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Contingencies of Self-Worth and Self-Validation Goals

Implications for Close Relationships

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Of all the needs that humans possess, one of the most fundamental is the need for relatedness: the need to have close, mutually caring, and supportive relationships with others (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995, for a review; see also Blackhart, Baumeister, & Twenge, Chapter 12, this volume; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Close relationships serve as a safe haven, thereby alleviating distress and providing comfort and support in times of need (Bowlby, 1969; Collins & Feeney, 2000; see also Feeney, Chapter 7, this volume). Close relationships also serve as a secure base from which people can confidently explore their environment and develop autonomous, integrated personalities (Green & Campbell, 2000). Although relationships are meant to provide a sense of safety and security, certain intrapersonal processes may interfere with people's ability to form and maintain such relationships. In this chapter, we propose that people's *contingencies of self-worth*, or bases of self-esteem, and *self-validation goals*, the desire to prove that one possesses qualities on which self-esteem is based, may ultimately hinder people from sustaining quality relationships with others.

People differ in the domains on which they base their self-worth; some derive self-worth from being virtuous, having God's love, or experiencing sup-

port from their family, whereas others may base their self-worth on excelling academically, outdoing others in competition, obtaining others' approval, or being physically attractive (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). Contingencies of self-worth (CSWs; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), in turn, may influence feelings of closeness and security in relationships, and distinguish between those who are satisfied versus relatively dissatisfied in their relationships.

One mechanism by which people's CSWs may affect relationship outcomes is through the kinds of goals people adopt in their relationships. Specifically, people adopt *self-validation goals* to prove, demonstrate, and confirm that they possess certain qualities in domains on which their self-worth is staked (Crocker & Park, 2004). For example, a person who bases his self-esteem on gaining others' approval may adopt the goal of proving that he is likeable. Although pursuing self-validation goals is highly motivating, the motivation to prove qualities about the self may ultimately undermine close relationships because the focus is on the self, not on the relationship. Indeed, much of the existing literature on the effects of intrapersonal processes on interpersonal outcomes can be integrated in the larger framework of CSWs and self-validation goals. Consistent with the literature, certain individuals may be more vulnerable to experiencing negative relationship outcomes than others. Specifically, people who are highly rejection-sensitive, possess insecure attachment styles, have high, fragile self-esteem, or low self-esteem are likely to pursue self-validation goals in such a way that others are driven away, thereby hindering them from building close relationships with others.

We begin this chapter with a discussion of how childhood experiences and sociocultural factors shape people's CSWs and self-validation goals. We then examine how contingencies and self-validation goals create problems in interpersonal relationships for people with high rejection sensitivity, insecure attachment styles, high, fragile self-esteem, and low self-esteem. Finally, we propose directions for future research regarding the role of CSWs and self-validation goals in relationship outcomes and conclude with a discussion of alternatives to the pursuit of self-esteem. In short, our goal is to outline the ways in which CSWs have a direct effect on the quality of interpersonal relationships and then describe how relationships have a reciprocal influence on CSWs and self-validation goals.

ORIGINS OF CONTINGENCIES OF SELF-WORTH AND SELF-VALIDATION GOALS

In childhood, people experience events, such as being abandoned, rejected, or criticized, that threaten their sense of safety and security. In response, children draw conclusions about how others will respond to them (e.g., they won't

be there for me, they will reject me, they will humiliate me), and what they must be or do to avoid these negative responses in the future. These conclusions take the form of specific beliefs, or CSWs, regarding what one must be or do to be a person of worth. Consequently, people are motivated to prove to themselves and to others that they have worth and value (i.e., that they satisfy their contingencies). These self-validation goals involve proving or demonstrating that one possesses certain qualities in domains of contingency. The pursuit of self-validation goals, in turn, regulates anxiety and ensures that fears (e.g., of criticism, of rejection) are kept at bay (see Crocker & Park, 2004). In sum, although CSWs and self-validation goals vary as a function of life experiences, the underlying motivation is to regulate anxiety, feel secure in relationships, and achieve the emotional high that accompanies success in domains of contingency.

