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Identifying Positives within a Negative Self-Image: What Might Low Self-Esteem Individuals Bring to Romantic Relationships?

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Although low self-esteem (LSE) refers to possessing primarily negative self-views, individuals with low self-esteem (LSEs) may have specific self-views that are positive. In the context of romantic relationships, LSEs often engage in destructive relationship behaviours, such as devaluing their partners and frequently checking for signs of rejection. However, there is evidence that romantic relationships can positively influence LSEs, as these relationships provide access to ongoing positive social feedback and emotional support. This article reviews literature surrounding the relationship between self-esteem and romantic relationships in order to understand how LSEs may perceive themselves as adding value to their romantic relationships. Based on the findings from the literature review, LSEs may value their (a) perceived attentiveness to relationship obstacles, (b) avoidance of conflict, (c) unique behaviours that increase partner dependence, and (d) traits that are shared with romantic partners. The paper calls for empirical work on this topic, including identifying other traits that LSEs perceive as valuable, understanding what LSEs' partners value about them, and tracking changes in LSEs' self-views over the course of a relationship. Possible practical applications of these findings include the development of new interventions to improve self-esteem and relationship quality by building on LSEs' perceived positive qualities.

Self-esteem is defined as the value people place on themselves as well as how much they like themselves (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). It is comprised of an individual's self-views, or that person's beliefs about their own strengths and weaknesses in a number of domains (Pelham & Swann, 1989). Possessing high self-esteem (HSE) is associated with outcomes such as increased happiness (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), lower rates of depression (Murrell, Meeks, & Walker, 1991), higher perceived social support (Lakey, Tardiff, & Drew, 1994), and better overall physical health (Glendinning, 1998). Conversely, low self-esteem (LSE) is associated with reduced overall life satisfaction and increased incidence of depression (Baumeister et al., 2003; Murrell et al., 1991). Given the risks associated with LSE, researchers have examined the characteristics of people with LSE (LSEs) and investigated potential methods for improving their self-esteem.

Although LSEs, by definition, have a predominantly negative view of themselves and their qualities, some of their self-views may be neutral or even positive. Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton (1989) reported that because researchers usually categorize participants as LSEs and HSEs using a median-split procedure, LSE does not always reflect negative self-views. Rather, LSEs respond to self-esteem measures in a way that indicates neutral self-views. Furthermore, the importance people place on specific self-views (i.e., self-esteem related to a particular domain, such as academics or athletics) influences the degree to which those views contribute to global self-esteem (Pelham & Swann, 1989). As such, LSEs may believe that they have particular positive qualities or talents while their other self-views are negative. Despite this, there is limited research concerning what those with low global self-esteem might appreciate about themselves.

Sociometer theory suggests that self-esteem functions as a mechanism that people

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use to monitor their level of social acceptance or value to other people (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Given this relational definition of self-esteem, LSEs might perceive personal strengths in the context of their romantic relationships (also known as close relationships or intimate relationships). Romantic relationships can also satisfy needs for belongingness and connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Indeed, people in romantic relationships spend less time with friends than single people, suggesting that interactions with intimate partners fulfill these needs (Milardo, Johnson, & Huston, 1983). In addition, being in a committed relationship is associated with higher subjective well-being, particularly for those who report that their relationships are happy (Dush & Amato, 2005). Romantic partners appear to represent a stable source of social and emotional support, and for LSEs this can be a particularly valuable resource. One study obtained separate ratings for each partner's self-esteem within a couple, and then added them together to measure the couple's overall self-esteem (Robinson & Cameron, 2012). The resulting pooled self-esteem was reliably correlated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and quality (2012). As such, LSEs whose partners have higher self-esteem can draw from collective self-esteem to build relationship satisfaction and stability (2012).

Through involvement in close relationships, LSEs may be able to recognize the value they add to their partners' lives or contribute to the success of the relationship. Some research shows that although LSEs tend to refute or trivialize positive feedback because it conflicts with their self-views, they may respond more positively to feedback from their significant others (Stinson et al., 2010). The current paper integrates existing research on LSEs and their close relationships in order to identify qualities that LSEs believe they possess that add value to their romantic relationships.

How Do LSEs Behave in Close Relationships?

