feedback (described later).

The experimenter ushered participants to separate rooms and, a few minutes later, told each participant that he or she was randomly assigned to be the interviewer and that his or her study partner would be the interviewee. He then gave participants a brochure that described the bogus social intelligence test and a bogus "Attitudes Toward Interviewing" scale. The brochure presented a bogus test developer company, a conceptual definition of social intelligence ("The ability to satisfy one's own and others' interpersonal goals"), applications of social intelligence testing (e.g., to gauge the effectiveness of interpersonal psychotherapies), a list of skills measured by the Social Intelligence Test (which overlapped with the experimenter's description at the start of the study), and references to bogus studies supporting the validity of the Social Intelligence Test (e.g., relations between performance on the Social Intelligence Test and self-reported loneliness, self-reported popularity, evaluations by others, and changes in social network size).

For participants randomly assigned to the competent and incompetent conditions, the experimenter filled in the study partner's answer sheets in such a way that scoring it in accordance with an answer key would yield 18 or 8 correct responses, respectively.

The answer key included a list of the ostensibly correct answers and an interpretation table, which provided five ranges of raw scores, each identified by a percentile and "diagnostic categorization." The study partner's score for participants in the incompetent and competent conditions corresponded with a percentile of 20 (diagnostic categorization of "socially challenged") or 80 (diagnostic categorization of "socially competent"), respectively. To enhance the credibility of this feedback, partners' ostensible performances were not extreme; diagnostic categorizations of "socially inept" and "socially gifted" were at the low and high extremes, respectively, and the diagnostic categorization of "average" fell between the "socially challenged" and "socially competent" categories.

After the 10-min period during which partners were ostensibly taking the test, participants in the competent and incompetent conditions received their study partner's ostensible answer sheet (made more believable by the partner's handwritten personal information) and the scoring key, and they graded their partner's test (ostensibly because the experimenter could not know the person's performance to remain unbiased). Participants in the control condition did not receive any information regarding their partner's test performance. All participants then received an instruction sheet and a form on which they would write their first message to their study partner. The experimenter explained to all participants that the first written message was practice and they could write anything.

The instruction sheet reiterated that there would be a written and a verbal portion of the interview. In addition, this instruction sheet stated, "In prior studies, interviewees have reported feeling anxious about their performance on these interviews. Any interview question may be skipped and the interview can be terminated at any time." This message was included to raise the possibility to participants that their study partner might need support.

After writing their first message, the experimenter explained that some "background measures" needed to be collected and then administered the dependent measures (communal motivation, perceived partner communal motivation, public image threat).

Following completion of the dependent measures and a suspicion check, participants were reunited and thoroughly debriefed.

### Measures

*Explicit self-esteem.* Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) using 6-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

**TABLE 5:** Effects of Experimental Condition and Self-Esteem on Dependent Measures (Study 3)

	Public Image Threat	Communal Motivation	Message Warmth	Perception of Partner
Model 1				
Competent condition	-.10	-.04	-.35	-.11
Incompetent condition	.03	-.11	-.02	-.20
Explicit self-esteem	-.14*	.01	.06	.06
Implicit self-esteem	-.02	.10	-.02	.08
Model 2				
Explicit × Competent	-.14	-.02	.45*	.01
Explicit × Incompetent	-.29**	-.07	.41*	.05
Implicit × Competent	-.08	.14	.05	.20
Implicit × Incompetent	-.19	.49**	.12	.44*

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

*Implicit self-esteem.* Participants indicated their preferences for each letter in the alphabet and for each number from 0 to 9 on 9-point rating scales (1 = *dislike very much*, 9 = *like very much*). The implicit self-esteem measure was an average of two indices: (a) the difference between a participant's average preference for letters in his or her own name and the participant's average preference for letters not in his or her own name, and (b) the difference between a participant's average preference for numbers in his or her own birth date and the participant's average preference for numbers not in his or her own birth date. Higher values on this index represent greater tendencies to value symbols associated with the self over symbols not associated with the self (higher implicit self-esteem; Jones et al., 2002; Koole et al., 2001).

