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Blind and Deaf to Acceptance: The Role of Self-Esteem in Capitalizing on Social Acceptance

By

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Committee in charge:

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Abstract

Blind and Deaf to Acceptance: The Role of Self-Esteem in Capitalizing on Social Acceptance

by

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Across two studies, we evaluated whether people with low self-esteem are less likely to capitalize on, or take full advantage of, their romantic partners' accepting behaviors. We conceptualized capitalization as the tendency to perceive acceptance when it occurs, and to experience positive changes in affect and relationship satisfaction when acceptance is perceived. We found that participants with low self-esteem under-perceived their partners' acceptance, both in daily life and in the laboratory. When these behaviors were noticed, participants with low self-esteem experienced smaller, and temporally shorter, boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction than participants with high self-esteem. Moreover, the degree to which participants noticed social acceptance in daily life predicted relationship closeness over time. These results generally supported our predictions, and suggest that targeting responses to social acceptance may be an important point of intervention for future studies evaluating ways to improve self-esteem.

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Blind and Deaf to Acceptance: The Role of Self-Esteem in Capitalizing on Social Acceptance

Earning an A on an important midterm, getting asked on a date, having your child give you a hug, winning a prize, receiving a compliment from your partner – these are just a few examples of the countless types of positive events people encounter in their everyday lives. Though each of these positive events seems likely to have beneficial effects for a person, such as boosting their good feelings, or making them feel close to another, research has found that people differ in their responses to them (e.g., Langston, 1994; Smith & Reis, 2012). That is, some people are better able to capitalize on, or make the most of, these positive events than others. For example, one person might tell their best friend that they got asked out, while another might keep quiet. One person might attribute a good grade to their hard work, while another might think it was luck. One person might feel more satisfied in their relationship after their partner gave them a compliment, while another might not feel any different.

In the current paper, we evaluated individual differences in the tendency to capitalize on a particularly important type of positive event, receiving acceptance from a romantic partner. In two studies, we linked self-esteem (SE) to individual differences in the tendency to capitalize on social acceptance and operationalized capitalization as the degree to which one takes notice of a partner's accepting behaviors, and experiences boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction when acceptance is perceived. Given the importance of relationship functioning for health and well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988), whether one takes advantage of these opportunities may have consequences for the individual and for their relationships.

Capitalization

Foundational work by Langston (1994), and Bryant (1989) before him, define capitalization as making the most of a positive event – by any means. These researchers evaluated different ways to capitalize on positive events and the beneficial effects capitalization has for the individual. For example, Langston (1994) assessed perceptions of control as a means to capitalize on positive events. In a daily-diary study, participants reported on daily positive events, along with their perceived control over the events. Perceiving higher levels of control over a positive event in daily life (e.g., believing the event was due to something about you, you were responsible) was associated with higher levels of daily positive affect and predicted higher life satisfaction and lower stress one month later.

In recent years, researchers have focused on another means to capitalize, making the most of a positive event by sharing news of it with another (e.g., Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). For example, in that same daily-diary study, Langston (1994) also found that talking about a positive event with someone else was associated with more positive affect. This same pattern was replicated in a study by Gable and colleagues (2004), who found that sharing news of the most positive event of the day predicted higher levels of positive affect, above and beyond the positive affect induced by the event itself (Gable et al., 2004). Partner responsiveness, however, is a necessary condition for the positive effects of event sharing to be observed. If a partner does not respond in an active-constructive manner (i.e., with enthusiasm) the benefits of positive event sharing disappear (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable et al., 2004).

In the current paper, we evaluated capitalization in response to a particular type of

positive event – acceptance in romantic relationships – for example, when a partner goes out of his or her way to do something nice, such as giving a compliment or acting in a loving way. More specifically, we evaluated how individuals differ in their tendency to make the most of their partners' accepting behaviors. Though acceptance from a romantic partner normatively provides a host of positive outcomes for the individual and their relationships (e.g., Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012), people likely differ in their tendency to capitalize on these events. In particular, we hypothesized that individuals with more negative self-views, such as those with low SE, may be less likely to capitalize on acceptance from their romantic partners – to not derive the full benefits of partner acceptance that people with more positive self-views accrue. This prediction is based on self-verification theory (Swann, 1997) and the risk-regulation model (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), as further described below.

Theoretical Models

Self-Verification Theory

Starting at a young age people examine how others treat them, accumulate evidence, and gradually form what they believe are accurate and stable self-views. For example, those with high SE, who have experienced mostly social acceptance from others, see themselves in relatively positive ways (e.g., Leary, 1999). Alternatively, individuals with low SE, who have experienced chronic rejection from others, have more negative self-views (e.g., Leary, 1999). According to self-verification theory, individuals are motivated to maintain these self-views, irrespective of their valence (e.g., Swann, 1997). The implication of this assumption for individuals with high SE is straightforward: they see themselves in positive ways and want to preserve that rosy perspective. However, the theory also argues that individuals with low SE, who have negative self-views, want others to see them in similarly negative ways.

Why would individuals with low SE want to maintain the negative beliefs they hold about themselves? Self-verification theory argues that stable self-views provide a sense of security, predictability, and control (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Individuals use their self-views to anticipate how others will treat them, and can thus prepare for social interactions. In this way, individuals come to prefer self-verifying feedback from others, even if the feedback is negative. Such feedback reassures the individual that their perceptions about the world are correct and reinforces their belief that they know themselves well.

Partner acceptance communicates that an individual is worthy and valued in another's eyes. Although it is consistent with the positive self-views of those high in SE, it may be at odds with low SE individuals' more negative self-views. Thus, when people with low SE encounter acceptance from romantic partners, self-verification tendencies may emerge to maintain self-views, and correspondingly, to hinder the individual from fully capitalizing on the acceptance experience.

Risk-Regulation Model

The risk-regulation model, like self-verification theory, is a motivational account of the biases individuals with low SE evidence in response to partner acceptance. According to this model, the motivation driving low SE individuals' reactions to acceptance is not the need for

prediction and control, but rather the need for self-protection – specifically in the context of close relationships (Murray et al., 2006). The model argues that individuals have two, often opposing, goals in their relationships – relationship-promotion and self-protection. Unfortunately, the things an individual can do to foster a satisfying relationship (and thus realize relationship-promotion goals) also make the individual more vulnerable to the pain that would come from rejection (and thus undermine self-protection goals). To balance these divergent needs, people develop a risk-regulation system.

One component of this system is an appraisal rule that links situations of dependence (i.e., being in a relationship) to the goal of gauging the partner’s positive regard. To determine whether the partner has this regard, the system looks for signs that the partner sees something in them worth valuing. This is where the system can go awry for individuals with low SE. If a person doubts their own self-worth, it makes it difficult for them to feel confident in their partner’s positive regard. Thus, they end up prioritizing self-protection over relationship-promotion, which sensitizes the individual to signs of threat and motivates them to assume a risk-averse orientation.

While the low SE individual is quick to see their partner’s behavior as a sign of rejection, they may also make light of their partner’s cues of acceptance – for fear of the humiliation that would result if it turns out they interpreted the behavior in overly positive ways, or the pain they would face if they become attached to their partner and then are rejected by them in the future. Thus, research on the risk-regulation model suggests that in their efforts to self-protect, individuals with low SE may also fail to fully capitalize on social acceptance from romantic partners.

Conceptualizing Capitalization

Although prior researchers have focused on perceived control and event sharing, these are certainly not the only ways capitalization can be conceptualized. We focused our research on two additional capitalization processes. First, capitalization may involve perceiving, or taking notice of, the acceptance experience, and doing so in positive ways. Moreover, when acceptance is in fact perceived, capitalization may additionally involve reacting positively to the event, by experiencing initial boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction, savoring rather than dampening these good feelings, and even remembering these good feelings as time passes. These conceptualizations fit well with pre-existing literature on both self-verification theory and the risk-regulation model, as further described below. The models differ in the motivational causes behind capitalization failures (prediction/control vs. self-protection), not necessarily the ways capitalization failures manifest. That is, they generally make similar predictions regarding how individuals with low SE respond to social acceptance from romantic partners. Although some of the research we review has been conducted with other individual difference measures that evaluate self-views, such as attachment style or depressive symptoms, the results likely parallel those that would be found if SE was measured instead.

Perceived Acceptance

First, capitalization may involve the tendency to take notice of a partner’s accepting behaviors and to perceive these behaviors in positive ways. For example, if a romantic partner said “wow, you look good today,” a person with low SE might not pay attention to the

compliment, or may perceive the partner's intentions as less than sincere, perhaps thinking that the partner wanted something or did something wrong. Researchers can evaluate these perceptual biases by comparing an individual's report of their partner's accepting behavior to the partner's own reports, or even to the perceptions of more objective third parties in laboratory settings. Why might perceptual capitalization failures emerge? From a self-verification perspective, people tend not to perceive, and to devalue, feedback that is inconsistent with their self-views (e.g., Swann, 1997). As acceptance likely contradicts the relatively negative self-views of people with low SE, this feedback may not be noticed, or may be perceived in more negative, and thus self-consistent, ways. From a risk-regulation perspective, individuals with low SE, who are concerned with self-protection, may be cautious in their perceptions of acceptance, under-noticing it, or negatively perceiving it, in order to avoid the pain and humiliation they might face if they mistakenly interpret their partners' behavior in overly positive ways.

A few studies have provided support for these predictions. For example, Cameron and colleagues (2010) found that participants with low SE rated a novel interaction partner's behavior as lower in social acceptance cues than participants high in SE, even though the partner's behavior was identical across participants (Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz, & Balchen, 2010). In another study, participants read support messages provided by their romantic partner before giving a speech in the laboratory (Collins & Feeney, 2004). In contrast to participants with a secure attachment style, participants with insecure attachment rated their partners' notes lower in emotional support and felt substantially less supported, even when controlling for objective ratings of how supportive the note was. Relatedly, Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, and Rose (2001) found that individuals with negative self-views underestimate their partners' love for them.

Positive Reactions

If an individual does perceive their partner's acceptance, capitalization may also involve the tendency to react positively, in the immediate and in the longer-term. That is, when acceptance is perceived, people may still vary in the degree to which they 1) experience initial boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction, 2) whether they savor or dampen these feelings, and 3) how they remember these feelings over time.