Overall, HSE is associated with favourable outcomes for intimate relationships, whereas LSE is related to feelings and behaviours that adversely impact the relationship. For instance, LSEs report that they are less satisfied with their relationships than people with high self-esteem (HSEs; Wood, Hogle, & McClellan, 2009). Additionally, Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler (1988) measured couples' self-esteem during an initial lab session, and found that couples who reported that they had broken up at a two-month follow-up tended to have lower combined self-esteem than those who were still together at the end of the study.

Self-esteem is also associated with how partners feel about and behave towards one another. LSEs do not typically report confidence in their partners' positive feelings towards them. In studies where self-doubt was experimentally induced, LSEs questioned their partners' positive regard, even if the self-doubt was not related to their relationship (e.g., if they received poor feedback on an intelligence test; Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998). Even when self-doubt is not induced, LSEs report that they underestimate their partner's regard, whereas HSEs report a more accurate perception of their partner's feelings (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). For HSEs, caring from others is viewed as relatively unconditional and independent of HSEs' actual qualities, whereas LSEs view others' regard as conditional (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Although LSEs' insecurities are often unfounded, they may see them as a potential cause for being rejected, and subsequently become defensive and detached from their partners (Murray et al., 1998). Similarly, Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche (2002) found that LSEs continually test "hypotheses" about their partner's caring, expecting to find evidence that their partners would reject them. This persistent "hypothesis-testing" may have a negative impact on partners

(2002). One daily diary study found that the partners of individuals high in rejection sensitivity experienced a decline in relationship satisfaction over the course of a year (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003). LSEs' tendency to search for signs of rejection where none exist may cause frustration and detachment, ultimately reducing the quality of the relationship.

LSEs are also more likely to engage in destructive relationship behaviours in difficult situations. For example, in response to relationship threats, LSEs devalue their partners (Murray et al., 1998). Belittling one's partner may be a self-protective measure. By thinking less of the partner, the prospect of being rejected by that partner may be less painful (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008). Conversely, HSEs respond to threat by seeking intimacy with their partners (Murray et al., 2000). Rusbult, Morrow, and Johnson (1987) found that LSEs were more likely to use passive, destructive strategies to solve relationship problems, preferring to allow the relationship to deteriorate rather than constructively intervening in the conflict. Sensitivity to rejection cues and passivity during a conflict can reduce LSEs' feelings of security (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002), their relationship quality (Rusbult et al., 1987), and their partners' relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 2003).

A Pathway to Improving LSEs' Perceived Self-Value and Romantic Relationships?

Despite the implication that LSEs undermine their romantic relationships due to their reluctance to see themselves positively, there is potential for a romantic partner's positive regard to help LSEs develop a more positive self-concept. LSEs typically have less stable self-concepts than HSEs (Campbell, 1990), so they may rely heavily on their romantic relationships as a source of ongoing social feedback (Stinson et al., 2010). In a healthy relationship, romantic partners may be able to overlook each other's weaknesses (Murray & Holmes, 1994) and provide a constant source of positive attention that

diverges from LSEs' typical self-views. This phenomenon is known as "idealization" (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

Idealization appears to yield several benefits for couples. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) found that idealization was associated with increased relationship satisfaction, decreased incidence of conflict, and increased likelihood of persisting through relationship obstacles. Interestingly, individuals who were idealized by their partners early in a relationship tended to improve their perceptions of themselves later in the relationship (Murray et al., 1996). In this way, idealization may benefit LSEs: If the partners of LSEs hold positive illusions about their relationships, they may impart some optimism to LSEs over time regarding their LSE partner's strengths.

If their close relationships can help LSEs see themselves more positively, it is important to understand how LSEs believe they add value to those relationships. LSEs often experience negative outcomes in their romantic relationships, such as reduced closeness and satisfaction, due to their tendency to underestimate how much their partners value them (Murray et al., 2000). Helping LSEs feel secure and valued may prevent destructive relationship patterns that undermine relationship quality and longevity. Furthermore, improving self-esteem can be a difficult task with several costs. Striving to improve self-esteem can interfere with a person's ability to learn and feelings of autonomy (Crocker & Park, 2004). Failed attempts to enhance self-esteem are harmful to both physical and mental health (2004). Since LSE has been associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes, as well as life satisfaction (Baumeister et al., 2003), it is important to identify methods that could be used to improve self-esteem and buffer against its negative effects. The issue of developing interventions to improve self-esteem is further complicated by LSEs' negative responses to positive feedback (Stinson et al., 2010). However, it appears that LSEs' romantic relationship partners can help them overcome

some of these difficulties. Therefore, identifying LSEs' perceived personal strengths within their romantic relationships could inform strategies to improve their intimate relationships as well as their self-esteem.

