Contingencies of self-worth and responses to negative interpersonal feedback

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Contingencies of Self-worth and Responses to Negative Interpersonal Feedback

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The present research examined effects of receiving negative interpersonal feedback on state self-esteem, affect, and goal pursuit as a function of trait self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth. Two same-sex participants interacted with each other and then received negative feedback, ostensibly from the other participant, or no feedback, regarding their likeability. Participants then reported their state self-esteem, affect, and self-presentation goals—how they wanted to be perceived by others at the moment. Among participants who received negative feedback, those who more strongly based their self-worth on others' approval experienced lower state self-esteem, positive affect, and greater negative affect than those whose self-worth was less contingent on others' approval. Participants with low self-esteem showed greater desire to appear physically attractive to others the more they based self-worth on others' approval and received negative feedback. In contrast, participants with high self-esteem showed greater desire to appear warm/caring/kind the more they based self-worth on others' approval and received negative feedback. Implications for self-esteem, motivation, and interpersonal processes are discussed.

The desire to belong and to form close relationships is considered to be a fundamental human need and motivator of behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Accordingly, when people are rejected by others they experience hurt feelings (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998b), anxiety (Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001) and loss of self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Although some people claim not to base their self-esteem on others' approval (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003b), Leary and colleagues have suggested that social disapproval affects everyone's self-esteem, even those who report being unaffected by others' evaluations (Leary et al., 2003). Alternatively, Baumeister, Twenge, and colleagues have found that rejection does not lead to

emotional distress, but to a lack of emotion and feelings of numbness and emotional withdrawal (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002b; DeWall & Baumeister, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003; see Baumeister, Twenge, & Ciarocco, 2002a, for a review).

We propose that rejection and social disapproval are emotionally distressing, but that people differ in how vulnerable they are to these experiences as a function of their bases of self-esteem, or contingencies of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Specifically, we propose that the effects of receiving negative interpersonal feedback on outcomes such as state self-esteem, affect, and goal pursuit may depend on how contingent a person's self-worth is on others' approval. Specifically, we suggest that the more people base their self-worth on others' approval, the more likely they are to experience drops in state self-esteem, positive affect, and increases in negative affect when they receive negative interpersonal feedback, whereas those whose self-worth is less contingent on others' approval should not experience the same degree of emotional distress following negative feedback. In addition to effects on state self-esteem and affect, we propose that there may also be differences in the types of goals that people pursue following negative feedback as a function of their trait self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth.

Contingencies of Self-worth

William James (1890) argued over a century ago that people derive self-esteem from succeeding in certain domains and not others. According to the contingencies of self-worth model (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), people differ in their bases of self-esteem, which are shaped by their beliefs about what they think they need to be or do to be a person of worth. Crocker and colleagues (2003b) identified seven domains in which people may derive their self-worth: Virtue, God's love, family support, academic competence, physical attractiveness, competition, and gaining others' approval. The more a person bases self-worth in a domain, the more he or she may be vulnerable to experiencing negative effects of self-threat in that domain. For example, research has shown that the more students base their self-worth on academics, the more likely they are to experience lower state self-esteem and greater negative affect and self-evaluative thoughts when they perform poorly on academics tasks, receive lower-than-expected grades, or are rejected from graduate schools (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, & Chase, 2003a; Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002; Niiya, Crocker, & Bartmess, 2004; Park & Crocker, 2003).

Extending these ideas to the interpersonal domain, receiving negative feedback about one's interpersonal qualities (e.g., likeability) should also decrease state self-esteem, positive affect, and increase negative affect. Importantly, though, this effect should be qualified by how much people base their self-worth on others' approval. Specifically, negative interpersonal feedback should affect state self-esteem and mood, but only for those who highly base self-worth on others' approval, compared to those whose self-worth is less contingent in this domain, or who do not receive negative interpersonal feedback.

Self-esteem, Negative Interpersonal Feedback, and Self-presentation Goals

According to Schlenker (1980), self-presentation reflects people's attempts to create, modify, or maintain an impression of themselves to others. In the present study, we define self-presentation goals as attempts to convey a desired image of oneself to

other people. The more important and central a standard of self-worth is to oneself, the more likely an individual will be motivated to pursue self-presentation goals in that domain (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In other words, people seek to create desired images of themselves in the minds of others when the domain is viewed as important to their sense of self than when it is not. Given that contingencies of self-worth represent domains that are important to the self, those who more strongly base self-worth on a domain such as others' approval should be highly motivated to convey an image of likeability to others.

We propose that the types of self-presentation goals adopted by people with relatively high self-esteem (HSE) versus low self-esteem (LSE) may be influenced by the degree to which they base self-worth on others' approval, and whether or not they receive negative feedback regarding their interpersonal qualities. Based on past research, we predicted that people with HSE would seek to validate their internal, personal qualities following negative feedback, such as wanting to appear competent to others. In contrast, people with relatively lower self-esteem, who are chronically concerned about interpersonal belongingness, were expected to place greater importance on validating their interpersonal qualities, such as wanting to be perceived as likeable or attractive to others.

Several findings from the self-esteem literature support our hypotheses. People with HSE possess more favorable, confident self-views and are not as worried about being accepted or rejected by others as people with LSE (Baumeister, 1998). Indeed, research has shown that having higher self-esteem leads people to perceive social acceptance from others, even in the face of rejection (Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997). In contrast, people with LSE are highly sensitive to signs of disapproval and are more likely than people with HSE to feel rejected by others, even when this is not the case (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Nezlek et al., 1997). Indeed, LSE is related to constructs that reflect preoccupation with avoiding others' disapproval, such as social anxiety, public self-consciousness, shyness, fear of negative evaluation, and insecure attachment styles (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Zimbardo, 1977).