From a self-verification perspective, acceptance from a partner may not be a purely positive experience for a low SE person, as it may signal that they are not being verified by their partner, or even that they do not know themselves well. Correspondingly, they may feel smaller boosts in positive affect or relationship satisfaction in response to perceived acceptance than individuals with high SE, or even experience no boost at all.

If positive affect or relationship satisfaction does initially increase, people with low SE may also fail to savor their good feelings, perhaps because people tend to think about information inconsistent with self-views less often over time (e.g., Swann, 1997). They may even dampen good feelings because the event represents a threat to their self-verification needs. That is, people with low SE may not maintain positive reactions over time.

Finally, when people with low SE think back to an acceptance experience, they may remember feeling in ways consistent with their expectations, rather than with their actual experience. Because people with low SE may not expect to feel great when receiving non-verifying (albeit accepting) feedback, they may remember feeling worse during the experience than they actually felt at the time. That is, low SE individuals' memory of the acceptance

experience, not just their actual reactions to the acceptance experience, may be biased. For example, prior research has shown that people with high SE remember feedback as more favorable than it actually was, while people with low SE remember feedback as less favorable (Story, 1998). Moreover, people with high SE have been found to recall events as more positive in valence than they initially rated them, while people with low SE recall them as more negative (Christensen, Wood, & Barrett, 2003). None of this research evaluated memory for affective responses to feedback, however.

Parallel predictions can be made from a risk-regulation perspective. Individuals with low SE, who perceive acceptance, may be unsure whether they should trust their perceptions. Although they may be drawn to the acceptance, they may feel afraid that they could be wrong in their interpretation. Such confusion, or doubt, may result in smaller initial boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction than those experienced by people high in SE. Moreover, individuals with low SE may not savor, may dampen, and may forget about the positive affect and relationship satisfaction that they do experience, in order to minimize emotional attachment to, and dependence on, the partner. The happier and more satisfied they let themselves feel, and remembering feeling, each time something positive occurs, the more vulnerable they become to the pain of future rejection.

There is some research in support of these predictions, particularly with respect to relationship satisfaction. For example, people are more attracted to partners and friends who confirm their self-views, and withdraw from relationships in which their partner sees them more or less favorably than they see themselves (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Moreover, individuals with low SE exhibit lower global levels of relationship satisfaction than people with high SE (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993). Perhaps the failure to fully capitalize on partner acceptance may be one mechanism that maintains lower satisfaction.

The literature on affective responses has been more mixed. On the one hand, a meta-analysis of the literature on affect and self-verification found that people with negative self-views do experience positive affect when receiving positive feedback, arguably because all people have a fundamental need to be admired and praised (Kwang & Swann, 2010). For example, participants low and high in SE both experienced positive affect after receiving positive feedback on their task performance (Shrauger, 1975). On the other hand, a few studies have shown that people with low SE display maladaptive affective reactions to positive events, but mostly in response to events in the academic domain (see North & Swann, 2009 for review). For example, people with low SE report being more likely than people with high SE to dampen positive feelings after experiencing successes (Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003), suggesting that they might dampen positive affect to social acceptance as well. In other studies, individuals with low SE experienced heightened anxiety after an academic success (Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, & Ross, 2005) and even after receiving a non-failure midterm grade (Ralph & Mineka, 1998). These studies did not evaluate responses to social acceptance specifically, thus leaving open the question of how people with low SE will respond to this kind of positive event. They do suggest, however, that if affective differences between low and high SE people emerge, they may be smaller than the differences that appear with respect to cognitive responses.

The Present Research

In two studies we evaluated whether individuals low and high in SE differ in their tendencies to capitalize on acceptance from romantic partners. More specifically, we measured

the relationship between SE and perceptions of social acceptance, and positive reactions to perceived social acceptance, both immediately and over time. In Study 1, these indices of capitalization were measured in response to partner acceptance that occurred naturally, in daily life. In Study 2, we evaluated these processes in a laboratory setting, in response to a compliment from a romantic partner. See Table 1 for each of our capitalization indices along with the corresponding measures included in Studies 1 and 2. This work adds to the aforementioned literature on capitalization, self-verification, and risk-regulation in a few different ways.

Capitalizing on Social Acceptance in Relationships

Prior work has focused on evaluating types of capitalization, and the benefits capitalization offers – with respect to positive events in general. We build off this work by narrowing in on a positive event specific to romantic relationships – a domain that has critical consequences for health and well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; House et al., 1988). Prior work shows that receiving acceptance from a romantic partner, in the form of appreciation, gratitude, thoughtful behaviors, or compliments, is normatively beneficial for people and for their relationships. For example, people appreciative of their romantic partners are more committed to their relationships and more likely to stay in their relationships over time (Gordon et al., 2012). Moreover, expressing appreciation for a partner is associated with the partner expressing more appreciation in return (Gordon et al., 2012). Relatedly, when a partner engages in thoughtful behaviors, it increases feelings of gratitude for them, and these boosts in gratitude predict higher levels of relationship satisfaction and connection (Algoe et al., 2010). Finally, thinking about the meaning and significance of a romantic partner’s compliment increases happiness, relationship security, and even state SE (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2007).

Collectively, these studies suggest that acceptance from a partner represents a critical opportunity to feel good about yourself and your relationship, and that individual differences in the tendency to make the most of these experiences likely has important consequences. That is, failing to fully capitalize on partner acceptance may represent a perpetuating factor in low SE people’s vulnerability and dissatisfaction in their romantic relationships.

Combining Multiple Levels of Analysis

To create a more comprehensive understanding of capitalization in response to partner acceptance, we focused our analyses at multiple levels, in daily life and in a controlled laboratory environment. Although research from the capitalization tradition has often employed daily diary studies, the aforementioned self-verification and risk-regulation work, which serves as the basis for our predictions, has relied almost exclusively on laboratory and survey methodologies. However, chronic reactions to these experiences in daily life may accumulate to create a characteristic profile that has consequences for the self and the relationship, and should thus be assessed empirically. Prior experimental work suggests that people low and high in SE evidence similar affective responses to social acceptance (Kwang & Swann, 2010). At the daily level, however, subtle changes in affective capitalization may emerge that have not been picked up by laboratory studies that involve strong manipulations. For example, with daily diary methodology, we may find that although people with low SE generally do experience comparable boosts in positive affect on the day partner accepting behaviors are perceived, they show a more rapid decline in positive affect by the following day.

Combining these diary analyses with a laboratory design lends further support to our predictions. In the laboratory, we can directly define the acceptance experience, and can measure and account for the nature of the acceptance that a partner provides. For example, in evaluating how positively an individual perceives their partner's acceptance, we can measure and control for more objective ratings of the acceptance. This can rule out whether individuals with low SE perceive less acceptance simply because their partners indeed provide less acceptance than the partners of those with high SE.

Capitalization Consequences

Finally, we evaluate whether patterns of capitalizing on partner acceptance have downstream consequences. That is, does the person who makes the most of their partner's accepting behaviors – who pays attention to acceptance, and feels good and connected to the partner in response to acceptance, have more close and satisfying relationships over time? Toward this end, we followed participants in our two studies longitudinally to look at whether indices of capitalization, irrespective of other individual difference variables such as self-esteem, predict relationship functioning the year following participation in the diary and laboratory studies. That is, does the general tendency to make the most of partner acceptance relate to future relationship functioning, regardless of whether you are a high or low self-esteem individual?

Study 1

In Study 1, both members of romantic couples completed a 21-day daily diary assessment. Each day they reported on whether their partner engaged in accepting behaviors – the degree to which the partner did things to make them feel secure and loved, the degree to which they themselves engaged in accepting behaviors to make their partner feel secure and loved, along with their positive affect and relationship satisfaction. We also followed participants longitudinally and evaluated their relationship closeness one year later. With this data we assessed the following hypotheses concerning capitalization on social acceptance from a romantic partner.

Hypothesis 1 (Perceptions): Compared to participants high in SE, participants low in SE will perceive their partners enacting accepting behaviors to a lesser degree across the 21 days of the daily diary. That is, participants with low SE will fail to fully capitalize on social acceptance by under-perceiving it in their daily lives. Although we are unable to obtain completely objective indicators of the partners' actual accepting behaviors, we can compare the participants' perceptions of acceptance to their partners' reported enacted acceptance – and evaluate the degree to which these reports correspond.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b (Reactions): Even when participants with low SE do perceive their partners' accepting behaviors in daily life, they will fail to fully capitalize on acceptance, by reacting less positively to it. That is, compared to participants high in SE, those low in SE will experience a smaller increase in (a) positive affect and (b) relationship satisfaction on days in which they themselves perceive their partner doing more to make them feel secure and loved, and will be less likely to maintain these feelings the following day.

Hypothesis 3 (Consequences). The more a participant capitalizes on partner acceptance in daily life, the closer they will feel to their partner one year later¹. More specifically, we extracted four indices of capitalization based on reports during the daily diary assessment and

hypothesized that each positively predicts relationship closeness over time. These include the degree to which participants: 1) generally perceive partner acceptance in daily life, 2) perceive their partners' accepting behaviors when their partner reports enacting acceptance (the correspondence between what the partner reports doing and what the participant perceives), 3) react positively to acceptance when it is perceived, and 4) maintain that positive reaction over time.

Method

Participants

Fifty-three heterosexual couples involved in non-married, monogamous relationships were recruited for participation in the study for payment using flyers posted in and around the University of California, Berkeley campus (age: $M = 20.59$, $SD = 2.43$). Ethnic breakdown was 46.15% Asian, 35.58% White, 0.96% Pacific Islander, and 17.31% other, with 9.71% of the sample identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The participant sample was generally comparable to the University of California, Berkeley student population on these demographic variables. Participants had to be dating for a minimum of 3 months to be eligible for enrollment (months: $M = 16.52$, $SD = 14.37$).

Eighty-six of the original 106 participants completed the follow-up assessment one year later. There were no differences between the full sample and the subsample that completed the follow-up assessment in their SE, age, how long they had been in a relationship, baseline relationship closeness, all t 's $< .65$, p 's $> .52$, or their gender composition, $\chi^2 = 0$, $p = 1.0$.

Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire, a 2-hour laboratory session, a 21-day daily diary, and a follow-up questionnaire. As the laboratory session is not relevant for the current analysis it will not be described further. The online questionnaire included measures of SE and relationship closeness. Upon completion of the laboratory session participants received a link to the daily diary survey that they were instructed to complete at the end of the day for the 21 days of the assessment. Partners were instructed to complete each diary separately and to refrain from discussing their responses. Participants were sent daily emails reminding them to complete the diary, and were instructed to complete their responses sometime between 6 pm and 3 am the following morning. Average response rate was 91.70% of diary days, with 0.5% of responses eliminated due to submission outside the time window. One year after the diary study participants were sent an online survey which included questions on their current relationship status and closeness.

Survey Measures

Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSE). The RSE is a well-validated, and widely-used, 10-item questionnaire that measures SE (Rosenberg, 1989). Ratings were made on a scale from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 6 (*describes me very well*). Appropriate items were reverse-scored and then averaged ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 5.25$, $SD = 0.87$).

Baseline relationship closeness. Participants reported their current level of commitment

to their partner on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*) ($M = 6.51$, $SD = .78$). Participants also completed the inclusion-of-the-other-in-the-self scale, which is a widely-used and well-validated measure of perceived closeness with another (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Each point on the scale shows two circles – one labeled “self” and the second labeled “other.” The degree of overlap between these two circles varies at each point on the scale, representing the degree of overlap one sees between themselves and the other person. Participants were asked to pick the scale point that best described their current relationship with their romantic partner. Responses were made on a scale from 1 (*completely non-overlapping circles*) to 7 (*almost completely overlapping circles*) ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.17$). These two measures were averaged to create a composite index of baseline relationship closeness ($\alpha = .55$, $M = 6.09$, $SD = .82$).

Relationship closeness at one year. Participants still involved in the same romantic relationship at the time of the follow-up assessment (77 of 86 total respondents) reported on their current level of commitment to their partner ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 1.09$) and closeness to their partner ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.0$) on scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*). These items were averaged to create a composite measure of relationship closeness ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 6.21$, $SD = .99$).

Diary Measures

Daily diary measures assessed the partners’ interactions, including positive events and conflict. Each participant reported on their own and their partner’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and also described non-relationship relevant stressors and successes. The current assessment focused on the following measures. Each was reported on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Daily perceived acceptance. Each diary day participants rated their partners’ behavior on the following item: “My partner did/said things that made me feel secure and loved” ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.06$).

Daily partner-reported enacted acceptance. Each diary day, partners rated their own behavior on the same item: “I did/said things that made my partner feel secure and loved” ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.05$).

Daily positive affect. To measure positive affect we averaged participants’ ratings on the items “happy,” “calm,” “satisfied,” and “confident,” as reported each diary day ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 3.18$, $SD = .78$).

Daily relationship satisfaction. Each diary day participants indicated the degree to which they felt happy/satisfied with their relationship ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.07$).

Data Analyses

The diary data involved a hierarchical structure. Days of assessment were nested within participants and participants were nested within couples. For each couple, this structure represented a two-level model and required the simultaneous analysis of within-person and between-person levels that are hierarchically organized. These analyses were conducted using the mixed procedure in the SAS statistical package, which is based on a hierarchical linear model approach (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). For each member of a couple, the lower level, *within-person*, analysis generated estimates of the relationship among daily measures (e.g., the association between perceived acceptance and relationship satisfaction/affect). The higher level, *between-person*, analysis then examined whether these within-person processes varied as a

function of between-person differences in SE. For the follow-up analyses, participants were nested within couples – representing a one-level model.

The diary and follow-up analyses assumed an error structure allowing for contemporaneous (same-day) dependence between the errors within a couple and additionally for the diary analyses, a first-order autoregressive structure within a person in a couple. Across analyses, variances were allowed to differ between males and females. To adopt a conservative approach to significance testing, we used the number of couples to compute degrees of freedom. All continuous predictors were centered on their grand mean (Aiken & West, 1991).

To make use of the longitudinal nature of the diary data, analyses measured associations between perceived social acceptance and affect/relationship satisfaction both the same day (same-day analyses) and with a 1-day lag (cross-day analyses). For the cross-day analyses, our statistical models tested whether the within-subjects relationships between *yesterday's* perceived acceptance and *today's* affect/relationship satisfaction were moderated by SE, while also controlling for yesterday's affect/relationship satisfaction. These analyses can be interpreted as testing whether the *change* in affect/relationship satisfaction from yesterday to today was influenced by the level of perceived acceptance yesterday, and whether this relationship was different for high and low SE participants.

Across dependent variables, all significant interactions between SE and perceived (or enacted) acceptance were followed with simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). Key to our hypotheses was the relationship between acceptance and capitalization indices among participants low (1 SD below the mean) vs. high (1 SD above the mean) in SE. Thus, we focused our simple slope analyses on these comparisons.

Following the recommendations of the actor-partner interdependence model (Kashy & Kenny, 2000) all analyses included partner SE as an additional covariate (correlation between partners' SE, $r(51) = -.0009, p = .99$). Although there were no three-way interactions with gender, there were gender differences in our dependent variables. Therefore gender was included as an additional covariate in all analyses². In sum, all analyses controlled for yesterday's affect/relationship satisfaction (when appropriate), partner SE, and gender. Unstandardized parameter estimates from all Study 1 analyses are presented in Tables 3a and 3b (also see Table 2 for zero-order correlations between SE and capitalization measures).

Results

Perceived acceptance

Mixed analysis was conducted on perceived acceptance with partner reported enacted acceptance, SE, and their interaction as predictors. There was a main effect of partners' report of enacted acceptance, $F(1, 48) = 54.94, p < .0001, b = .28$, and a main effect of SE, $F(1, 48) = 18.73, p < .0001, b = .20$, suggesting that participants low in SE perceived less acceptance overall. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between partner reports of enacted acceptance and participant SE, $F(1, 48) = 6.89, p = .01, b = .08$. Simple slopes analysis indicated that as partners' reports of their enacted acceptance increased, so too did reports of perceived acceptance for participants with high SE, $F(1, 48) = 56.46, p < .0001, b = .35$. This relationship was also significant for those low in SE, $F(1, 48) = 21.71, p < .0001, b = .21$, but was weaker in strength as indicated by the significant interaction term. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 1.

Reactions to Acceptance

Immediate reactions (same-day). Mixed analysis was conducted on today's positive affect with today's perceived acceptance, SE, and their interaction as predictors. There was a main effect of today's perceived acceptance, $F(1, 47) = 164.01, p < .0001, b = .25$, and a main effect of SE, $F(1, 47) = 50.36, p < .0001, b = .18$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between today's perceived acceptance and SE, $F(1, 47) = 6.28, p = .02, b = .05$. Although simple slopes analysis indicated that the relationship between perceived acceptance and positive affect was significant both for high SE, $F(1, 47) = 125.25, p < .0001, b = .29$, and low SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 73.74, p < .0001, b = .21$, the significant interaction suggests that the relationship was weaker for the latter. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 2.

Similar analysis was conducted on today's relationship satisfaction with today's perceived acceptance, SE, and their interaction as predictors. There was a main effect of today's perceived acceptance, $F(1, 47) = 367.89, p < .0001, b = .53$, and a main effect of SE, $F(1, 47) = 5.41, p = .02, b = .07$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between today's perceived acceptance and SE, $F(1, 47) = 9.91, p = .003, b = .08$. Simple slopes analysis indicated that as today's perceived acceptance increased, so too did relationship satisfaction for high SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 282.48, p < .0001, b = .60$. The relationship was also significant for low SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 186.49, p < .0001, b = .47$, but, again, was weaker in strength as demonstrated by the significant interaction. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 3.

Longer-term reactions (cross-day): Mixed analysis was conducted on today's positive affect with yesterday's perceived acceptance, SE, and their interaction as predictors. There was a significant main effect of yesterday's perceived acceptance, $F(1, 47) = 3.90, p = .05, b = .04$, and of SE, $F(1, 47) = 52.71, p < .0001, b = .20$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between yesterday's perceived acceptance and SE, $F(1, 47) = 4.35, p < .04, b = .04$. Simple slopes analyses indicated that as yesterday's perceived acceptance increased, so too did today's positive affect for high SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 7.58, p = .008, b = .07$. In contrast, participants with low SE did not maintain higher levels of positive affect today as a function of yesterday's perceived acceptance, $F < 1$. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 4.

Similarly, mixed analysis was conducted on today's relationship satisfaction with yesterday's perceived acceptance, SE, and their interaction as predictors. There was a main effect of yesterday's perceived acceptance, $F(1, 47) = 18.07, p < .0001, b = .13$, and a main effect of SE, $F(1, 47) = 8.08, p = .005, b = .12$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between yesterday's perceived acceptance and SE, $F(1, 47) = 8.61, p = .005, b = .08$. Simple slopes analysis revealed that yesterday's perceived acceptance positively predicted today's relationship satisfaction for high SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 24.44, p < .0001, b = .20$, and marginally did so, but at a weaker level, for low SE participants, $F(1, 47) = 3.02, p = .09, b = .06$. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 5.

Capitalization Consequences for Relationship Closeness

Finally, we evaluated the association between relationship closeness one year after the diary study and three indices of capitalization during the diary assessment: 1) perceived acceptance, 2) immediate (same-day) positive reactivity, and 3) longer-term (cross-day) positive reactivity. Across analyses we included participant SE, partner SE, participant gender, and baseline relationship closeness as covariates. That is, we measured the relationship between the general tendency to capitalize on partner acceptance and future relationship outcomes, irrespective of other individual difference variables. Additional covariates are described below. Unstandardized parameter estimates for all analyses can be found in Table 3b.

Perceived acceptance. First, we evaluated whether participants' average perceived acceptance across the 21 diary days predicted relationship closeness at the one-year follow-up. To make sure that the impact of perceived acceptance on future relationship closeness was not due to the degree to which partners engaged in acceptance in daily life, we also controlled for partners' average level of enacted acceptance across the 21-days. Mixed analysis revealed that there was a significant effect of average perceived acceptance in predicting relationship closeness, $F(1, 34) = 9.41, p < .01, b = .47$, suggesting that participants who perceived more acceptance from their partner in daily life, were closer to their partner one year later. As can be seen in Table 3b, across all the following analyses the only other predictor of relationship closeness at one-year was baseline relationship closeness, $F's > 35.99, p's < .0001$.