It is important to note that the traits LSEs value within themselves do not always reflect how they are perceived by others. LSEs perceive themselves more negatively than HSEs do, but studies that compare self-ratings to observer reports indicate that these self-perceptions are inaccurate (Baumeister et al., 2003). For example, one study found that HSEs perceive themselves to be more socially skilled than LSEs do, but their roommates report no difference between the two groups (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988, as cited in Baumeister et al., 2003). Similarly, some of the characteristics that LSEs value in themselves may not be accurate in reality or in the eyes of their partners. For example, even though they report lower relationship commitment than their HSE counterparts (Robinson & Cameron, 2012), LSEs might describe themselves as highly invested in their romantic relationships. Likewise, LSEs report passivity in relationship conflicts (Rusbult et al., 1987), which might contribute to a belief that their relationships are stable. In reality, LSEs tend to derogate and distance themselves from their partners when they believ¬¬e the security of their relationship is threatened (Murray et al., 2000). It is possible that LSEs do not recognize that these behaviours are harmful. The hypotheses discussed in the next section concern how LSEs view themselves, independently from their actual behaviour and the perceptions of their partners.

What Might LSEs Think They Bring to a Relationship?

Relationship Investment

LSEs might perceive their tendency to over-analyze relationship events as indicative of their investment in the success of their relationships. Within close relationships, LSEs readily perceive signs of rejection and react to

potential threats (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). In reality, rejection sensitivity alienates romantic partners and can lead to relationship erosion (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). However, LSEs may perceive their attention to signals of rejection as a way of preserving their relationships and proactively avoiding negative outcomes, such as the termination of their relationships.

LSEs' style of love may also contribute to their perception of their own heavy investment in their relationships. LSE is associated with manic love (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Dion & Dion, 1975). This type of love involves obsession with the partner and extreme emotional shifts within the relationship (Campbell, et al., 2002). Manic love is also characterized by possessiveness and dependence (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). This might reflect LSEs' desire to avoid rejection and retain their relationships as a source of self-affirmation. Since LSEs' partners provide ongoing feedback (Stinson et al., 2010), LSEs may see their relationships as vital to maintaining their self-concepts, which may predispose them to a manic style of love. LSEs might see themselves as highly committed to securing positive outcomes for the relationship because of their concerns about rejection and tendency to engage in manic love.

Conflict Avoidance

On the other hand, because LSEs fear rejection, they may be reluctant to engage in interpersonal conflicts or voice their concerns. In university students, self-esteem is positively associated with self-reported conflict-resolution skills, such as confrontation and emotional expression (Arslan, Hamarta, & Uslu, 2010). Hamarta (2009) also found that self-esteem was negatively associated with social problem avoidance, which involves procrastinating or being passive in resolving social problems. Additionally, in a six-month longitudinal study by LePine and Van Dyne (1998), HSEs were more likely than LSEs to voice concerns within a work group. The results from these studies suggest that LSEs may try to avoid conflict

altogether in their personal relationships. Conflict with another person might be interpreted by LSEs as a sign of impending rejection, representing a threat to their emotions and the security they feel within the relationship. As such, conflict avoidance may be a self-protective measure.