Studies have documented differences in the types of self-aspects emphasized by people with relatively HSE versus LSE. Schutz and Tice (1997) found that people with HSE focused more on their personal qualities and accomplishments than people with LSE, who tended to emphasize their interpersonal qualities. Importantly, Vohs and Heatherton (2001) found that people with HSE and LSE showed differences in self-construals following competency-based ego threat; whereas people with HSE became more independent in their self-construals, preferring feedback about their competence and personal abilities, people with LSE adopted a more interdependent self-construal and sought feedback regarding their interpersonal qualities, such as wanting to know how others viewed them and finding out what kind of a friend they were. Finally, Rudich and Vallacher (1999) found that whereas people with HSE sought to satisfy self-esteem needs over belongingness needs, people with LSE sought to satisfy belongingness needs first, preferring to interact with someone who wanted to form a relationship, regardless of how positively the other person viewed them.

Based on these findings, we predicted that following negative interpersonal feedback, people with LSE as compared to HSE would seek to repair their feelings of belongingness by validating their interpersonal qualities. Specifically, we expected that among people with LSE who received negative interpersonal feedback, basing

self-worth more strongly on others' approval would predict increased pursuit of interpersonal self-presentation goals related to appearing likeable/sociable/popular or attractive/good-looking/physically fit. In contrast, we expected that among people with HSE who received negative interpersonal feedback, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval would lead to increased pursuit of self-presentation goals aimed at validating their internal, personal qualities, such as wanting to appear competent/intelligent/knowledgeable.

In addition to the domains of competence, likeability, and physical attractiveness, we also measured self-presentation goal domains of appearing virtuous/moral/responsible and warm/caring/kind for exploratory purposes. Virtue/moral/responsible represents a relatively internal domain, as it does not require ongoing external feedback or validation from others (Crocker et al., 2003b). Similarly, wanting to appear warm/caring/kind may be viewed as being largely independent of others' validation and thus, a more internal, personal trait than an external feature of the self, such as one's popularity or physical attractiveness.

In sum, the present research sought to provide a new perspective to the study of ego threat by examining an interpersonal threat, and by examining how contingencies of self-worth, specifically, how much people based self-worth on others' approval, moderated the pursuit of self-presentation goals among people with HSE versus LSE.

Overview of Study

The present study had two overarching aims. First, we examined the effects of receiving negative interpersonal feedback on state self-esteem and affect as a function of how much people based their self-worth on others' approval. We predicted that receiving negative feedback would decrease state self-esteem, positive affect, and increase negative affect for those whose self-worth was highly contingent on others' approval, compared to those whose self-worth was less contingent in this domain. Second, we examined the effects of negative feedback and approval contingency on HSE and LSE people's pursuit of self-presentation goals. Based on past research, we hypothesized that HSE participants who received negative interpersonal feedback would strive to validate their internal qualities, by wanting to appear competent/intelligent/knowledgeable, the more strongly they based self-worth on others' approval. In contrast, LSE participants who received negative interpersonal feedback were expected to validate their interpersonal qualities the more they based self-worth on others' approval, by wanting to appear likeable and attractive to others. Finally, we predicted that the approval contingency in particular, and not other contingencies of self-worth, would lead to our effects. Thus, we also examined the unique effect of the approval contingency, i.e., after partialling out the effects of other contingencies, on state self-esteem, affect, and self-presentation goals.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 90 participants (44 females, 46 males) ranging from 17 to 22 years of age ($M = 18.77$, $SD = 0.89$) and included 64% White, 10% Asian, 10% Black, 11% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% of other racial backgrounds.

Materials

Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale. The Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (CSWS; Crocker et al., 2003b) measures seven domains that people may derive their self-esteem from. Participants responded to 5 items measuring the others' approval contingency of self-worth using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). The items were: "My self-esteem depends on the opinions others hold of me"; "I don't care what other people think of me," reversed; "I can't respect myself if others don't respect me"; "What others think of me has no effect on what I think about myself," reversed; and "I don't care if other people have a negative opinion about me," reversed (α = .87).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Trait self-esteem was measured using the widely used and well-validated 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). Participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) how much they agreed with items such as: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "At times, I think I am no good at all," reversed. The RSE has high internal consistency (in this sample, α = .88), test – retest reliability, and has been shown to be a valid measure of self-esteem (see Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, for a summary).

Dependent Measures

State self-esteem. The state self-esteem scale is an adapted version of the RSE that measures people's momentary feelings about themselves. Participants used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) to indicate their agreement with statements such as: "Right now, I feel satisfied with myself"; "Right now, I feel useless," reversed (10 items, α = .91).

Affect. Participants rated (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*) how much they felt negative affect (i.e., angry, frustrated, mad, annoyed, tense, agitated, preoccupied, irritated, 8 items, α = .89) and positive affect (i.e., happy, cheerful, proud, agreeable, pleased, content, energetic; 7 items, α = .90) after receiving negative interpersonal feedback or no feedback.

State self-presentation goals. To assess self-presentation goals at the moment, participants ranked how important it was for them to be perceived by others in various domains. Specifically, participants ranked (from 1 = *Most Important* to 5 = *Least Important*) how important it was for them at the moment to be perceived as likeable/sociable/popular, attractive/good-looking/physically fit, warm/caring/kind, competent/intelligent/knowledgeable, and virtuous/moral/responsible. Importance of self-presentation goal domains was later reverse-scored so that participants' first choice was assigned a "5," second choice a "4," and so on.