*Written message warmth.* The first author and two coders, all blind to experimental condition and self-esteem scores, rated the friendliness of each written message on 4-point response scales (1 = *not at all friendly*, 4 = *very friendly*). These ratings were reliable ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and were averaged to create an index of written message warmth.

*Communal motivation and perceived partner motivation.* Participants completed the same measures of communal motivation ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and perceived partner communal motivation ( $\alpha = .85$ ) used in Study 2.

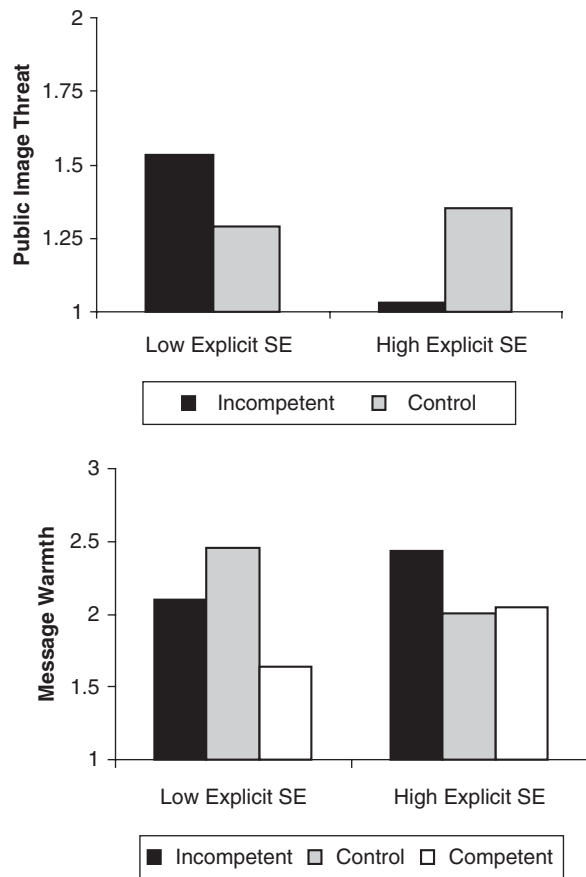
*Public image threat.* Using 5-point response scales (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), participants indicated the extent to which they currently felt a variety of emotions, including three indicators of threat to public image (embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed;  $\alpha = .80$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Two-level multilevel models (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992), tested using the HLM 5.0 program (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2001), tested predictions while modeling individuals as nested within dyads. Given the limited degrees of freedom at Level 1 (only two individuals per dyad), slopes were modeled as fixed across couples and intercepts were modeled as randomly varying (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Effects of experimental conditions (competent vs. control and incompetent vs. control), explicit self-esteem (continuous), and implicit self-esteem (continuous) were examined in an initial model and two-way interactions were examined in a subsequent model.

As shown in Table 5, explicit self-esteem moderated the effects of the incompetent condition on public image threat and the effects of both conditions on written message warmth. Implicit self-esteem moderated the effects of the incompetent condition on communal motivation and perceived partner communal motivation.