Similarly, LSEs' reliance on their partners for social approval may motivate them to avoid actions that could result in negativity from their partners or the end of the relationship. Across three studies, Rusbult et al. (1987) investigated the association between self-esteem and relationship problem-solving styles. Clear differences emerged between HSEs and LSEs. First, LSEs were more likely to neglect problems in the relationship rather than engage in other strategies (1987). Neglect can take a variety of forms, including refusing to discuss problems and avoiding one's partner, which contribute to the passive deterioration of the relationship (1987). In addition, there was some evidence that LSEs were more likely than HSEs to remain loyal to their partners in a conflict (1987). Loyalty represents a passive, yet constructive approach exemplified by supporting one's partner and re-affirming commitment to the relationship without making specific attempts to repair it (1987). HSEs were also more likely than LSEs to terminate the relationship during periods of conflict, potentially because they were more confident than LSEs about their ability to find an alternative partner (1987). It is possible that LSEs view their use of passive strategies as positive, regardless of whether those strategies are destructive (such as neglect) or constructive (such as loyalty). They may believe that avoiding conflict reduces or prevents relationship instability, even when avoidance is not the optimal approach. As a result, LSEs may view themselves as non-confrontational within their romantic relationships.

Specific Qualities and Concrete Actions

Some evidence suggests that LSEs might place more value on specific actions they take within the relationship (such as doing favours or showing interest in their partners' hobbies), compared to general characteristics about themselves (such as being "kind," "good-looking," or "funny"). One study examined how HSEs and LSEs reacted to feeling "irreplaceable" (Murray, Leder, et al., 2009). Participants were asked to list one or two irreplaceable qualities about their partner and were told that their partner would be doing the same task. In the control condition, participants and their partners did in fact complete the same task. In the experimental condition, partners actually did a more time-consuming task to give the impression that they were listing a high number of irreplaceable qualities. When LSEs were in this condition and thus made to believe that their partners considered them irreplaceable, their trust in their partners was higher than that of LSEs in the control condition. Meanwhile, there was no difference in trust between the two conditions for HSEs (2009). A partner's appreciation of general qualities such as physical attractiveness or intelligence may not allow LSEs to feel secure, as alternative romantic partners could possess higher levels of those traits (2009). LSEs may thus be more inclined to value their irreplaceable qualities (such as a talent for cooking or particular inside jokes), since these are less susceptible to relationship threats from romantic competition or upward social comparisons.

It is possible that LSEs also value their unique qualities that reinforce their partner's dependence on them. A study by Murray, Aloni, et al. (2009) explored how individuals respond to feeling that they are inferior to their partners. In this study, newlyweds completed a daily diary for 14 days. Regardless of self-esteem, participants responded to feelings of inferiority by trying to promote their partner's dependence on them the next day. For example, they would make lunches or do other favours for their spouses, which subsequently reduced their self-doubts and doubts about their marriages (2009). Feelings of inferiority appear to activate anxieties regarding an "exchange script," which suggests that partners should be equally

desirable in order to form a good match (2009). Perceiving oneself to be inferior in a certain domain leads to compensatory efforts in other domains. These exchange anxieties and compensatory efforts are more easily suppressed by HSEs than LSEs, as demonstrated in follow-up experiments (2009). The researchers suggest that fostering the partner's dependence might be an effective short-term strategy for LSEs to maintain their relationships (2009). Therefore, LSEs might focus on making themselves indispensable to their partners more than HSEs do. In doing so, LSEs may place value on specific actions they take, such as finding lost items or organizing social activities, which increase their partner's reliance on them and on the relationship.

LSEs' reactions to their partners' compliments might also reveal the types of traits they are more likely to value in themselves. For instance, Marigold, Holmes, and Ross (2007) tested an abstract framing intervention and found that the interpretation of a partner's compliment, regardless of the compliment's actual content, could influence changes in LSEs' self-esteem. When asked to think abstractly about a partner's compliment (i.e., identify its meaning and significance for the overall relationship), LSEs showed improvements in self-esteem compared to LSEs who thought about the concrete details of the compliment (i.e., recalling the circumstances under which the compliment was received, including the wording and what the participant was wearing). The authors note that during the intervention, participants were asked to recall a specific instance of a compliment, rather than thinking about their partner's overall feelings. According to them, it should have been less threatening for LSEs to accept that their partners valued them because of their specific qualities rather than because their partners' assessments of the LSEs were positive overall (2007). Although the compliments were interpreted in an abstract way, thinking about particular instances of a compliment may have been easier for LSEs to abstract from. Thus, LSEs might be more inclined to believe that their partners

appreciate their highly specific traits or qualities, rather than overall positive evaluations.