Procedure

Two unacquainted, same-sex participants were recruited per session. Participants were led to believe that the study was about first impressions and interpersonal interactions. Participants first completed questionnaires assessing demographic information, trait self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, and filler questionnaires. Then, participants were brought into the same room for a brief interaction in which

participants were instructed to introduce themselves and take turns talking about what they did last weekend. Afterwards, participants were taken to separate rooms and completed a questionnaire assessing their impressions of the other person. One of the participants was randomly assigned to the negative interpersonal feedback condition; the other was assigned to the no feedback (control) condition. After the interaction, both participants rated their partner on a series of scales pertaining to the other's likeability, friendliness, warmth, etc.

Participants in the negative feedback condition were given the following instructions:

> Now that you have just interacted with the other student, we are interested in knowing your impressions of him/her. Your responses on this questionnaire will be shared with the other student, and he/she will also share his/her responses with you. It is very important to us that you be as honest as possible in your responses. Please read the following items below and rate your perceptions of the student you just interacted with.

In actuality, the rating sheets were never shown to participants or to anyone besides the experimenter and principal investigator. The rating sheet that participants received, ostensibly from their partner, was actually filled out by the experimenter beforehand so that participants in the negative feedback condition always received the same neutral to slightly negative ratings. The ratings were anchored between negative and positive interpersonal traits, where $1 =$ negative version of the trait and $7 =$ positive version of the trait. The items were: Unfriendly vs. Friendly, Uninteresting vs. Interesting, Awkward vs. Poised, Shy vs. Outgoing, Dull vs. Charismatic, Cold vs. Warm, and Unlikable vs. Likable. Participants in the negative feedback condition were always given the same feedback; they were rated a "4" (neutral) on the items "Friendly," "Outgoing," "Warm," and "Likable," a "3" on the items "Interesting" and "Charismatic," and a "2" on the item "Poised."

Past research has shown that state self-esteem is most sensitive to interpersonal evaluations that are moderate in valence versus unequivocally negative (Leary et al., 1998a). Thus, relatively neutral, rather than extremely negative interpersonal ratings were used to manipulate negative feedback. Participants in the negative feedback condition were expected to experience lower state self-esteem, more negative affect, and less positive affect the more contingent their self-worth was on others' approval.

Participants in the no feedback condition were given the following instructions:

> Now that you have just interacted with the other student, we are interested in knowing your impressions of him/her. Your responses on this questionnaire will be kept completely confidential and will never be disclosed to the other student. It is very important to us that you be as honest as possible in your responses. Please read the following items below and rate your perceptions of the student you just interacted with.

Because these participants did not receive any evaluative feedback, they were not expected to experience emotional distress. All participants then completed questionnaires assessing their state self-esteem, affect, and self-presentation goals. Finally, all participants were debriefed, thanked, given credit, and dismissed.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents zero-order correlations among participants' approval contingency of self-worth, trait self-esteem, and dependent measures. Basing self-esteem on

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TABLE 1 Correlations among Approval Contingency of Self-Worth (CSW), Self-esteem, Self-Presentation (SP) Goals, Dependent Measures, and CSWs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Approval CSW	—															
2. Self-esteem	-.28**	—														
3. Attractive SP goal	.22*	-.06	—													
4. Caring SP goal	-.06	.13	-.34**	—												
5. Likeable SP goal	.25*	-.04	-.01	-.32**	—											
6. Competent SP goal	-.21*	-.02	-.11	-.49***	-.21*	—										
7. Virtue SP goal	-.21*	-.02	-.42***	.04	-.59***	-.03	—									
8. Negative affect	.28**	-.37***	.01	.09	.06	-.14	-.03	—								
9. Positive affect	-.10	.37***	-.19+	.08	-.08	.01	.17	-.64***	—							
10. State self-esteem	-.28**	.55***	-.05	-.01	-.02	.05	.04	-.64***	.63***	—						
11. Appearance CSW	.59***	-.30***	.35***	-.16	.23*	-.16	-.25*	.23*	-.11	-.25*	—					
12. Competition CSW	.36***	-.14	.34***	-.27*	.14	.05	-.23*	.19+	-.26*	-.23*	.45***	—				
13. Academic CSW	.37***	-.30**	.24*	-.12	.06	-.04	-.11	.12	-.14	-.17	.52***	.38***	—			
14. Family support CSW	.40***	.08	.03	.08	.08	-.15	-.04	.15	-.07	-.19+	.38***	.15	.23*	—		
15. God's love CSW	.09	-.14	-.15	.16	-.17	-.16	.30**	.11	.02	-.26*	.01	.07	.02	.09	—	
16. Virtue CSW	.11	-.03	-.16	.13	.03	-.09	.06	.05	.11	-.13	-.00	.07	.22*	.21*	.14	—

Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; +p < .10.

others' approval was related to lower trait self-esteem and state self-esteem, and to placing less importance on being perceived as competent or virtuous. In addition, the approval contingency of self-worth was positively related to wanting to be perceived as likeable, attractive, and to more negative affect overall. Both trait self-esteem and state self-esteem were related to less negative affect and to more positive affect, but were not significantly related to self-presentation goals.