Specific events in childhood are likely to overgeneralize to other settings in adulthood. For example, a child who felt abandoned may anticipate or perceive potential abandonment in future interpersonal situations, such as in the context of romantic relationships. Because people are anxious that the distressing event (e.g., abandonment) could occur again, they become vigilant for this possibility and readily interpret ambiguous events in ways that reinforce their expectations. To protect themselves from potential danger, people react in various ways, ranging from withdrawing and distancing themselves from others, to seeking excessive reassurance, to criticizing others. Although these reactions temporarily relieve anxiety, the anxiety and subsequent vigilance are likely to return. Reactions to potential threats become stronger as people increase their efforts to prevent the event from occurring again. Ultimately, this maladaptive interpersonal cycle is likely to disconnect people from others and undermine their sense of interpersonal safety and security.

Social Interactions

Interactions with peers, family members, teachers, and others may shape people's CSWs. In one study, 130 college students were asked to retrospectively report on their childhood experiences of peer acceptance versus peer rejection when they succeeded or failed in domains of contingency (Park, Montgomery, & Crocker, 2005). Specifically, participants were asked to think back to when they were a child and report how often they felt their peers acted positively versus negatively toward them when they succeeded versus failed in the domains of academics, physical appearance, and virtue.

Results showed that the more participants reported having been teased, rejected, or looked down upon by their peers when they performed poorly at school, the more likely they were to base their current self-esteem on academic competence and to possess academic self-validation goals. Importantly, the effects of negative perceived peer reactions on current academic CSW

and self-validation goals were mediated by participants' anxiety in childhood about being smart when they were with their peers. A similar mediation process was found with the virtue CSW. Participants who reported negative peer reactions for not acting virtuously were more likely to base their current self-esteem on virtue. Furthermore, this relationship was significantly mediated by participants' anxiety in childhood about being virtuous when they were with their peers. Finally, for the appearance CSW, *positive* peer reactions to being attractive in childhood predicted basing one's current self-esteem on appearance and having the goal of validating one's attractiveness. These effects, however, were not mediated by anxiety in childhood about being attractive to one's peers.

Taken together, these findings suggest that positive versus negative peer interactions in childhood influence people's current CSWs and self-validation goals. Importantly, childhood anxiety about being *X* (e.g., competent, virtuous) mediated the relationship between negative peer reactions and CSWs. Finally, people do not simply base their self-esteem in domains that they are good at; for example, basing self-worth on academic competence was not significantly related to domain-specific self-esteem in the academic domain ($r =$ $-.08$) (Park et al., 2005). Instead, people base their self-esteem in domains that are associated with anxiety. Anxiety about being smart or virtuous with one's peers may reflect underlying anxiety about being accepted versus rejected and feeling safe and secure in one's relationships.

Cultural Influences

In addition to being shaped by social influences and interactions, CSWs may also develop in response to prevailing cultural norms and values. For example, according to self-objectification theory, women in North American culture come to adopt an observer's perspective on their bodies as a result of living in a culture that objectifies women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Having an externalized perspective, in turn, may lead women to base their self-worth on domains that depend on others' feedback and validation, such as others' approval and physical attractiveness. Indeed, Crocker and colleagues (2003) found that college women tended to base their self-esteem more on others' approval and their appearance than did men. Moreover, for young women, being highly aware of one's body as an object was related to basing self-worth more on interpersonally contingent domains, such as others' approval and physical appearance, and less on domains such as God's love or virtue (Crocker, Stein, & Luhtanen, 2004). In sum, the objectification of women may lead them to be contingent on sources of self-worth that depend on others' reactions and feedback, such as being physically attractive or likeable.

Cultural values of independence and interdependence may also play a role in the development of specific CSWs. In individualistic cultures, such as

the United States, the self is defined by independence, distinctiveness from others, and personal freedom (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, in interdependent cultures, such as Japan, the self is defined by one's relationships, group memberships, and connections with others (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In Japan, maintaining a sense of belongingness and harmonious relations is of paramount importance. Japanese people possess a strong external frame of reference; they view themselves through the eyes of others and strive to maintain "face" and avoid shame. Because of their heightened sensitivity to external cues of approval and disapproval, people in interdependent cultures may possess CSWs that are contingent on others' reactions, such as others' approval, being a good friend, or being a loyal group member. Indeed, research has shown that the Japanese are highly attuned to others' opinions and expectations (Kuwayama, 1992) and are guided less by internal attitudes or desires and more by social cues, such as social roles and norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People in individualistic cultures may also have CSWs related to relational concerns, but because of cultural values stressing independence may derive their sense of self-worth more from being independent and unique.