Next, we evaluated whether the correspondence between the partners' enacted acceptance, and the participants' perceived acceptance predicted relationship closeness at the one-year follow-up. We extracted unstandardized regression coefficients (b's) for the correspondence between each participant's perceived partner acceptance and their partner's enacted acceptance across the 21 diary days. Positive coefficients mean that on days in which the partner reported enacting more acceptance, the participant correspondingly perceived more acceptance, with the size of the coefficient reflecting the strength of the relationship. We then used these slope coefficients to predict participants' relationship closeness at the one-year follow-up³. The degree to which participants' perceptions of acceptance aligned with their partners' reports did not predict relationship closeness at follow-up, $F < 1$.

Reactions to acceptance. Given that we observed very similar patterns of reactivity to perceived acceptance across positive affect and relationship satisfaction, $r(1953) = .52, p < .0001$, we created a new composite measure of positive reactivity by averaging participants' daily responses to these two variables ($\alpha = .70, M = 3.33, SD = .81$). To serve as our immediate (same-day) positive reactivity index, we again extracted unstandardized regression coefficients from participants' perceptions of partner acceptance today and their composite positive reactivity that same day, across the 21 days of the diary period ($M = .38, SD = .24$). Finally, for our longer-term (cross-day) positive reactivity index, we extracted unstandardized regression coefficients from participants' perceptions of partner acceptance yesterday and their composite positive reactivity today ($M = .06, SD = .23$). For both indices positive coefficients indicate that when the participant perceived more acceptance, they experienced higher levels of positive affect/relationship satisfaction on that same day and/or on the next day, with the strength of the association reflected by the size of the coefficient⁴. We then used these coefficients to predict relationship closeness one year later⁵. Mixed analysis revealed that relationship closeness one year later was not predicted by same-day positive reactivity or cross-day positive reactivity, $F's < 1$.

Summary

Overall, these results lend support to our prediction that people with low SE are less likely than people with high SE to capitalize on social acceptance from their romantic partners. As compared to participants with high SE, participants with low SE noticed fewer of their partners' accepting behaviors, and were less positively reactive to perceived social acceptance, experiencing smaller boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction, and experiencing these boosts for a shorter amount of time. Importantly, low SE participants did not appear to completely miss out on the positive effects of partner acceptance, but did not capitalize to the same degree as participants with high SE. We did find that average perceived acceptance across the 21 diary days significantly predicted relationship closeness over time. The more acceptance participants noticed, regardless of what their partner reported, the closer and more committed they were to their partner one year later. The other capitalization indices (correspondence between enacted and perceived acceptance, same-day positive reactivity, and cross-day positive reactivity) did not predict relationship closeness over time.

Study 2

In Study 2 we again evaluated the relationship between SE and capitalization on partner acceptance, but now in a controlled laboratory environment. Both members of romantic couples came to the laboratory and one was assigned to deliver a compliment to the other. Participants reported on their perceptions and affect in response to the compliment. In addition, we followed participants during the year following their laboratory session and evaluated the relationship between capitalizing on social acceptance and long-term relationship satisfaction. With these data we again assessed our main hypotheses, but now in response to a specific, and measurable, acceptance experience.

Hypothesis 1 (Perceptions): Compared to participants high in SE, participants low in SE will perceive the compliment in less positive ways, even when controlling for outside ratings of the compliment made by coders. That is, participants with low SE will fail to fully capitalize on the compliment by under-perceiving how accepting it is.

Hypothesis 2 (Reactions): Even when participants with low SE do perceive the compliment in positive ways, they will fail to fully capitalize on the compliment by reacting less positively to it. That is, compared to participants high in SE, those low in SE will experience a smaller increase in positive affect from before to after the compliment conversation, even when controlling for their perceptions of compliment acceptance. Moreover, in the one-week follow-up assessment we additionally measured how participants remembered feeling during the compliment conversation. We hypothesized that participants with low SE will remember feeling less good during the compliment conversation than participants with high SE, regardless of how they actually reported feeling during the laboratory session. This is conceptually different from the affect question we evaluated in Study 1 – in which low and high SE participants differed in their maintenance of positive affect the day following partner acceptance. Here, we are evaluating whether participants with low SE fail to fully capitalize on acceptance by *remembering* feeling less good during the compliment conversation than participants with high SE, irrespective of how they actually felt when the event occurred. Unlike in Study 1, we were unable to measure changes in relationship satisfaction in response to the compliment conversation.

Hypothesis 3 (Consequences). The more a participant capitalizes on partner acceptance during the laboratory session, the more satisfied they will be in their relationship one year later. More specifically, we extracted four indices of capitalization based on reports during and after the laboratory assessment and hypothesized that each positively predicts relationship satisfaction over time. These include the degree to which participants: 1) perceived acceptance during the laboratory session, 2) perceived more acceptance to the degree that coders scored the compliment as higher in acceptance, 3) reacted positively to acceptance when it was perceived, and 4) remembered feeling positively during the acceptance experience one week later.

Method

Participants

Fifty-nine heterosexual couples involved in non-married, monogamous relationships were recruited for participation in the study using flyers in and around the University of California, Berkeley campus and via craigslist ads. Participants were provided with monetary compensation or course credit for their participation. Ethnic breakdown was 1.71% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 29.91% Asian, 5.98% Black or African American, 45.30% White, and 17.09% other, with 15.18% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The participant sample was generally comparable to the University of California, Berkeley student population on these demographic variables. To be eligible for enrollment, couples had to have been dating for a minimum of 3 months (months: $M = 22.39$, $SD = 18.93$) and each member had to be in the age range 18 to 35 years ($M = 21.92$, $SD = 3.63$).

Of the original sample, 54 compliment receivers completed the one-week, and 44 completed the one-year, follow-up assessments. There were no significant differences between the full sample and those that completed the one-week assessment, t 's < 42 , p 's $> .67$, or one-year assessment, t 's < 1.18 , p 's $> .24$, on SE, partner SE, age, baseline relationship satisfaction, or the amount of time they had been in a relationship. Moreover, there were no differences in the gender composition of the full sample and the subsamples that completed the one-week, $\chi^2 = .02$, $p = .89$, or one-year assessments, $\chi^2 = 1.27$, $p = .26$.

Procedure

This assessment was part of a larger study on giving and receiving acceptance, which additionally included measures of psychophysiological and neuroendocrine responses. Only measures relevant to the current assessment will be described.

Before the laboratory session. Participants completed a series of background surveys online from their home, which included the RSE scale and baseline relationship satisfaction measures.

Laboratory session. Before arriving for their laboratory session one member of each couple was randomly assigned to the participant role (receiving the compliment), and the other to the partner role (giving the compliment) – with a separate experimenter assigned to each individual. Upon arrival for their laboratory session, couples were escorted to the main experimental room, which had two chairs on opposite sides of a small table and a camera unobtrusively focused on each chair. After the couples were seated, the experimenter described the study and videotaping procedures and went through informed consent. Subsequently, the

partner was escorted to a different room.

The partner was told that s/he was assigned to lead a five-minute conversation and that during the conversation the participant would remain silent. The experimenter explained that the partner was assigned to describe three qualities about the participant that they really liked and appreciated. The experimenter went on to explain that the conversation should last the entire five minutes, and they were encouraged to come up with some examples and situations in which their partner demonstrated such qualities. The experimenter gave the partner a form which further outlined these instructions and provided space for them to write out the details of each compliment. While the partner prepared for the conversation, the participant was given a neutral magazine to read and left alone.

Once the partner was finished preparing, the experimenter explained to the participant the same basic information about the conversation as was previously told to the partner (e.g., the partner would lead the conversation, the participant should remain silent). The participant was led to believe, however, that their partner was allowed to choose from a few different conversation topics and had freely chosen to discuss what qualities they like and appreciate about them (rather than informing the participant that the partner had been assigned to that topic).

When ready, the partner was brought back to the same room as the participant, and was seated across from him/her. The experimenter gave a signal over an intercom for the partner to begin the conversation. The conversation lasted five minutes and was video-recorded.

Afterward, the members of the couple were separated. Both participants filled out a questionnaire which assessed how they felt during the compliment conversation along with their perceptions of the conversation. After completing all laboratory procedures, participants were given further information about the follow-up assessments that were scheduled to take place during the subsequent year, were compensated and debriefed. During debriefing the participant was not informed that their partner did not choose the topic of conversation.

Follow-up assessments. Couples completed follow-up assessments one week and one year following the laboratory session. These assessments were emailed to the participants who completed them from home. The assessments included measures of current relationship satisfaction. In addition, participants were asked to think back to the laboratory session and recollect how they felt during the compliment conversation.

Survey Measures

Rosenberg self-esteem scale. The scale used in Study 1 was also used in Study 2 (Rosenberg, 1989) ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 4.69$, $SD = .96$).

Relationship satisfaction. A composite measure of relationship satisfaction was created from participants' responses to five questions: the current degree of happiness in the relationship, the warmth and comfort of the relationship, how rewarding the relationship was, their satisfaction in the relationship, and their commitment to the relationship. These measures are slightly different from those used in Study 1. Given that this assessment was less involved than the procedures used in Study 1 (which included the 21 day daily-diary, along with the laboratory and follow-up procedures) we were able to include more items in our evaluation of relationship functioning. Responses were made on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*). In the follow-up questionnaires happiness was mistakenly measured on a 6-point scale but was rescaled to the same 5-point scale as the rest of the items. Responses to the five items were averaged to serve as the composite index of relationship satisfaction, which was measured at two points: before the

laboratory session (baseline) ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 5.21$, $SD = .81$) and again one year following the laboratory session ($n = 37$, $\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.96$, $SD = .94$).

Laboratory Measures

Perceived acceptance. Following the compliment conversation participants completed a questionnaire that included measures of how they perceived the compliment conversation. Participants rated on scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), how sincere they perceived their partner was during the conversation ($M = 6.73$, $SD = .64$), and how much their partner enjoyed the conversation ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.38$). They also rated their perceptions of the overall conversation tone on a scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*) ($M = 6.53$, $SD = .65$). These three items were averaged to create a composite measure of perceived acceptance ($\alpha = .65$, $M = 6.25$, $SD = .70$).

Coded acceptance. In Study 2 we used coder ratings to serve as our barometer for enacted acceptance, rather than the partners' reports (used in Study 1). As partners' reports themselves could be biased (for example, by their own level of SE), outsider coded acceptance affords a more tightly controlled evaluation of our hypotheses than possible in Study 1.