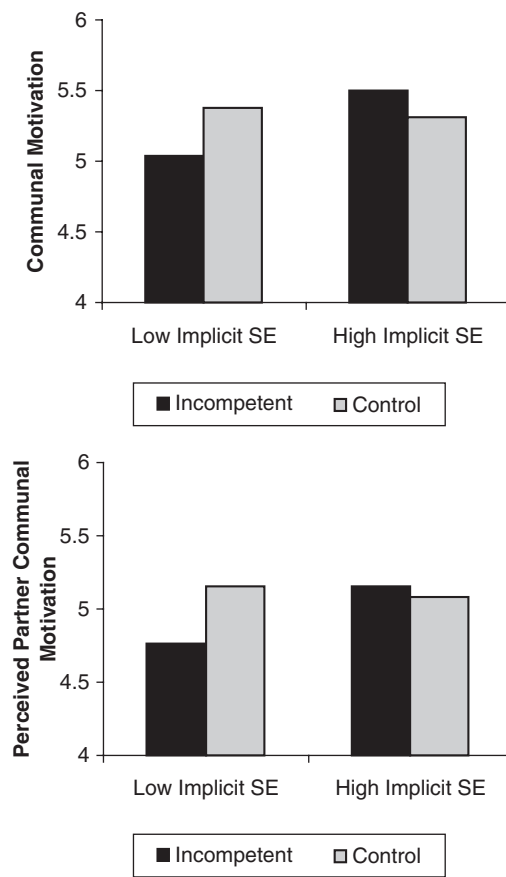
Predicted values for the explicit self-esteem interactions are displayed in Figure 3. Conditional effects of experimental conditions were examined at low ( $-1 SD$ ) and high ( $+1 SD$ ) levels of self-esteem. For participants low in self-esteem, the incompetent condition trended toward predicting increased public image threat,  $b = .24$ ,  $p = .14$ , and decreased written message warmth,  $b = -.36$ ,  $p = .23$ , although these effects were not significant. In addition, the competent condition predicted decreased message warmth,  $b = -.82$ ,  $p < .05$ . For participants high in self-esteem, the incompetent condition predicted decreased public image threat,  $b = -.32$ ,  $p < .05$ , and tended to predict increased written message warmth,  $b = .43$ ,  $p = .12$ , and the competent condition did not predict written message warmth,  $p = .89$ . Although most conditional effects were not significant, the



**Figure 3** Effects of explicit self-esteem (SE) and experimental condition on public image threat and written message warmth (Study 3).

interaction pattern is generally consistent with predictions. Whereas participants with high self-esteem wrote the friendliest messages when their friend ostensibly most needed support—when they seemed socially incompetent—participants with low self-esteem wrote the friendliest messages when they had no information regarding their friend’s performance.

Predicted values for implicit self-esteem interactions are displayed in Figure 4. Conditional effects of the incompetent condition were examined at low ( $-1 SD$ ) and high ( $+1 SD$ ) values of implicit self-esteem. When implicit self-esteem was low, the incompetent condition reduced communal motivation,  $b = -.34$ ,  $p < .05$ , and perceived partner communal motivation,  $b = -.39$ ,  $p < .05$ . When implicit self-esteem was high, condition did not predict communal motivation or perceived partner motivation,  $ps > .25$ , and the direction of the effects was reversed. These results support predictions that participants with low implicit self-esteem would distance from their friend and perceive their friend as distancing from them after learning that their friend was socially incompetent.



**Figure 4** Effects of implicit self-esteem (SE) and experimental condition on communal motivation and perceived partner communal motivation (Study 3).

#### Mediation Analysis: Testing the Projection Model

The projection hypothesis predicts that effects of the experimental condition on communal motivation explain (mediate) the effects of the experimental condition on perceived partner communal motivation. Indeed, controlling for communal motivation eliminated the Implicit Self-Esteem  $\times$  Incompetent Condition interaction effect on perceived partner communal motivation,  $p = .82$ . Own communal motivation was a significant predictor of perceived partner motivation,  $b = .94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Also, controlling for communal motivation eliminated the simple effect of the incompetent condition on reduced perceived partner communal motivation for participants low in implicit self-esteem,  $p = .81$ . Supporting the projection model, these results suggest that the incompetent condition reduced perceived partner communal motivation for participants with low implicit self-esteem because these participants reduced their own motivation to care for their friend and assumed that their friend did the same.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research tested the hypothesis that low-self-esteem individuals distance themselves from flawed partners by reducing their concern for their partners' welfare, felt closeness, and motivation to provide support. In addition, this research tested the hypothesis that such effects are especially likely to emerge in situations that cause low-self-esteem individuals to focus on the possibility that partners reflect on them (i.e., when they might share partner flaws or focus on similarities). We further predicted that communal distancing would carry the additional cost of perceiving partners as less responsive to the self through projection of responsiveness.

### Low-Self-Esteem Individuals Distance From Flawed Partners

The results of the present studies suggest that although low-self-esteem individuals do not *inevitably* distance themselves from partners in the face of partner flaws, they are more likely to do so relative to high-self-esteem individuals. In Study 1, low-self-esteem participants, but not high-self-esteem participants, who reported on partner flaws that they perceived themselves to possess showed evidence of distancing. In Study 2, low-self-esteem participants, but not high-self-esteem participants, who were primed to focus on being similar to their partner showed evidence of distancing when the partner's social inadequacies were salient. In Study 3, low-self-esteem participants, but not high-self-esteem participants, who received feedback that their partner was not "socially intelligent" showed evidence of distancing and of feeling threat to their public image.