Analysis Strategy

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test our hypothesis that the more participants based self-worth on others' approval, the worse they would feel following negative interpersonal feedback. Experimental condition (coded as -1 = no feedback; 1 = negative feedback), centered scores for trait self-esteem, approval contingency, their three 2-way interactions, and 3-way interaction were entered simultaneously into a regression model to predict state self-esteem and affect, respectively. Demographic controls were also entered into the regression equation, including gender (coded as -1 = male, 1 = female) and race (four race groups entered as three dummy variables: Black = 1, All others = 0; Asian = 1, All others = 0; Other = 1, All others = 0, making Whites the reference group).[1] In addition to conducting analyses with the approval contingency score, we also examined the unique effect of approval contingency, after partialling out effects of the other six contingencies of self-worth and then using this revised score in place of the approval contingency to predict the dependent variables. The unpartialled effects of approval contingency scores are reported, and the effects of approval contingency after partialling out the other contingencies are reported in parentheses as unique effects.[2]

State Self-esteem and Affect

As predicted, being in the negative feedback condition predicted lower state self-esteem, $\beta = -.20$, $p < .03$, less positive affect, $\beta = -.29$, $p < .01$, and more negative affect, $\beta = .26$, $p < .01$, confirming that the manipulation was effective and had an impact on participants. Higher trait self-esteem was also related to higher state self-esteem, $\beta = .50$, $p < .001$, more positive affect, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$ and less negative affect, $\beta = -.36$, $p < .01$. Importantly, as predicted, there were significant Approval Contingency × Condition interactions for state self-esteem, $\beta = -.26$, $p < .01$, negative affect, $\beta = .38$, $p < .001$, and positive affect, $\beta = -.26$, $p < .02$. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the interactions.

Specifically, in the negative feedback condition, the more participants based self-worth on others' approval, the lower their state self-esteem, $\beta = -.35$, $p < .01$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.21$, $p < .15$), the greater their negative affect, $\beta = .47$, $p < .01$ (unique effect: $\beta = .32$, $p < .04$), and the lower their positive affect, $\beta = -.25$, $p = .09$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.25$, $p < .11$). In the no feedback condition, basing self-worth on others' approval marginally predicted higher state self-esteem, $\beta = .23$, $p < .06$ (unique effect: $\beta = .11$, $p < .48$), positive affect, $\beta = .28$, $p < .07$ (unique effect: $\beta = .32$, $p < .08$), but not negative affect, $\beta = -.22$, $p < .15$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.36$, $p < .06$).

Taken together, these findings are consistent with our hypothesis that receiving negative interpersonal feedback lowers state self-esteem, with corresponding effects on affect, but that these effects are found only as a function of how much people base
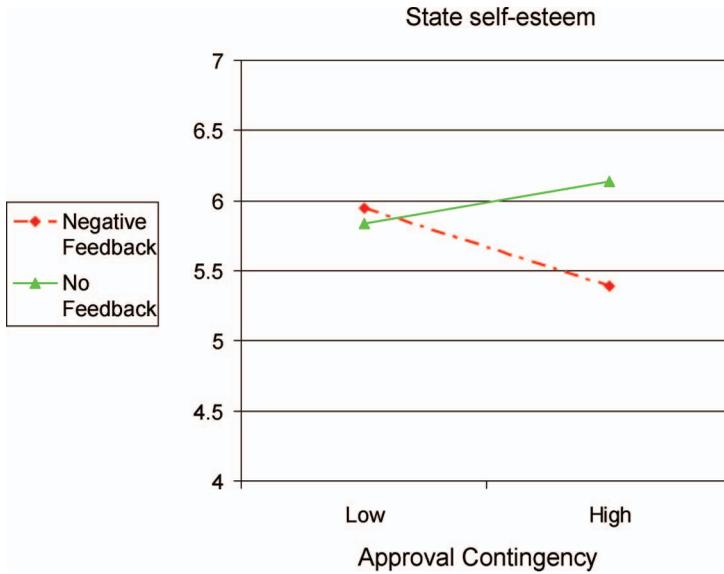
FIGURE 1 Expected value of state self-esteem as a function of approval CSW and feedback conditon.
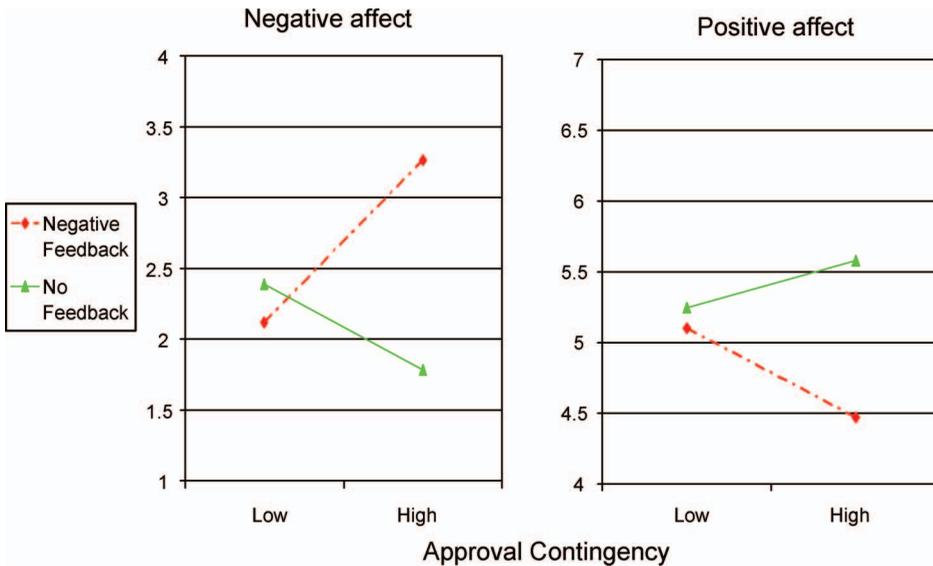
FIGURE 2 Expected value of negative and positive affect as a function of approval CSW and feedback condition.

their self-worth on others' approval. Moreover, these effects generally held even after partialling out effects of other contingencies of self-worth. Thus, contrary to Leary and colleagues' (2003) contention that even those who claim to be unaffected by others' opinions are hurt by rejection, our findings suggest that receiving negative interpersonal feedback—even relatively neutral to mildly negative feedback—leads to negative effects if people's self-worth is highly contingent on others' approval.

Indeed, HSE and LSE people did not differ in their reactions to negative feedback; what mattered in this case was how much people based their self-worth on others' approval.