When self-esteem is contingent on a domain, people typically adopt self-validation goals to prove their worth in those domains. For example, basing self-esteem on academic performance is strongly correlated with the goal of validating one's intelligence through schoolwork (Crocker, 2003), basing self-esteem on others' approval is strongly correlated with the goal of validating one's likeability, and basing self-esteem on physical appearance is strongly correlated with the goal of validating one's attractiveness (Park & Crocker, 2004a). Thus we assume that most people, most of the time, pursue self-validation goals in domains of contingency, with implications for interpersonal relationships.

CONTINGENCIES, SELF-VALIDATION GOALS, AND RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES

CSWs and self-validation goals are likely to guide interpersonal behavior. In domains of contingent self-worth, people may have the goal of proving something about themselves, which they may do at the expense of others' needs or well-being. That is, when people are highly focused on proving their worth in domains of contingency, they are likely to become preoccupied with themselves, hindering them from forging close connections with others.

Several programs of research provide suggestive evidence for the role of CSWs and self-validation goals in dysfunctional relationship cycles. In the next section, we discuss personality traits that convey interpersonal insecurities in terms of their underlying CSWs.

Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity refers to a cognitive-affective processing system in which people anxiously expect and readily perceive rejection from others (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Early experiences of conditional love by parents, emotional neglect, harsh disciplining, and exposure to family violence are associated with anxious expectations of rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Khouri, & Feldman, 1997). In order to prevent rejection, high rejection-sensitive people are hypervigilant for signs of being abandoned; they anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to signs of rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Indeed, given their highly interpersonal focus, high rejection-sensitive people are likely to base their self-esteem on domains that are interpersonally based, such as physical attractiveness, and be sensitive to rejection based on their appearance (Park, 2005).

For high rejection-sensitive people, having interpersonal CSWs may serve a self-regulatory function; for example, basing self-esteem on being attractive or likeable may be a means to prevent rejection and maintain close relationships. Having interpersonal CSWs may then lead high rejection-sensitive people to be "on guard" in their relationships, seeking to prove that they are attractive and likeable, and not unattractive or unlikable, to prevent rejection. Along these lines, Downey and colleagues have proposed that rejection sensitivity operates as a defensive motivational system (Downey, Mugious, Ayduk, London, & Shoda, 2004). Situations where high rejection-sensitive people expect rejection (e.g., conflict) activate this system, leading them to vigilantly monitor signs of interpersonal negativity and rejection. To avoid rejection, high rejection-sensitive people overaccommodate, ingratiate, and self-silence in order to be liked and to maintain important relationships (Purdie & Downey, 2000).

The kinds of behaviors that high rejection-sensitive people engage in to prevent rejection may differ depending on their CSWs. For example, someone who is highly rejection-sensitive and bases her self-esteem on physical appearance may engage in excessive dieting or exercising in order to appear more attractive to her partner and avoid rejection. Indeed, research has shown that basing self-esteem on one's appearance predicts symptoms of disordered eating, especially among women (Egnatios, Park, & Crocker, 2004; Sanchez & Crocker, 2005) and being rejection-sensitive based on appearance also uniquely predicts eating disorder symptoms (Park, 2005). Thus knowing high rejection-sensitive people's CSWs may help predict the specific kinds of behaviors they might engage in to prevent rejection in their close relationships.

In sum, high rejection-sensitive people may invest a great deal of time and energy into satisfying their CSWs in order to maintain their relationships. Although heightened efforts to fulfill CSWs may temporarily assuage anxieties about rejection, this may eventually give way to overreactions of hostility,

depression, and other negative mental health outcomes when rejection has occurred. Ultimately, anxiety and vigilance about rejection are likely to return, and efforts to validate self-worth and prevent future rejection are likely to escalate. Thus, when people are caught in the cycle of validating self-worth in contingent domains, they may end up creating the opposite of what they want, which is to feel secure in their relationships.

Insecure Attachment Style

Through interactions with attachment figures, children come to develop mental models of the self, beliefs about their lovability and worthiness of care and attention, and mental models of others, beliefs about how emotionally available and responsive others will be toward their needs (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1969; Collins, 1996). We propose that people's attachment styles, stemming from childhood and continuing into adulthood, affect the types of CSWs and self-validation goals they pursue, with implications for interpersonal relationships.