Toward this end, two independent coders scored each conversation (using the same scales as above) for partner sincerity, partner enjoyment, and conversation tone. The coders were trained using seven of the conversations, double-scored 35% of the remaining conversations (19 conversations), and each coded approximately 50% of the remaining 33 conversations. There was high reliability for the conversations that were double-scored (partner sincerity: $\alpha = .70$; partner enjoyment: $\alpha = .78$; conversation tone: $\alpha = .70$). For the final analyses, we used the consensus scores from the seven conversations coders trained on, the data from a primary coder for the conversations that were double-scored, and each coder's separate data for the couples that were only scored by one person. Ratings on these three scales were averaged to create a composite measure of coded acceptance ($\alpha = .77$, $M = 5.40$, $SD = .74$). This measure was positively correlated with a composite of partners' ratings of their own enjoyment, sincerity, and tone, $r(57) = .28$, $p = .03$. There was no correlation between coded acceptance and partners' SE, $r(57) = .19$, $p = .16$, or participants' SE, $r(57) = -.08$, $p = .53$.

Positive affect. Responses on two items were used to assess positive affect. Happiness was measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Enjoyment of the conversation was measured on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) and was then rescaled to be on the same 5-point scale as happiness. Participants rated happiness at baseline ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .84$), and rated both happiness ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .81$) and enjoyment ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .99$) after the conversation – with respect to how they felt during the conversation. In addition, at the one-week follow-up assessment participants reported on both how happy they remembered feeling during the compliment conversation ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .86$) and how much they remembered enjoying the conversation ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .84$). A composite measure of positive affect was created by averaging responses to happiness and enjoyment (except at baseline, when enjoyment was not measured) (after the conversation: $\alpha = .74$, $M = 4.17$, $SD = .80$; one-week: $\alpha = .52$, $M = 4.23$, $SD = .70$).

Data Analysis

The laboratory data involved a hierarchical structure in which participants were nested

within couples. Analyses were conducted in the SAS statistical package using the mixed procedure, which is based on a hierarchical linear model approach (Kenny et al., 1998). Consistent with the actor-partner interdependence model (Kashy & Kenny, 2000) all analyses were conducted with both participants' and partners' SE entered in the model (correlation between partners' SE, $r(57) = .29, p = .03$). Although there were no three-way interactions with gender, there were gender differences in our dependent variables. Gender was therefore included as a covariate in all analyses (with other covariates further described below). Please see Table 1 for comparisons between Study 1 and Study 2 analyses. Unstandardized parameter estimates from all Study 2 analyses are presented in Tables 5a and 5b (also see Table 4 for zero-order correlations between SE and capitalization measures).

Results

Perceived Acceptance

Mixed analysis was conducted on perceived acceptance, with the participants' SE, coded acceptance, and their interaction as predictors. There were no significant main effects, F 's < 1 . There was, however, a marginal interaction between participant SE and coded acceptance, $F(1, 54) = 3.11, p = .08, b = .25$. Simple slopes analyses were conducted to further understand the interaction pattern (Aiken & West, 1991). Participants high in SE (1 SD above the mean) perceived the compliment as marginally more accepting to the degree that the coded acceptance ratings were higher, $t(54) = 1.88, p = .07, b = .35$. In contrast, participants low in SE (1 SD below the mean) did not perceive the conversation any differently as a function of coded acceptance, $t(54) = -.74, p = .46, b = -.14$. Illustration of the interaction based on estimates obtained from the mixed analysis is presented in Figure 6.

Reactions to acceptance

Immediate reactions (same-day). Mixed analysis was conducted on positive affect during the compliment conversation with the participants' SE, the participants' perceived acceptance⁶, and their interaction as predictors. The participants' baseline positive affect was included as an additional covariate. In effect, this measures the change in positive affect from baseline to the compliment. There was a significant main effect of perceived acceptance, $F(1, 53) = 54.55, p < .0001, b = .71$, suggesting that participants experienced a greater boost in positive affect to the degree that they perceived the conversation higher in acceptance. In addition, there was a significant main effect of participant SE, $F(1, 53) = 4.31, p = .04, b = .15$. There was no interaction between participant SE and perceived acceptance, $F < 1$. These results suggest that irrespective of perceived acceptance, those low in SE experienced smaller boosts in positive affect from baseline to the compliment conversation than participants high in SE.

Longer-term reactions (cross-week). Mixed analysis was conducted on how participants remembered feeling during the compliment conversation, as reported one week after the laboratory session. Participants' SE, participants' perceived acceptance, and their interaction were entered as predictors. In addition, participants' positive affect during the compliment, as measured during the laboratory session, was included as an additional covariate. In effect, this measures the change in how participants reported feeling during the conversation, from shortly after the conversation finished to one week later. There was no main effect of perceived

acceptance, $F < 1$. There was a marginal main effect of participant SE, $F(1, 48) = 2.90, p < .10$, $b = .12$, suggesting that one week later participants high in SE tended to remember feeling more positive during the conversation than participants low in SE, irrespective of how they actually reported feeling during the conversation. There was no interaction between SE and perceived acceptance, $F < 1$.

Capitalization Consequences for Relationship Satisfaction

As in Study 1, we evaluated the association between relationship outcomes one year after the laboratory session and three indices of capitalization: 1) perceived acceptance, 2) immediate (same-day) positive reactivity, and 3) longer-term (cross-week) positive reactivity. So as to measure the relationship between the general tendency to perceive partner acceptance and future relationship outcomes, irrespective of other individual difference variables, we included participant SE, partner SE, participant gender, and baseline relationship satisfaction as covariates. Additional covariates are described below. Unstandardized parameter estimates can be found in Table 5b.

Perceived acceptance. First, we evaluated whether participants' overall level of perceived acceptance during the compliment conversation predicted relationship satisfaction at the one-year follow-up. To make sure that the impact of perceived acceptance on future relationship satisfaction was not due to the degree to which partners provided accepting compliments, we also controlled for coded acceptance. Mixed analysis revealed that there was no effect of perceived acceptance in predicting relationship satisfaction one year later, $F < 1$. Across all subsequent analyses, only participant gender marginally predicted relationship satisfaction, with men more satisfied than women over time, F 's $> 2.90, p$'s $< .10$.

Next, we created a difference score by subtracting coded acceptance from participant perceived acceptance, with positive numbers indicating that the participant perceived more acceptance than the coders. We then evaluated whether the correspondence between coded acceptance and participant perceived acceptance during the compliment conversation predicted relationship satisfaction one year later. The results were not significant, $F < 1$.

Reactions to acceptance. Next, we evaluated whether participants' positive reactivity to their partners' compliment predicted relationship satisfaction one year later. To serve as our index of same-day positive reactivity we computed the difference between participants' baseline happiness and their positive affect during the conversation ($M = .70, SD = .94$). Positive numbers suggest that the participant felt more positive affect during the conversation than when they came into the laboratory. To serve as our index of cross-week positive reactivity we computed the difference between participants' positive affect during the conversation and their remembered positive affect recalled one week later ($M = .05, SD = .51$). Positive numbers suggest that the participant remembered feeling more positively during the conversation, as reported one week later, than they actually reported during the laboratory session. Perceived acceptance was included as an additional covariate⁷. Mixed analysis revealed that neither same-day nor cross-week positive reactivity predicted relationship satisfaction one year later, F 's < 1 .

Summary

Study 2 provided some support for our predictions that people low in SE do not fully capitalize on social acceptance from their romantic partners. Participants received a compliment

from their romantic partner and reported on their perceptions and affect after the event. Participants low in SE perceived the conversation in less positive ways than high SE participants, particularly when the conversation was rated more accepting by coders. Moreover, regardless of how positively low SE participants perceived the conversation, they experienced a smaller boost in positive affect during the conversation than participants high in SE, and tended to remember feeling less positively during the conversation one week later. These capitalization indices did not predict relationship satisfaction one year after the laboratory session, however.

General Discussion

Across two studies, we found support for our prediction that compared to individuals with high SE, those with low SE are less likely to capitalize on, or make the most of, social acceptance from romantic partners. These capitalization deficits emerged across the domains of perception and positive reactivity (affect and relationship satisfaction), and were found both in daily life and in a laboratory paradigm.

Perceived Acceptance

In Study 1, as compared to participants with high SE, participants with low SE underperceived their romantic partners' acceptance behaviors in daily life. To serve as our barometer for the degree to which social acceptance was present, we asked partners to report on whether they did or said things each day that made the participant feel secure and loved. We then evaluated whether the match between what the partner reported doing and what the participant perceived the partner doing varied as a function of SE. We found that although participants low in SE indeed perceived more acceptance on days when their partner reported enacting more acceptance, the match in perceived and enacted acceptance was greater for high SE participants.

We found a similar pattern of results in Study 2. In this study, participants knew that their partner was going to give them a compliment. Therefore, we did not evaluate whether the participant noticed the compliment (like in Study 1), but rather how positively the participants perceived the acceptance that they received. Coders scored the conversation for the partners' sincerity, the partners' enjoyment, and the overall tone of the conversation. These served as an index of how accepting the compliment was. Participants were asked to provide responses to the same three questions. Again, we evaluated the match between how accepting the coders scored the compliment and how accepting the participant perceived the compliment, and whether this varied by the participants' SE. Using outside codes in this way allowed us to control for the possibility that the partners of those low in SE may in fact deliver less accepting compliments (though preliminary analyses revealed that there was no relationship between the partners' or participants' SE and coded compliment acceptance). The nature of the partners' accepting behaviors could not be monitored directly in the diary format of Study 1.

We found that when coders rated the conversation more positively, participants high in SE perceived the conversation more positively as well. These high SE participants seemed able to accurately perceive the positivity of the acceptance they received. In contrast, low SE participants perceived the conversation in less positive ways, regardless of how the conversation was coded. That is, even when the compliment was rated by coders as high in acceptance, participants low in SE continued to perceive it in less positive ways.