Self-presentation Goals

Next, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine self-presentation goals as a function of trait self-esteem, approval contingency, and experimental condition. Experimental condition (coded as before), centered scores for trait self-esteem, approval contingency, their 2-way interactions, and 3-way interaction were entered simultaneously into regression equations to predict participants' self-presentation goals, along with demographic controls for gender and ethnicity, dummy coded as described earlier. Three-way interactions were decomposed by examining the Self-esteem × Approval Contingency interaction in the negative feedback and no feedback conditions separately. Then, we conducted simple slopes tests to examine the effects of approval contingency for participants at 1 *SD* above (HSE) and 1 *SD* below (LSE) the mean of trait self-esteem (Aiken & West, 1991).

Likeable/popular/sociable goal. Results of multiple regression analyses revealed that the more participants based their self-worth on others' approval, the more they wanted to be perceived as likeable/popular/sociable, but this did not depend on trait self-esteem or experimental condition. The only significant finding was a main effect for basing self-worth on others' approval, which predicted greater desire to be perceived as likeable/popular/sociable, $\beta = .23$, $p < .05$.

Attractive/good-looking/physically fit goal. We predicted that following negative interpersonal feedback, people with LSE would want to appear attractive to others as a function of their approval contingency of self-worth. Results of regression analyses revealed a significant main effect of approval contingency, $\beta = .26$, $p < .05$, qualified by a significant Self-esteem × Approval Contingency × Condition interaction, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .03$. Examining the simple Self-esteem × Approval Contingency interaction in the negative feedback and no feedback conditions separately revealed a significant main effect of approval contingency, $\beta = .45$, $p < .01$, and a significant 2-way interaction in the negative feedback condition, $\beta = -.34$, $p < .04$. In the no feedback condition, there were no significant main effects and the 2-way was non-significantly reversed, $\beta = .18$, $p < .32$. Figure 3 illustrates the interactions.

As expected, compared to participants who scored low in approval contingency, LSE participants who received negative feedback placed greater importance on appearing attractive/good-looking/physically fit the more they based self-worth on others' approval, $\beta = .88$, $p < .01$ (unique effect: $\beta = .82$, $p < .01$). In the no feedback condition, there was no significant effect of approval contingency, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .40$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.32$, $p < .16$). For HSE participants, basing self-worth on others' approval marginally predicted greater desire to appear attractive in the no feedback condition, $\beta = .55$, $p = .07$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.02$, $p < .92$), but not in the negative feedback condition, $\beta = .19$, $p < .43$ (unique effect: $\beta = .05$, $p < .78$).

Taken together, the results show that among participants with LSE who received negative feedback, the more strongly they based self-worth on others' approval, the more importance they placed on appearing attractive to others, whereas participants with HSE did not show this pattern. These effects were found even after partialling
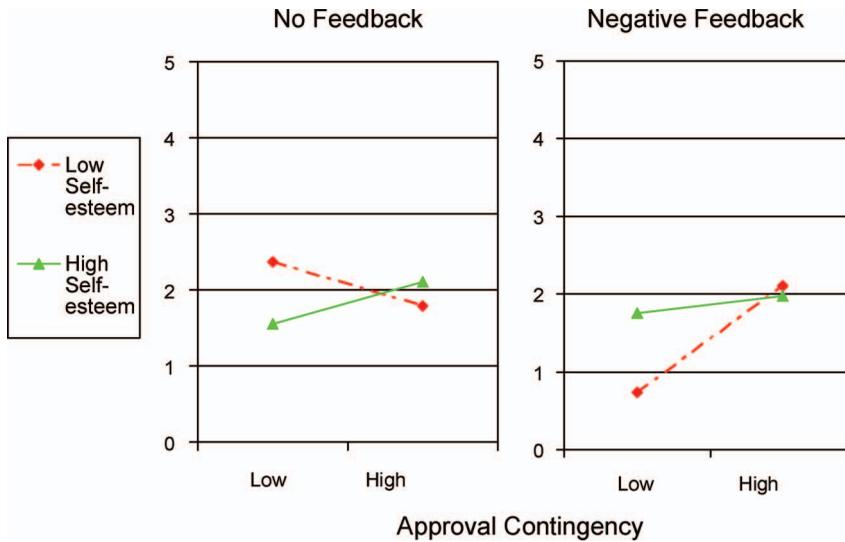
FIGURE 3 Expected value of attractiveness self-presentation goal as a function of approval contingency, self-esteem, and condition.

out effects of other contingencies, suggesting that the approval contingency explains unique variance in predicting the desire to appear attractive/good-looking/physically fit among people with LSE following negative interpersonal feedback.

Competent/intelligent/knowledgeable goal. We predicted that following negative feedback, HSE people would report greater desire to appear competent to others the more they based self-worth on others' approval. Results, however, revealed no significant Self-esteem × Approval Contingency × Condition interaction, $\beta = -.13$, $p < .26$. Instead, there was only a marginal Self-esteem × Approval Contingency interaction, $\beta = .20$, $p < .08$, such that LSE participants de-emphasized the importance of being perceived as competent/intelligent/knowledgeable the more they based self-worth on others' approval, $\beta = -.50$, $p < .04$, whereas the opposite pattern was found among HSE participants, $\beta = .36$, $p < .12$. These effects did not hold, however, when partialling out effects of other contingencies from the approval contingency.