In support of the notion that specific compliments are more effective for LSEs, Kille, Eibach, Wood, and Holmes (2017) examined the effects of priming a concrete mindset versus an abstract mindset by asking participants to think about the steps they would take to achieve greater physical health (concrete) or why they wanted to achieve greater physical health (abstract). This was intended to influence participants' interpretations of a compliment from their partners to be either concrete or abstract. Thinking concretely about a compliment prevented LSEs from focusing on whether the compliment is consistent with their self-views, whereas thinking abstractly highlighted discrepancies between the compliment and the LSE's relevant self-views (2016). The authors suggest that the difference between their findings and those of Marigold et al. (2007) stems from the "non-directive" nature of the manipulation (Kille et al., 2017, p. 48). In other words, the abstract reframing intervention was successful because it guided participants through the process of generalizing a compliment; without this type of direction, the concrete mindset was more useful to LSEs. Thus, without any guidance or intervention, LSEs may be less likely to experience dissonance if they believe that their partners like something specific about them, despite LSEs' own self-doubts.

To summarize, a generally positive evaluation from a romantic partner may be irreconcilable with LSEs' more negative self-views, whereas a positive evaluation regarding a specific quality or behaviour may create less self-concept conflict. In addition, it may be more difficult for LSEs to find examples that negate specific (concrete) positive traits or behaviours (for example, being a good listener) than general ones (for example, being a good person). It may be easy for LSEs to recall a time when they were not a "good" person towards their partner, but relatively less easy to recall a

specific instance when they ignored their partner. As such, it may be easier for LSEs to believe that they are valuable to their relationships in specific ways than to believe that they are generally good partners.

Shared Traits and Values

LSEs may come to like qualities in themselves that they also appreciate in their partner. According to the similarity principle of attraction, people tend to like those who are similar to themselves in some way more than those who are dissimilar. This effect has been demonstrated in terms of similarity of attitudes (Byrne, 1961) and physical attractiveness (Feingold, 1988), among other variables. In married couples and dating couples alike, those who are most satisfied in their relationships tend to perceive their partners as similar to themselves (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Perceived similarities, therefore, can drive not only initial attraction, but can also influence the maintenance and continuation of intimate relationships.

One might expect that LSEs would be an exception to the rule that "similarity breeds liking," since LSE seems to imply a dislike of one's traits and characteristics. However, Hendrick and Page (1970) compared those who had low, moderate, and high levels of self-esteem and found evidence to the contrary. In their study, similarity was measured on the dimensions of attitudes towards certain social issues. Regardless of self-esteem, participants liked similar others more than dissimilar others and rated similar others more positively on dimensions such as intelligence and sincerity (1970). As such, although LSEs have a negative view of themselves, they may still like people who share similar attitudes to themselves and ascribe positive characteristics to those individuals.

Because LSEs are attracted to similar others, they may end up in relationships with people with whom they share qualities. Paradoxically, this similarity can benefit their romantic relationships. LSEs in one study felt closer to and more in love with their partners after thinking about a value they shared with their partner compared to thinking about a non-shared value or no values at all (Lomore, Spencer, & Holmes, 2007). Meanwhile, thinking about a shared or non-shared value did not yield any differences in HSEs' feelings towards their partner compared to the control condition. Concentrating on similarities between themselves and their partners may have reminded LSEs of interdependence in their relationships and eased their concerns about rejection (2007). By thinking about a particular value as being shared by the couple, LSEs also avoid focusing on themselves and making negative evaluations (2007).

Recognizing shared values and characteristics might improve overall relationship quality since these qualities concern the couple as a unit, rather than the LSE as an individual. By seeing these similar qualities as a strength of the relationship, LSEs may come to appreciate the traits that they share with their partner. When Murray, Holmes, et al. (2002) investigated the relationship between perceived partner similarity and satisfaction, they did not empirically investigate the role of self-esteem. However, they suggested that even among LSEs, perceiving similarity between oneself and one's partner could potentially ease concerns about rejection and abandonment (2002).