Together, these results suggest that compared to individuals with high SE, those with low

SE tend to under-notice their partners' accepting behaviors and perceive such behaviors in less positive ways. This could be a basic information processing phenomena, in which self-views guide what people pay attention to and remember (e.g., Markus, 1977). For example, people have been found to remember feedback in ways that conform to self-views – with those high in SE remembering more favorable feedback than unfavorable, and those low in SE remembering more unfavorable feedback than favorable (Swann & Read, 1981). Because acceptance contradicts the more negative self-views of people with low SE, from a self-verification perspective, they may under-perceive acceptance so as to maintain a sense that they know themselves and their place in the world (Swann, 1997). These findings also fit with the risk-regulation literature, which argues that individuals with low SE prioritize self-protection in their romantic relationships (Murray et al., 2006). While the low SE individual may be aware of their partner's behavior at a literal level, it is possible that they perceive the behavior in overly cautious ways – not recognizing that it was intended to make them feel secure and loved or that the partner was sincere in their intentions. Such perceptions protect the individual from embarrassment should they have mistakenly interpreted the behavior in overly positive ways, and help to avert attachment to a partner that could reject them in the future.

Positive Reactivity

We also found evidence that when individuals with low SE indeed perceive acceptance, their positive reactions to the acceptance are more muted than the reactions experienced by those high in SE. In Study 1, participants with low SE experienced higher levels of positive affect and relationship satisfaction on days when they perceived their partner doing more to make them feel secure and loved than on days when they perceived their partner doing less. However, these boosts were not as large as those experienced by participants high in SE. In addition, participants with high SE were more likely to savor the boosts in affect and relationship satisfaction that they experienced. In fact, these participants showed increasingly positive reactions over time, experiencing higher levels of positive affect and relationship satisfaction the day following the acceptance experience than the day the event initially occurred. In contrast, the positive reactions experienced by participants with low SE tended to plateau that same day.

In Study 2, both low and high SE participants experienced higher levels of positive affect during the conversation if they perceived the compliment from their partner in more positive ways. Irrespective of how positively they perceived their partners' compliment, however, low SE participants experienced smaller boosts in positive affect during the conversation (as compared to baseline), than participants with high SE. We did not observe the same interaction between perceived acceptance and SE that was found in Study 1. That is, the relative difference between low and high SE participants in their affective response to the compliment was the same whether they perceived the conversation as being quite positive, or less positive. A similar pattern emerged when participants recalled how they felt during the conversation – when asked to think back to the event one week later. Participants with high SE tended to remember feeling more positively during the conversation than participants with low SE, irrespective of how they actually felt when the conversation occurred.

As with our perception findings, these results suggest that people low in SE do capitalize on their partners' accepting behaviors, but not to the same degree as those with high SE. Overall, when a low SE person does perceive their partners' acceptance, their affective and relationship level reactions appear more subdued. This may be because acceptance is not a

purely positive experience for these individuals. From a self-verification perspective, acceptance may signal to a low SE person that their partner does not really know them, or even that they do not know themselves. From a risk-regulation perspective, people with low SE may feel conflicted – desperately wanting to trust and believe in their partners' love and intentions, but feeling afraid to do so. Even though it may feel good at some level to be admired or appreciated by a partner, these motivational conflicts may stifle the full extent of a low SE persons' positive response.

These findings add to the literature on self-verification and affective processing. The meta-analysis by Kwang and Swann (2010) concluded that affective responses to feedback are more determined by self-enhancement motives (the desire to be seen in a positive way) than self-verification motives. They argue that people respond positively to positive feedback and negatively to negative feedback, regardless of their self-views. Consistent with their conclusion, we indeed found that low SE individuals experienced boosts in positive affect when perceiving acceptance from their partners. However, we found that the extent of this boost did vary by SE, with low SE participants experiencing smaller increases in positive affect than high SE participants. Our results suggest that self-views do influence affective responses to positive feedback, but that this influence is on the extent of the affective response, not whether positive affect is felt at all. These findings also contribute to the risk-regulation literature by suggesting that although people with low SE may desperately want acceptance from romantic partners, their fear of humiliation and rejection may prevent them from making the most of partner behaviors that indicate they are in a secure relationship and that their partner does indeed have positive regard for them.

Capitalization Consequences

In Study 1, the more acceptance participants noticed across the 21 diary days the more committed and close to their partner they were one year later. These results held regardless of how much acceptance their partner actually reported enacting during the diary period. This finding suggests that an important source of relationship satisfaction is the degree to which you take notice of the things your partner does for you. Moreover, participants reported on the degree to which their partners' behavior was intended to make them feel secure and loved. Thus, it might be particularly important not just to "see" your partners' positive behaviors, but to construe your partners' intentions in positive ways – believing that they are engaging in such loving behaviors because they want you to be happy and feel secure. It makes good sense why you might not feel close and connected to a partner over time if you perceive your partners' behaviors in less affirmative ways; for example, thinking that they engaged in a positive behavior because they felt guilty about something or thought it was the right thing to do.

We did not find the same pattern of results in Study 2. That is, participants' perceptions of their partners' acceptance during the compliment conversation was unrelated to relationship satisfaction one year later. Why are these results different? Perhaps it was because in Study 2 we overtly explained to participants that their partner was going to give them a compliment. Although participants could still vary in the degree to which they perceived the compliment in positive ways, they knew it was a compliment. This might leave less room for interpretation than when a partner gives a compliment in daily life, and thus may be less diagnostic of future relationship patterns.

Moreover, the diary measures not only evaluated whether participants noticed their

partner saying things to make them feel secure and loved (e.g., compliments) but also doing things with these goals in mind. Perhaps these behavioral indicators of acceptance are more common in daily life than compliments, and leave more room for interpretation. For example, although it is possible to perceive a partner surprising you with dinner as a way they are trying to make you feel secure and loved, it is easily possible to perceive your partner engaging in that same behavior for other reasons, such as because they are trying to eat healthier, simply felt like cooking, or wanted to make amends for a prior transgression. The differences in these results highlight the importance of studying capitalizing processes at multiple levels, with multiple methods.

Contrary to our predictions, indices of positive reactivity measured in Studies 1 and 2 did not have down-stream consequences either. The magnitude of the boosts in positive affect and relationship satisfaction participants experienced in response to acceptance was unrelated to relationship outcomes one year later. In these studies, we asked participants to report on their partners' accepting behaviors in daily life, and put them through an acceptance experience. Perhaps these manipulations subtly encouraged participants to take notice of their partners' accepting behaviors more than they would do otherwise, and thus allowed us to measure reactivity to acceptance that would not normally have been experienced. In contrast, the degree to which they under-perceived acceptance despite these encouragements may be the most diagnostic of their typical behavioral patterns and thus their future relationship outcomes.

Perhaps it would have been fruitful to additionally evaluate changes in participants' SE and general well-being over time. Even though low SE individuals, who do not fully capitalize on their partners' acceptance, may feel verified and self-protected, these individuals may also continue to feel negatively about themselves, perhaps even worse over time. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that self-verification strivings can perpetuate low SE and even predispose an individual to depression (North & Swann, 2009). Such a pattern is especially likely if the low SE individual not only fails to capitalize on their partner's acceptance, but overtly discourages their partner from making such overtures. That is, over time the low SE individual may cut themselves off from positive feedback altogether, and thus create a world that offers no evidence to disconfirm the negative views they hold about themselves.

Finally, although research indicates that responses to partner positive behaviors, such as gratitude, appreciation, or compliments, are important for relationship functioning (e.g., Algoe et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2012) it is also possible that responses to negative partner behaviors exert stronger down-stream consequences. For example, it would be interesting to evaluate reactions to both compliments and insults – and determine which is more critical for relationship health.

Implications and Future Directions

Collectively, these results suggest that people with low SE do not make the most of their partners' accepting behaviors. An important question that follows from this finding is whether these capitalization deficits impact partners – the people providing the acceptance. Engaging in behaviors to make your partner feel secure and loved is effortful. It might be quite disappointing if your partner does not notice all that you do for them, or does not seem to feel very good or satisfied with you, in response. Do partners of low SE people feel let down by their partners' responses? Do they stop engaging in these behaviors over time?

The results of these two studies are relatively consistent with predictions made by both self-verification theory and the risk-regulation model. So which is it – self-verification or self-

protection motives that drive the responses we observed? Unfortunately, our research does not answer this question. For example, if a person with low SE perceives their partner's accepting behaviors in more negative ways, it seems highly possible that they are viewing the feedback in ways that preserve their self-views, and that they are overly cautious in their interpretation of the feedback for fear of being mistaken or letting themselves get too attached. We suspect that both of these motives are involved, and may even accumulate to prevent people with low SE from taking full advantage of their partners' loving behaviors.

Future research should be done to tease these apart. For example, experimental work by Cameron and colleagues (2010) found that when the risk of rejection was minimized (for example, alerting the participant that their partner had social anxiety), participants with low SE were more likely to take notice of an interaction partners' accepting behaviors (Cameron et al., 2010). Here, self-protection motives more strongly influenced low SE participants' responses to the acceptance, because minimizing the risk of rejection did not change whether the accepting feedback was verifying or not. Another possibility is to evaluate responses to domain specific feedback. For example, if a low SE person generally has negative self-views, but believes they are particularly attractive, feedback from a romantic partner regarding their good looks would be self-verifying, but might still activate self-protection concerns. Moreover, it may be fruitful to evaluate the specificity of these findings to partner acceptance. For example, do individuals with low SE fail to capitalize on other types of positive events, such as making the most of a high grade in school, or an athletic achievement? Self-verification processes are relevant to feedback in a variety of domains, as long as the feedback is self-relevant. In contrast, risk-regulation processes are only germane to relationship contexts.

Again, this research suggests that people with low SE are not fully capitalizing on social acceptance and are thus missing out on opportunities to feel confident about themselves and their relationships. Such experiences, if adaptively processed, may have the potential to improve their negative self-views and even their relationship functioning. Therefore, future research should evaluate ways to teach low SE individuals how to better take advantage of their partners' accepting behaviors. For example, these individuals may benefit from attention training paradigms that direct them to be vigilant for signs of partner acceptance (e.g., Dandeneau & Baldwin, 2004). There is some evidence that these responses may be malleable. For example, Marigold, Holmes, and Ross (2007) had participants think about a compliment paid to them by their current romantic partner and either cognitively reframe the compliment, by thinking about it in an abstract manner (e.g., meaning, significance), or think about it in a concrete manner (e.g., details about what was said, what you were doing, where you were). When asked to think about the compliment in terms of abstract features, participants with low SE reported more happiness and increased state SE. Moreover, this reframing improved relationship-level responses – participants with low SE who thought about their partners' compliments in an abstract way felt more relationship security and recalled more positive, and less negative, behaviors from their partners in the intervening weeks. In this condition, they were effectively the same as participants with high SE.