Warm/caring/kind goal. Results of multiple regression analysis revealed that following negative feedback, HSE participants expressed greater desire to be perceived as warm/caring/kind the more they based self-worth on others' approval, whereas LSE participants reported relatively less desire to be perceived this way the more they based self-worth on others' approval. Specifically, results revealed a significant Self-esteem × Approval Contingency × Condition interaction, $\beta = .36$, $p < .01$. Examining the Self-esteem × Approval Contingency interaction in the negative feedback and no feedback conditions separately revealed a significant 2-way interaction in the negative feedback condition, $\beta = .44$, $p < .01$; no other effects were significant. In the no feedback condition, there was a significant main effect of approval contingency, $\beta = -.50$, $p < .01$, and a significant 2-way interaction in the opposite direction, $\beta = -.32$, $p < .04$. Figure 4 illustrates the interactions.
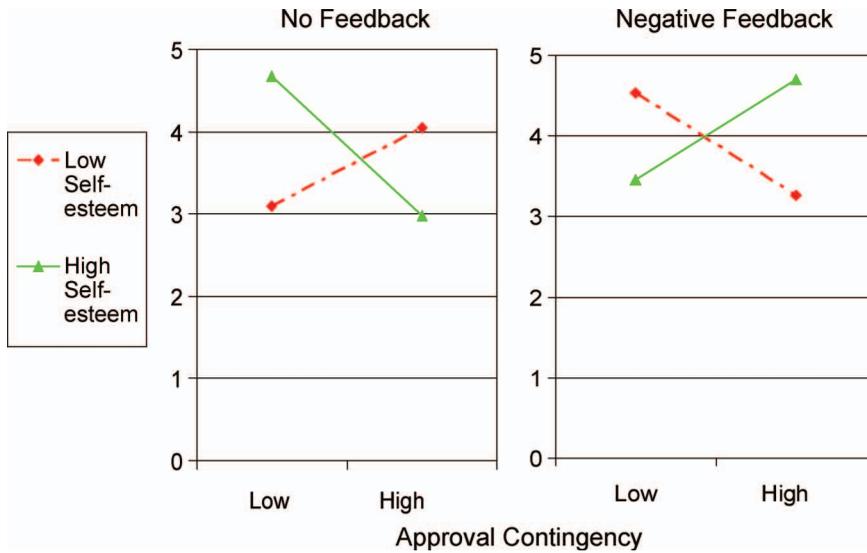
FIGURE 4 Expected value of warm/caring/kind self-presentation goal as a function of approval contingency, self-esteem, and condition.

Specifically, among HSE participants who received negative feedback, the more they based self-worth on others' approval, the more they tended to want to be perceived as warm/caring/kind, $\beta = .52$, $p = .096$ (unique effect: $\beta = .28$, $p = .10$), whereas the reverse occurred in the no feedback condition, $\beta = -1.14$, $p < .001$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.21$, $p < .34$). For LSE participants who received negative feedback, the more they based self-worth on others' approval, the less they wanted to be perceived as warm/caring/kind, $\beta = -.85$, $p < .02$ (unique effect: $\beta = -.67$, $p < .03$), but not in the no feedback condition, $\beta = -.02$, $p < .95$ (unique effect: $\beta = .20$, $p < .36$).

Taken together, these results suggest that for participants with HSE, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval tended to predict greater desire to be viewed as warm/caring/kind following negative interpersonal feedback. For participants with LSE, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval actually predicted less desire to be perceived as warm/caring/kind following negative interpersonal feedback.

Virtuous/moral/responsible goal. Results revealed a significant main effect of approval contingency, $\beta = -.22$, $p = .05$, qualified by a marginally significant Self-esteem × Approval Contingency interaction, $\beta = -.18$, $p < .09$. Specifically, among HSE participants, the more they based self-worth on others' approval, the less they wanted to appear virtuous, $\beta = -.58$, $p < .02$, whereas this was not the case among LSE people, $\beta = .05$, $p < .83$. These effects did not hold, however, when partialling out the effects of other contingencies from the approval contingency.

Discussion

The results of the present study show that the effects of receiving negative interpersonal feedback on state self-esteem, affect, and goal pursuit depend on how much

people base their self-worth on others' approval. Specifically, participants who received negative feedback about their likeability experienced lower state self-esteem, less positive affect, and more negative affect the more strongly they based self-worth on others' approval. Those whose self-worth was less contingent on others' approval, or who did not receive negative feedback, did not show these effects. Furthermore, people with HSE and LSE differed in their pursuit of self-presentation goals following negative feedback as a function of their approval contingency of self-worth. These effects were found even after partialling out effects of other contingencies.

Consequences for Self-esteem and Affect

In past research, Leary and colleagues (2003) found that state self-esteem fluctuated in response to rejection, such that receiving negative interpersonal feedback lowered state self-esteem. In their studies, even participants who claimed not to care about others' evaluations showed drops in state self-esteem in the negative feedback condition. In contrast, the present study revealed that the degree to which people's self-worth is contingent on others' approval moderated the effects of interpersonal feedback on state self-esteem and affect.

Given that participants in our study received neutral to mildly negative feedback rather than explicitly negative, rejecting feedback, we cannot rule out the possibility that stronger instances of rejection might have affected even those whose self-worth was less contingent on others' approval. Previous research, however, suggests that state self-esteem is most sensitive to interpersonal evaluations that are moderate in valence rather than explicitly negative, because people are likely to discount feedback that is perceived to be extremely negative (Leary et al., 1998a). We therefore have reason to believe that even though our participants did not receive unequivocally rejecting feedback, the fact that they responded negatively to the neutral/mildly negative feedback provides further support for our claim that basing self-worth on others' approval is an important moderator of reactions to interpersonal feedback. It remains an empirical question whether stronger, more explicit instances of rejection might affect those whose self-worth is less contingent on the regard of others.