Summary and Hypotheses, Directions for Future Research, and Conclusion

Summary and Hypotheses

In close relationships, LSE is associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Murray, et al., 2003) and increased rates of relationship termination relative to HSEs (Hendrick et al., 1988). LSE is also associated with negative outcomes in other domains, such as reduced overall life satisfaction and increased incidence of depression (Baumeister et al., 2003; Murrell et al., 1991). It is possible, however, that romantic partners can help LSEs see themselves in a more positive light and improve their relationship quality by

encouraging LSEs to challenge their negative self-views. The current literature review sought to identify qualities that LSEs might like about themselves in the intimate relationship context.

Research on positive aspects of LSE is limited, perhaps because it seems counterintuitive that having generally negative beliefs about the self would be associated with positive qualities or beliefs. However, LSEs tend to have inaccurate views of themselves. Observers report similar levels of skill for LSEs and HSEs in domains such as social status and interpersonal competence (Baumeister et al., 2003). LSEs may also have specific self-views that are positive, such as a belief about a particular talent (Pelham & Swann, 1989). Additionally, at least one manipulation, which asked LSEs to think abstractly about compliments from their partners, has helped LSEs to see positive qualities in themselves (e.g., Marigold et al., 2007), suggesting that they do have the capacity to develop a less pessimistic self-concept. Despite the scarcity of research on this issue, existing research can inform predictions about what LSEs might value about themselves based on their responses to feedback and the strategies they use within their relationships. LSEs may believe that they contribute positively to their romantic relationships in the following ways:

▪ H1. LSEs may believe that their tendency to seek out and address signs of potential rejection reflects greater commitment and investment to the relationships.

▪ H2. LSEs may believe that their self-reported avoidance of conflict prevents tension in the relationship.

▪ H3. LSEs may value specific, concrete things that they do for their partners over general qualities or characteristics of themselves.

▪ H4. LSEs may value traits in themselves that they believe they share with their partners.

Directions for Future Research

Moving forward, research should focus on testing the above claims empirically and identifying other ways that LSEs might believe that they bring value to a relationship. Since self-esteem has previously been associated with attachment security (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Gamble & Roberts, 2005), it may be worthwhile to investigate what people with insecure attachment styles value about themselves. Some research suggests that gender differences might also influence what LSEs value in themselves. For example, Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992) suggest that men mainly derive self-esteem from personal achievements whereas women mainly derive self-esteem from relationships with others. As such, men and women may define and evaluate their contributions to a relationship differently. This line of research could involve open-ended methods (e.g., asking participants to list qualities in themselves that they perceive to be strengths) or closed-ended (e.g., asking participants to indicate whether they believe they possess certain qualities as well as the extent to which they like those qualities in themselves).

Another avenue for research might investigate what the partners of LSEs actually like about their partners. Given that idealization by romantic partners is related to positive change in one's self-views (Murray et al., 1996), the qualities that LSEs like about their partners may influence what LSEs value in themselves. A longitudinal study, where participants are asked at multiple time points to report their evaluations of their LSE partners, could also give a more informative picture of how opinions change as LSEs create distance in the relationship.

Once a clear empirical picture is formed, this research could be used to inform interventions to improve LSEs' close relationships. These interventions might also work to improve LSEs' self-esteem, or at least mitigate its negative consequences. For example, the intervention developed by

Marigold et al. (2007) could be adapted to focus on particular types of compliments. The researchers suggested that specifying the type of compliment participants recalled (e.g., a compliment about being considerate) might backfire since LSEs would be motivated to find examples that contradict the given trait (2007). However, knowing the types of compliments LSEs are likely to respond well to (e.g., those based on the four hypotheses presented in this literature review) might enhance the success of the intervention. Other interventions might also be developed that help LSEs build on the qualities they already perceive as strengths.

Conclusion

Overall, this investigation represents a relatively new area of research within self-esteem literature, one that considers how LSEs' self-perceptions might not be completely negative. In their intimate relationships, specifically, LSEs may value their perceived investment in the relationship and avoidance of conflict. They might also value the specific qualities that make them irreplaceable and indispensable to their partners. Finally, they may come to like aspects of themselves that are also reflected in their partners, such as shared values or interests. Understanding what LSEs think their partners value about them can help researchers build on those perceived positive characteristics and gain more insight into the problem of improving self-esteem and relationship quality for LSEs.

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