Summary

This research evaluated the role of SE in predicting the ways people respond to acceptance from romantic partners. We showed that participants with low SE under-perceived their partners' loving and accepting behaviors in daily life. When these behaviors were noticed,

participants with low SE experienced smaller boosts in relationship satisfaction and positive affect than participants with high SE. Moreover, the degree to which participants noticed their partners' accepting behaviors predicted future relationship closeness one year later. In a laboratory study, compared to participants with high SE, those low in SE perceived a compliment conversation with their partner in less positive ways and displayed smaller boosts in positive affect in response to this seemingly positive experience. These results show that individuals with low SE fail to fully capitalize on acceptance from romantic partners, and suggest that targeting responses to acceptance might be an important point of intervention for those low in SE.

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Footnotes

¹ We also measured relationship status but only three couples who responded to the follow-up questionnaire in Study 1 had broken up one year later. Therefore, we did not have enough power to run these analyses.

² We also tested for the effect of relationship length in Studies 1 and 2. There were no three-way interactions or main effects of relationship length on our dependent variables – thus it was dropped from the analyses.

³ There was no correlation between average perceived acceptance across the 21 diary days and the slope of perceived acceptance on enacted acceptance, $r(51) = -.01, p = .90$. The results do not change if average perceived acceptance was included as an additional covariate. Moreover, there was no interaction between average perceived acceptance and slope in predicting relationship closeness over time.

⁴ We could also have evaluated whether the average level of positive affect and relationship satisfaction across the 21 diary days predicts relationship closeness one year later (as we did with average perceptions). However, these analyses were not relevant to the current evaluation of capitalization on acceptance.

⁵ There was no correlation between average positive reaction across the 21 diary days and the slope of today's positive reactivity on today's perceived acceptance, $r(51) = -.03, p = .75$. There was a marginal correlation between average positive reactions and the slope of today's positive reactivity on yesterday's perceived acceptance, $r(51) = -.17, p = .07$. The pattern of results did not change when the average positive reaction across the 21 diary days was included as an additional covariate. Moreover, there were no interactions between average positive reaction and slope.

⁶ It was also possible to evaluate immediate and longer-term reactions with coded acceptance as a predictor (instead of perceived acceptance). However, with these analyses we wanted to understand whether SE relates to an individuals' positive reactivity when they themselves perceive partner acceptance (irrespective of how others construe their partners' behavior).

⁷ There were significant negative correlations between baseline positive affect and change in positive affect from baseline to the compliment conversation, $r(57) = -.60, p < .0001$, as well as positive affect during the compliment conversation and change in remembered positive affect from the compliment conversation to one week later, $r(57) = -.49, p < .001$. These results suggest that there was a ceiling effect in affect change – the higher a participant was at the initial time point the less the participant was able to increase in their affect. Neither the same-day nor cross-week capitalization analyses change with baseline positive affect or positive affect during the compliment conversation (respectively) included as additional covariates. Moreover, there were no interactions with initial affect and change in affect.

Table 1: Capitalization measures across Studies 1 and 2

	Study 1	Study 2
	Daily Diary	Laboratory Assessment
Partner Acceptance	Daily report of partners doing things to make the participant feel secure and loved	Partner provides a compliment – describes three things about the participant that they like and appreciate
Capitalization	Study 1 Daily Diary	Study 2 Laboratory Assessment
Perceived Acceptance	Correspondence between partner reported enacted acceptance and participant reported perceived acceptance	Correspondence between coded acceptance (partner sincerity, partner enjoyment, tone) and participant perceived acceptance
Positive Reactivity: Same-Day Positive Affect	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance today and positive affect today	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance and change in positive affect from baseline to the compliment
Positive Reactivity: Cross-Day/Week Positive Affect	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance yesterday and positive affect today	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance and change in positive affect during the compliment and what the participant remembered feeling, reported one week later
Positive Reactivity: Same-Day Relationship Satisfaction	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance today and relationship satisfaction today	-
Positive Reactivity: Cross-Day Relationship Satisfaction	Correspondence between participant perceived acceptance yesterday and relationship satisfaction today	-

Table 2: Zero-order correlations between SE and capitalization measures in Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-Esteem	-	.23*	.12	.07	.07
2. Average Perceived Acceptance		-	-.01	.03	-.23*
3. Slope Perceived Acceptance on Enacted Acceptance			-	.28**	.16
4. Slope Positive Reactivity Today on Perceived Acceptance Today				-	.22*
5. Slope Positive Reactivity Today on Perceived Acceptance Yesterday					-

*Note: $p \leq .10$, $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ **, $p < .001$ ****

Table 3a: Unstandardized parameter estimates predicting capitalization indices (Study 1)

Diary Measures	Participant SE	Partner Enacted Acceptance	SE * Enacted Acceptance
Perceived Acceptance	.20***	.28***	.08*
	Participant SE	Perceived Acceptance	SE * Perceived Acceptance
Same-Day Positive Affect	.18***	.25***	.05*
Cross-Day Positive Affect	.20***	.04 [†]	.04*
Same-Day Relationship Satisfaction	.07*	.53***	.08**
Cross-Day Relationship Satisfaction	.12**	.13***	.08**

*Note: $p \leq .10$ [†], $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ ** , $p < .001$ ****

Table 3b: Unstandardized parameter estimates predicting 1-year relationship closeness (Study 1)

Capitalization Measures		Participant SE	Partner SE	Baseline Closeness
Average Perceived Acceptance	.47**	-.14	-.03	.77***
Slope Perceived Acceptance on Enacted Acceptance	.09	-.07	-.08	.87***
Slope Positive Reactivity Today on Perceived Acceptance Today	-.12	-.06	-.08	.85***
Slope Positive Reactivity Today on Perceived Acceptance Yesterday	-.16	-.07	-.07	.85***

Note: $p \leq .10$, $p < .05$, $p < .01$, $p < .001$

For relationship closeness: $n = 80$ (completed follow-up and still together)

Table 4: Zero-order correlations between SE and capitalization measures in Study 2

	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Esteem	-	.17	-.02	.08
2. Perceived Acceptance		-	.14	-.30*
3. Same-Day Positive Affect (Change Compliment – Baseline)			-	-.30*
4. Cross-Week Positive Affect (Change One Week – Compliment)				-

*Note: $p \leq .10$ †, $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ **, $p < .001$ ****

Table 5a: Unstandardized parameter estimates predicting capitalization indices (Study 2)

Laboratory Measures	Participant SE	Coded Acceptance	Participant SE * Coded Acceptance
Perceived Acceptance	.07	.11	.25†

	Participant SE	Perceived Acceptance	Participant SE * Perceived Acceptance
Same-Day Positive Affect	.15*	.71**	.04
Cross-Week Positive Affect	.12†	.21	-.04

*Note: $p \leq .10$ †, $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ ** , $p < .001$ ****

Table 5b: Unstandardized parameter estimates predicting 1-year relationship satisfaction (Study 2)

Capitalization Measures		Participant SE	Partner SE	Baseline Satisfaction
Perceived Acceptance	.14	.21	.003	.25
Correspondence Perceived Acceptance and Coded Acceptance	-.05	.16	.01	.36
Same-Day Positive Affect	.03	.17	.03	.25
Cross-Week Positive Affect	-.21	.26	.05	.17

*Note: $p \leq .10$ †, $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ ** , $p < .001$ ****

For relationship satisfaction: $n = 37$ (completed follow-up and still together)

Figure 1. Perceived acceptance – Study 1

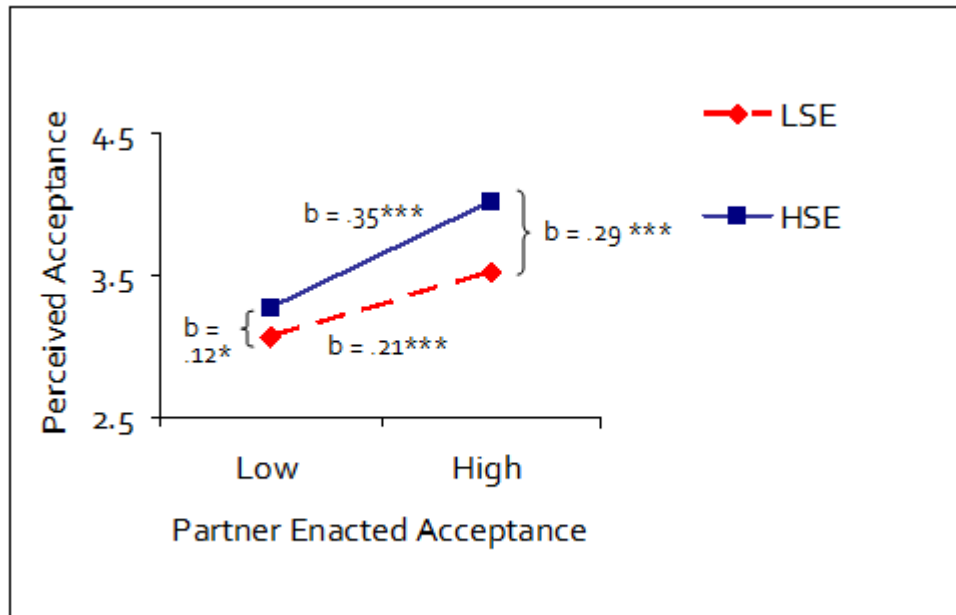


Figure 1. Perceived acceptance predicted from participant SE, and partner reported enacted acceptance. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and the mean of enacted acceptance.