Some of the conditional effects tested to probe interactions did not reach traditional levels of significance, but many did, and all effects and trends were in the expected directions. Moreover, effects for the high-self-esteem participants typically were in the opposite direction, suggesting not only that trait self-esteem is an important moderator of reflection-based distancing but also that a partner's flaws may cause high-self-esteem individuals to draw closer, perhaps because such flaws remind them of the partner's need for responsiveness.

### Situational Determinants of Distancing

We posited that low-self-esteem individuals would distance primarily in situations that pose the possibility that they share the partner's devalued or flawed status or in situations in which the relationship was on public display. In Study 1, only low-self-esteem participants who believed that a partner's flaws might apply to them exhibited distancing. In Study 2, only low-self-esteem

participants who first focused on similarities with the partner exhibited distancing when they subsequently thought about the partner's negative social attributes. In Study 3, by virtue of participants bringing partners to a psychological study, relationships were clearly on public display. The fact that distancing did not occur for low-self-esteem participants in Studies 1 and 2 when partners were not present and similarities were not emphasized suggests that low self-esteem does not inevitably lead to distancing. Rather, low self-esteem appears to interact with situational contexts that initiate reflection processes to predict the cutting off of flawed partners.

Indeed, other findings suggest that there are times when individuals with low (but not high) self-esteem actually may be comforted by a partner's flaws, perhaps because those flaws reduce their feelings of inferiority relative to the partner and, consequently, increase security about the partner's regard (Murray et al., 2005). We saw a hint of this in our own results. Specifically, in Study 1 participants with low (but not high) self-esteem who thought about flaws that were judged as not applying to the self increased communal motivation and increased perceived friend responsiveness. Effects in Study 2 are also consistent with this view, although they were not significant. In addition to the moderators examined in the present research, whether a partner's flaws initiate distancing or promote greater feelings of closeness may depend on whether low-self-esteem individuals are focusing on obtaining the partner's regard or obtaining the regard of outsiders.

### Effects of Distancing on Perceived Partner Responsiveness via Projection

All three studies provide evidence that conditions that reduced communal motivation also reduced perceived partner communal motivation. Mediation analyses suggested that this effect was indirect, mediated by participants' own reductions of communal motivation. In other words, perceptions of the partner's communal motivation were reduced because participants' own communal motivation was reduced. This is what one would expect if participants reduced their motivation to respond to a partner's needs and then projected that reduced communal motivation, as has been recently observed in other work (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay et al., 2007).

That people who distance from a partner in the face of that partner's flaws *also* project that distancing onto the partner's communal motivation may be relevant to how people experience distancing. In particular, projection may make them feel more comfortable with and less selfish about distancing. Their conscious experience may be of justifiably moving away from a

partner who is not terribly caring (as well as embarrassing to be around). On the other hand, that people project their communal responsiveness may make them feel worse about distancing. That is, although they may maintain a more broadly defined sense of desirability to others by disavowing an association with a flawed partner, they also may experience a loss of the support that was available to them from that partner. In turn, feeling that a close partner no longer cares is likely to contribute to low-self-esteem individuals' concerns about being valuable relationship partners. Somewhat ironically, those with doubts about being a desirable relationship partner may react in ways that reinforce those doubts. After all, a fair-weather friend is not likely to be a well-regarded friend.

### Implications for Existing Research on Reflection

Social psychologists have long been interested in reflection processes, and the present work represents a continuation and extension of that tradition. Reflection theorizing is most often associated with work by Cialdini and his colleagues on basking in reflected glory (Cialdini & Denicholas, 1989; Cialdini et al., 1976) and research on the self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model by Tesser and colleagues (Tesser & Campbell, 1983). In particular, Cialdini and colleagues have argued and provided evidence that people bask in reflected glory (BIRGing)—trumpeting associations with positive third parties to create favorable impressions. According to the SEM model, people experience positive affect when their close partners outperform them in a domain that is low in relevance to self-definition, and they may draw closer to those partners as a result (Tesser & Campbell, 1983; Tesser et al., 1988). More closely related to the current research is the public “cutting off of reflected failure” (CORFing) demonstrated by Snyder et al. (1986). That is, people seem to conceal their group memberships to third parties when they believe those memberships would damage their reputation.