One difference between Leary's studies and the present study is that participants in Leary's studies (Leary et al., 2003, Study 1) reported their ''beliefs about self-esteem,'' rather than their contingencies of self-worth. Based on their responses to the ''beliefs about self-esteem'' measure, participants were categorized into one of three groups: approval-dependent (i.e., others' evaluations affect their self-feelings); esteem-dependent (i.e., self-feelings affect others' evaluations); and socially auto-nomous (i.e., no connection between social approval and self-feelings whatsoever). In the present study, participants were not categorized discretely into one group versus another; rather, participants' approval contingency score was treated as a continuous variable, with participants scoring relatively high or low on this subscale, which may more accurately reflect how people think about themselves. Thus, it could be that conceptualizing *how much* people base their self-worth in a domain such as others' approval, rather than categorizing people into mutually exclusive groups, portrays a more nuanced account of how approval contingent self-worth interacts with negative interpersonal feedback to influence state self-esteem, affect, and goal pursuit.

The nature of the negative interpersonal feedback in the present study versus Leary's studies may also account for the difference in findings. In Leary's studies,

participants received negative feedback from a group (Leary et al., 2003; Study 1) rather than from another person in a one-on-one interaction format, as in the present study. In another study (Leary et al., 2003; Study 2), participants received ongoing positive or negative feedback from the other participant but, again, the feedback was not based on a face-to-face interaction, but occurred over a speaker phone. The nature of the feedback may also account for differences between the present findings and those of Baumeister, Twenge, and colleagues. In Baumeister and colleagues' studies, the rejection manipulations consisted of group exclusion experiences or receipt of feedback stating that participants would end up alone later in life (Baumeister et al., 2002b; Twenge et al., 2001, 2003).

In contrast to these manipulations, the present study used a form of interpersonal feedback that was direct and ostensibly from the other participant with whom students had just interacted. Interacting face-to-face with another participant and then receiving relatively negative interpersonal feedback from him/her could be more emotionally distressing for those whose self-worth is highly contingent on what others think of them. In other words, there may be greater potency and immediacy in feeling disapproved of by a person with whom one has just interacted, which differs from being rejected via a speaker phone, by a group, or receiving feedback that one will end up alone later in life. In sum, the present findings emphasize the importance of measuring people's contingencies of self-worth when examining reactions to interpersonal feedback and suggest that the nature of the feedback may be an important variable to consider in future research.

Consequences for Self-presentation Goals

The present research also showed that HSE and LSE people adopt different self-presentation goals following negative interpersonal feedback. Our original predictions were that for people with HSE, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval would predict greater desire to validate internal, personal qualities following negative feedback, by wanting to appear competent/intelligent/knowledgeable. In contrast, we expected that for people with LSE, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval would predict a greater desire to validate interpersonal qualities, by wanting to appear likeable or physically attractive to others. The results provided partial support for our hypotheses. Overall, participants who received negative feedback regarding their likeability did not seek to validate their likeability directly (i.e., by wanting to appear more likeable to others). Instead, they turned to other domains to repair their self-esteem and feelings of belonging. Specifically, people with LSE wanted to appear more physically attractive to others the more strongly they based self-worth on others' approval and received negative interpersonal feedback. In contrast, people with HSE expressed greater desire to appear warm/caring/kind to others the more they based self-worth on others' approval and received negative interpersonal feedback.

The finding for LSE participants could be interpreted as a strategy to gain others' approval and avoid disapproval following negative interpersonal feedback. Our interpretation is consistent with past research showing that LSE people are very concerned about how they appear to others and become interpersonally focused following ego threat (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). Given that physical attractiveness is strongly linked to interpersonal attraction and liking, wanting to appear attractive might reflect one route to enhancing likeability following ego threat, especially an interpersonal

threat (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). Furthermore, physical attractiveness is a relatively external domain, in that attractiveness is often determined by how attractive one appears in the eyes of others and depends largely on external feedback and evaluations by others, the media, and society at-large (Crocker et al., 2003b).

In contrast, HSE participants expressed greater desire to appear warm/caring/ kind to others the more they based self-worth on others' approval and received negative interpersonal feedback. Past research has shown that when people with HSE receive an ego threat, they respond by directly enhancing their self-esteem, such as calling to mind their strengths versus weaknesses (Dodgson & Wood, 1998), adopting an independent self-construal, and focusing on their personal qualities and abilities (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). Although we did not find the approval contingency of self-worth to moderate HSE participants' desire to appear competent following negative interpersonal feedback, they did report greater desire to appear warm/caring/kind, which could be viewed as a relatively internal, personal quality. That is, HSE participants may have sought to validate themselves in a domain that satisfied both needs for self-enhancement and interpersonal approval the more they based self-worth on others' approval, given that the domain they were contingent on was interpersonal in nature to begin with. Being virtuous or competent, although clearly internal, personal qualities, may have less to do with interpersonal concerns than being warm/caring/kind. Thus, our results suggest that the more people with HSE based their self-worth on others' approval, the more they sought to validate internal, personal qualities tied to interpersonal concerns, such as appearing warm/ caring/kind.

Implications

On a broader level, our findings are consistent with the idea that a threat to self-worth can motivate compensatory self processes aimed at repairing damaged self-worth. Along these lines, Baumeister and Jones (1978) found that participants who received an unfavorable public evaluation from another person compensated for it by presenting themselves more favorably in other areas. Of importance, participants who received negative feedback showed compensatory self-enhancement in areas in which the other person had no information, suggesting that they were strategic in their selectivity. Adding to this body of knowledge, the present study demonstrates that people's trait levels of self-esteem, as well as the extent to which they base self-worth on others' approval, moderate reactions to negative interpersonal feedback.