Note: $p \leq .10^*$, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Figure 2. Same-day positive affect – Study 1

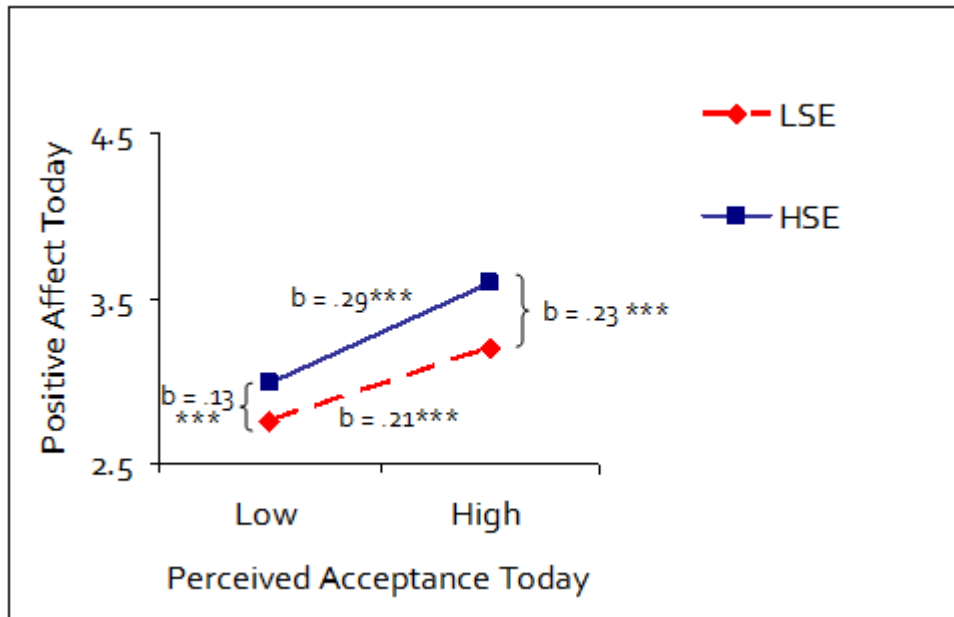


Figure 2. Positive affect today predicted from participant SE, and participant reported perceived acceptance today. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and the mean of perceived acceptance today.

Note: $p \leq .10$, $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ ** , $p < .001$ ***

Figure 3. Same-day relationship satisfaction – Study 1

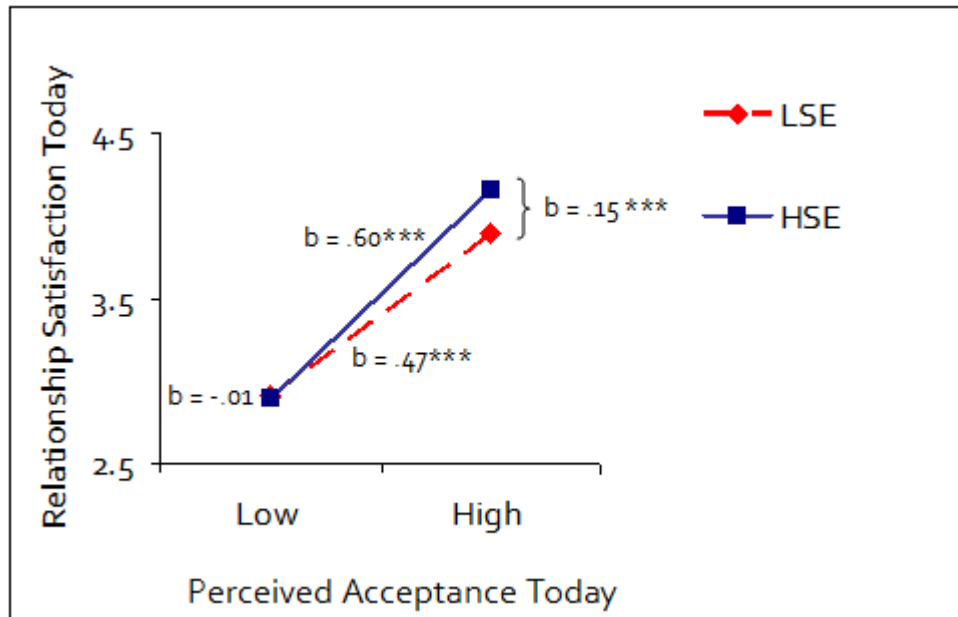


Figure 3. Relationship satisfaction today predicted from participant SE, and participant reported perceived acceptance today. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and the mean of perceived acceptance today.

Note: $p \leq .10$, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Figure 4. Cross-day positive affect – Study 1

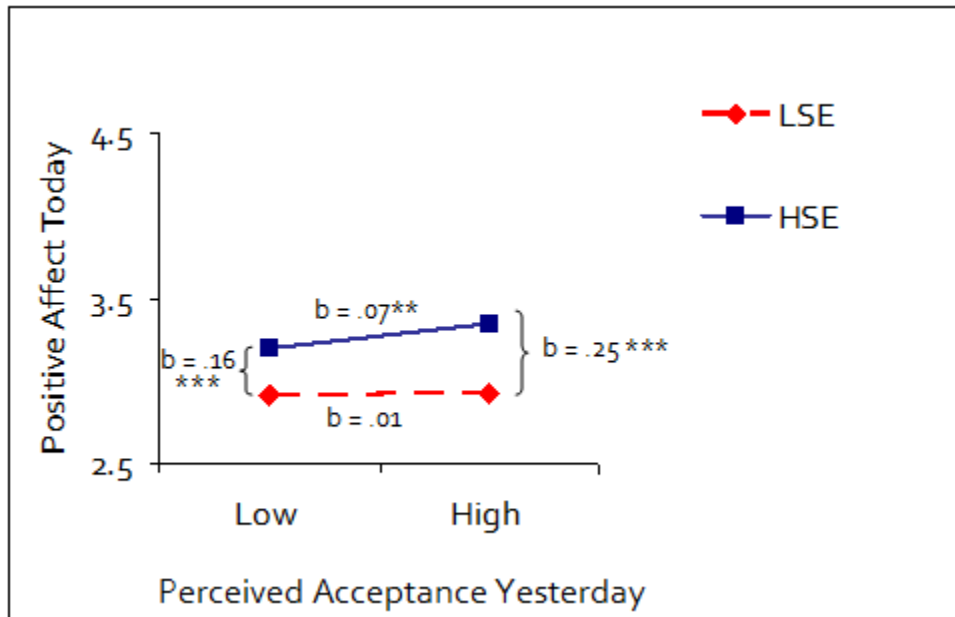


Figure 4. Positive affect today predicted from participant SE, and participant reported perceived acceptance yesterday. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and the mean of perceived acceptance yesterday.

Note: $p \leq .10^{\dagger}$, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Figure 5. Cross-day relationship satisfaction – Study 1

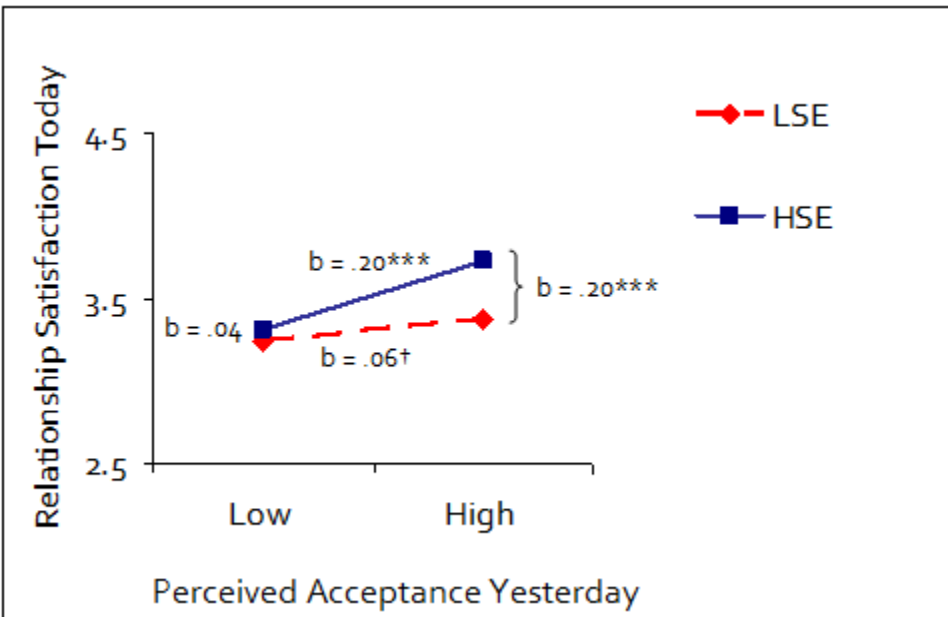


Figure 5. Relationship satisfaction today predicted from participant SE, and participant reported perceived acceptance yesterday. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and the mean of perceived acceptance yesterday.

Note: $p \leq .10^+$, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Figure 6. Perceived compliment acceptance – Study 2

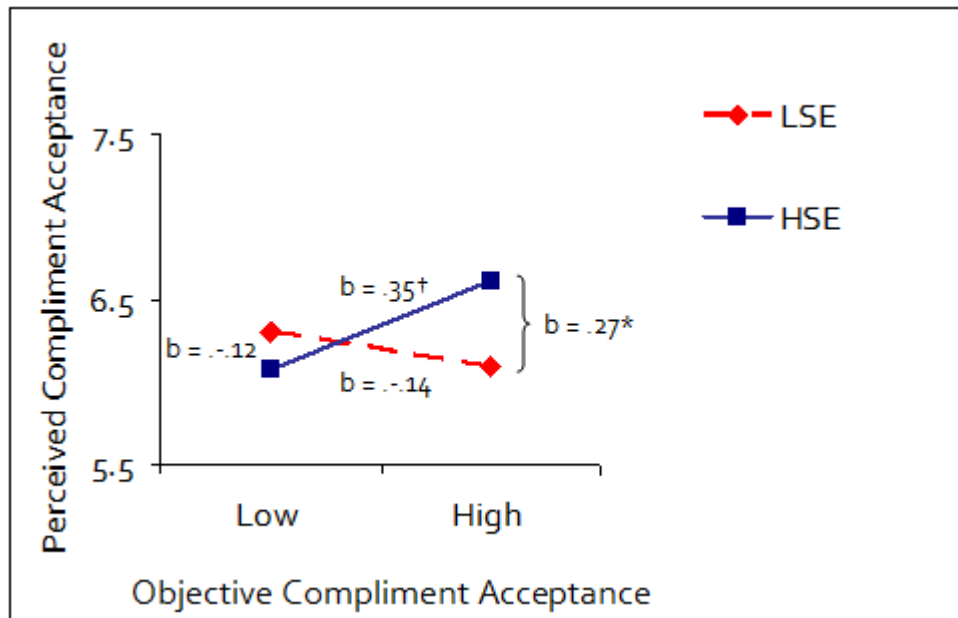


Figure 6. Perceived compliment acceptance predicted from participant SE, and coded acceptance. Predicted values are at 1 SD above and below the mean of SE and coded acceptance. Note: $p \leq .10^\dagger$, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$