Our research extends this research in several ways. First, the original work on CORFing focused on group memberships and did not emphasize the role of self-esteem. We have demonstrated that individuals with low (but not high) trait self-esteem are likely to cut off their close relationship partners when those partners seem flawed. Although some findings and theorizing suggest a role of self-esteem in SEM processes (Tesser & Cornell, 1991), to our knowledge no prior research has consistently shown the moderating effect of trait self-esteem in the CORFing process.

In addition, whereas prior reflection research has emphasized public self-presentation of one's bonds with others, we have examined the effects of a partner's flaws

on felt communal responsiveness, support provision, and perceived partner responsiveness in existing close relationships. We believe this to be important because communal responsiveness in the form of understanding, validating, encouraging, and helping relationship partners (and perceiving partners as responding in this way) is the bedrock of well-functioning close relationships (Reis et al., 2004). That reflection processes can affect such phenomena demonstrates the relevance of reflection to understanding close relationships.

Note that the SEM model posits that reflection occurs in performance domains that are *irrelevant* to self-definition and that social comparison (or contrast) occurs in domains that are relevant to self-definition. The present work, however, found evidence of reflection threat produced by a partner's lack of good social standing, a domain that is presumably relevant to everyone (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). We believe we found evidence of reflection in this relevant domain because participants were not directly competing. In our studies, we hoped to conceptually parallel what often happens in day-to-day social life when a partner's faux pas or drop in social standing occurs in a noncompetitive setting. Moreover, unlike most performance domains examined in research on the SEM model, nearly everyone hopes that both they and their partners perform well in the social domain. Rarely do social partners compete to be first in social competence because each generally benefits from the other's social competence. This desire for mutual success may preclude strong competition and enhance reflection effects.

Finally, this research goes beyond prior research by documenting the interactive effects of low trait self-esteem and situational factors that promote reflection processes. Low-self-esteem individuals appear concerned about regulating their own feelings of self-worth and sense of social inclusion to such an extent that they appear to be fair-weather friends, disavowing their care when their relationship partners exhibit flaws that, in particular situations, have the capacity to reflect negatively on them. Such a contingent pattern of care for others may perpetuate the doubts they have regarding whether they are valued and cared for by others.

### NOTES

1. Preliminary analyses revealed no effects of experimental condition or interactive effects involving experimental condition and trait self-descriptiveness on self-esteem for participants who completed the self-esteem scale at the end of the study,  $ps > .15$ . Thus, self-esteem scores did not appear affected by the manipulation for participants completing the self-esteem measure at the end of the study.

2. Gender did not further moderate the theoretically crucial Self-Esteem  $\times$  Flaws Condition  $\times$  Trait Self-Descriptiveness interactions,  $ps > .87$ ; the two-way interactions,  $ps > .33$ ; or the main effects of

experimental condition,  $ps > .35$ . In addition, gender did not consistently moderate effects in subsequent studies. Consequently, we do not further discuss gender.

3. The marginal conditional effect of the flaws condition on communal motivation and the insignificant conditional effect of the flaws condition on perceived partner communal motivation for participants low in self-esteem and high in trait self-descriptiveness may have been due to high average self-esteem scores. The average self-esteem score ( $M = 4.62$ ) was greater than the 3.5 neutral point on the 6-point scale, and 1  $SD$  ( $SD = .80$ ) below the mean reflects a score that is objectively neutral rather than low. Hence, the conditional effects for participants with "low" self-esteem presented in the text actually reflect conditional effects for participants with ambivalent or uncertain self-evaluations. The conditional effect of the flaws condition for participants who were high in trait self-descriptiveness and "truly low" in self-esteem (2  $SD$  below the mean) was significant for predicting communal motivation,  $\beta = -1.74$ ,  $p < .05$ , and was marginal for predicting perceived friend communal motivation,  $\beta = -1.36$ ,  $p = .086$ .