Often, the pursuit of self-presentation goals may serve both intrapersonal and interpersonal needs (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). Indeed, Cooley's (1902) theory of reflected appraisals states that people come to know and evaluate themselves by imagining how they appear in the eyes of others. In addition, attachment researchers have suggested that people come to develop positive or negative self-views based on how they perceive they are treated by their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969; Collins & Read, 1990). Along these lines, Swann and Seyle (2005) recently argued that self-esteem stems from both intrapsychic and interpersonal processes, and Morf (2006) suggested that: ''Personality . . . reflects internal states that are contextualized in (and manifested in interaction with) the social environment as people regulate contents of the self in pursuit of their desired identities'' (p. 1552). In our own work, we have

found that the importance people place on viewing themselves as competent, attractive, and likeable is strongly related to the importance they place on having others view them in these ways ($r = .76$, $p < .001$; Park & Crocker, unpublished data, 2005). Although the pursuit of self-presentation goals often involves both intrapsychic and interpersonal concerns, we acknowledge that, at times, people may adopt self-presentation goals for purely interpersonal reasons. For example, people might engage in self-presentation to get someone to do a favor for them or to assert power over others. In such cases, people may not be motivated by an intrapersonal desire to see themselves in a particular way. In the present study, however, we view the pursuit of self-presentation goals to serve a dual purpose—by seeking to convey a desired image of oneself to others, one may repair their damaged self-worth and their feelings of belonging with others.

As a final thought, contingencies of self-worth may not only reflect the domains on which people seek to enhance their self-esteem, but may also represent domains in which people seek validation, reassurance, and a sense of belonging with others. Similarly, self-presentation goals may not only function to validate one's self-worth in specific domains, but may also serve as a means to securing others' approval and acceptance, especially for those whose self-worth is highly contingent in this domain. Indeed, the more LSE participants based their self-worth on others' approval, the more they pursued goals that validated their interpersonal qualities. Specifically, they showed greater desire to appear physically attractive to others following negative interpersonal feedback, because attractiveness is a domain that depends on others' feedback and evaluations and is associated with interpersonal liking and approval. People with HSE, who tend to be more secure than in their feelings of attractiveness and approval than people with LSE, may have wanted to appear more warm/caring/kind to others the more they based self-worth on approval and received negative interpersonal feedback as a way to affirm their internal, personal qualities.

Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of the current research is its reliance on self-reports, which may be susceptible to social desirability biases. Future research could circumvent such biases by examining implicit, automatically activated concerns following threats to domains of contingent self-worth using computerized reaction-time tasks. Also, in the present study we only examined one domain of contingency—the approval contingency—and found that the more participants based self-worth on others' approval, the larger drops they showed in state self-esteem and mood following negative interpersonal feedback. Future studies could examine whether it is only the approval contingency that is affected by disapproval, or whether negative evaluations in other domains of contingency lead to similar results. For example, studies could investigate whether being disapproved of for being incompetent or unethical among those who highly base self-worth on being competent or virtuous would lead to results similar to those of the present study.

Future research could also investigate effects of receiving positive interpersonal feedback in domains of contingency, to examine the types of goals that people pursue when they are approved of versus disapproved of. In addition, whereas the current study focused on receiving negative feedback among same-sex, unacquainted college students, future studies could examine the effects of experiencing disapproval in real-life friendships or in romantic relationships, as well as use other forms of

social disapproval, such as being ostracized via the Internet (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000), text messaging (Smith & Williams, 2004), or simply being primed with rejection thoughts (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002).

Conclusion

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in studying the impact of rejection and social exclusion on a wide variety of outcomes (see Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005). The present research contributes to the growing literature on social rejection by considering the effects of contingencies of self-worth on people's responses to interpersonal feedback. This study showed that contingencies of self-worth differentially affected people's responses to negative interpersonal feedback. Specifically, the more participants based self-worth on others' approval and received negative feedback in this domain, the lower their state self-esteem, with corresponding effects on mood. Moreover, these findings held even after partialling out the effects of other contingencies of self-worth.

This study also showed that highly basing self-worth on others' approval and receiving negative interpersonal feedback differentially affected goal pursuit for people with HSE versus LSE. For people with HSE, basing self-worth more strongly on others' approval predicted greater desire to be perceived as warm/caring/kind by others following negative feedback, reflecting affirmation of internal qualities, yet still reflecting a desire for others' approval. For people with LSE, basing self-worth highly on others' approval predicted less desire to be perceived as warm/caring/kind and greater desire to be perceived as attractive/good-looking/physically fit following negative feedback, reflecting a more external and interpersonally-oriented strategy of gaining others' approval. Thus, the present study showed that it is the combination of having HSE or LSE *and* having self-worth that is highly contingent in a threatened domain that led to differences in goal pursuit. In sum, the links between trait self-esteem, contingencies of self-worth, ego threat, and goal pursuit represent complex phenomena that warrant further investigation.

Notes

1. Analyses of gender and race revealed that, overall, African Americans showed less desire to appear likeable/sociable/popular, $\beta = -.25$, $p < .04$, Asians tended to experience less positive affect, $\beta = -.19$, $p < .08$, and women showed greater desire than men to appear warm/caring/kind, $\beta = .34$, $p < .01$. We included these demographic variables because research has shown that women tend to score higher on the others' approval contingency than men, and African American students are less likely than White students to base their self-worth on the regard of others (Crocker & Lawrence, 1999; Crocker et al., 2003b).
2. We also ran analyses replacing approval contingency with the other six contingencies of self-worth to examine whether they could explain our effects. These analyses revealed no significant effects of wanting to appear attractive/good-looking/physically fit or warm/caring/kind. The only significant findings were for state self-esteem and negative affect. Specifically, the competition, virtue, and family support contingencies of self-worth all predicted more negative affect in the negative feedback condition, and the family support contingency also predicted lower state self-esteem in this condition.

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