4. An alternative explanation of the present findings is that low-self-esteem participants who claimed to possess their friend's flaws listed objectively more negative friend attributes. Three coders (blind to all other responses) rated the valence of each attribute on a 5-point scale (1 = *most people view it very negatively*, 5 = *most people view it very positively*). The three coders' ratings of each attribute were internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .96$ ) and were averaged across coders. These scores were then averaged across the three attributes listed by each participant to form an index of the valence of the attributes participants listed ( $\alpha = .87$ ). This index was submitted to the regression analysis displayed in Table 1. As expected, relative to the control condition, the attributes listed in the flaws condition were rated as more negative,  $\beta = -.69$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the attributes listed in the strengths condition were rated as more positive,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .01$ . However, these ratings were not predicted by self-esteem,  $p = .70$ ; the Condition  $\times$  Self-Esteem two-way interactions,  $ps > .32$ ; or the Condition  $\times$  Self-Esteem  $\times$  Trait Self-Descriptiveness three-way interactions,  $ps > .66$ . Thus, it was not that low-self-esteem participants who claimed to possess their friend's flaws listed objectively more negative attributes.

The three coders also coded the extent to which the attribute implied responsiveness on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely implies that the person is not responsive to others*, 5 = *definitely implies that the person is responsive to others*); these ratings were internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ) and were averaged across coders. In turn, these scores were averaged across attributes to create an index of the friend's responsiveness implied by the traits participants listed ( $\alpha = .65$ ). This index was submitted to the regression analysis displayed in Table 1. Relative to the control condition, attributes listed in the flaws and strengths condition were rated as implying less responsiveness,  $\beta = -.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , and more responsiveness,  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p = .10$ , respectively. However, these ratings were not predicted by self-esteem,  $p = .95$ ; Condition  $\times$  Self-Esteem two-way interactions,  $ps > .28$ ; and Condition  $\times$  Self-Esteem  $\times$  Trait Self-Descriptiveness three-way interactions,  $ps > .68$ . Thus, effects on perceived friend communal motivation cannot be explained by the objective responsiveness implied by the traits participants listed.

5. Three coders coded the valence and responsiveness of the attributes listed by participants in the devalued condition (as described in Note 4). The three coders' valence and responsiveness ratings of each attribute were internally consistent (alphas = .93 and .81, respectively) and were averaged across coders. In turn, these scores were averaged across the three attributes to create indices of the valence of partner attributes ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and of the responsiveness implied by partner attributes ( $\alpha = .72$ ). We then examined effects of self-esteem and similarity condition (within the devalued partner condition) on these indices. Although main effects were not significant,  $ps > .16$ , the Self-Esteem  $\times$  Similarity Condition interaction approached significance: valence,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .10$ , and responsiveness,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .084$ . When self-esteem was low, the similarity condition predicted more negative attribute valence,  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $p < .05$ , and reduced rated attribute responsiveness,  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $p = .10$ . When self-esteem was high, the similarity condition had no effect on attribute valence or

responsiveness,  $ps > .45$ . However, when controlling for rated attribute valence or responsiveness, all significant simple effects of self-esteem and similarity condition on communal motivation, closeness, and perceived partner communal motivation remained significant. Thus, although there were trends suggesting that low-self-esteem participants in the similar and devalued cell were especially likely to list negative partner attributes and attributes that implied lack of responsiveness, these trends did not explain effects on communal distancing.

6. Data from 19 participants were eliminated from analyses. These included those who did not believe the cover story ( $n = 3$ ), who had extremely high scores on the implicit self-esteem measure ( $> 5 SD$  above the mean;  $n = 1$ ), who had extremely low scores on the communal motivation measure ( $< 5 SD$  below the mean;  $n = 1$ ), who did not complete all of the measures used in the current research ( $n = 4$ ), who did not attend the laboratory session ( $n = 8$ ), and who experienced a procedural error ( $n = 2$ ). Including the available data that were excluded did not alter the general pattern of results, although including outliers did reduce some of the effects.

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