Preoccupied Attachment Style

People with a preoccupied/anxious attachment style are highly dependent on others and seek excessive closeness with others, but simultaneously worry that their partners will not want to be as close to them as they would like (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). People with a preoccupied attachment style are likely to have had caregivers who conveyed messages of conditional acceptance and rejection, leading them to internalize a negative view of the self and a positive view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998). Preoccupied people's deep-seated doubts about their lovability and worth lead them to look to others for validation (Bartholomew, 1990). Indeed, research has shown that preoccupied people possess self-esteem that fluctuates dramatically in response to perceived approval or rejection by others (Collins & Read, 1990). In a study of over 700 college students, Park and colleagues (2004) found that basing self-esteem on physical attractiveness was related to having a preoccupied attachment style. Because physical attractiveness plays an important role in interpersonal attraction and relationships, preoccupied people are likely to invest their self-worth in this domain to gain others' approval and adopt self-validation goals aimed at proving their attractiveness to others (Park, 2005).

When preoccupied people experience anxiety, they react in ways that temporarily relieve anxiety but ultimately strain their close relationships. Indeed, research has shown that preoccupied people tend to be clingy, dependent, emotionally unstable, and jealous in their romantic relationships, which is likely to drive partners away (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Preoccupied people also react to anxiety by caring for

their partners in a compulsive, inconsistent, controlling manner, overwhelming their partners with care and support even when it is unwanted in order to keep their partners close and committed to the relationship (Feeney & Collins, 2001). Not surprisingly, people with a preoccupied/anxious attachment style report experiencing more negative emotions in their relationships and less relationship closeness, satisfaction, or commitment than securely attached people (Simpson, 1990). These and other negative relationship outcomes may be due, in part, to preoccupied people's desire to validate their worth in interpersonal domains—to prove that they are likeable, attractive relationship partners. Although attempts to prove one's worth to others may temporarily relieve anxiety, this may ultimately hinder feelings of safety and security because the focus is on validating the self rather than on strengthening connections with others. Future research is needed to test this possibility.

Fearful Attachment Style

People with a fearful attachment style are likely to have had caregivers who were rejecting, malevolent, and punitive (Levy et al., 1998). These experiences lead fearfully attached people to conclude that they are unlovable and that others are uncaring and unavailable to meet their needs (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). To prevent negative responses from others, fearfully attached people are likely to base their self-worth on interpersonal domains, such as physical attractiveness, that enable them to indirectly gain acceptance from others without risking overt rejection (Park et al., 2004). Given that people like others who are attractive, fearfully attached people, who desire acceptance yet fear rejection, may adopt self-validation goals aimed at validating their attractiveness. Future research is needed to examine the potential mediating role of CSWs and self-validation goals in producing maladaptive relationship outcomes associated with fearful attachment, such as jealousy, "intimacy anger," and verbal/physical abuse toward partners (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomswki, & Bartholomew, 1994).

Dismissive Attachment Style

Based on their early attachment experiences with unreliable, unresponsive, neglectful caregivers (Levy et al., 1998), people with a dismissive/avoidant attachment style conclude that others are not available to meet their needs, so they must rely on themselves. Dismissive individuals possess a positive mental model of the self and a negative mental model of others (Bartholomew, 1990; Levy et al., 1998), preferring to be self-sufficient and independent rather than rely on others' feedback or support (Brennan & Bosson, 1998; Brennan & Morris, 1998).

People with a dismissive attachment style maintain emotional distance from others; they show little interest in forming close relationships, fall in love

less often (Feeney & Noller, 1990), avoid others' support (Collins & Feeney, 2000), and self-disclose less than people with a secure attachment style (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). These interpersonal responses may reflect an underlying desire to regulate anxiety and needs for safety and security. Indeed, Park and colleagues (2004) found that people with a dismissive attachment style were *less* likely to base their self-esteem on domains that depended on others, such as others' approval, family support, and God's love. Dismissive people may instead derive their self-worth from being independent and self-reliant and adopt self-validation goals in these domains. Consequently, negative relationship outcomes for dismissive people may result from their CSWs and self-validation goals aimed at demonstrating their independence and self-reliance rather than strengthening relationships.

Indeed, research has shown that the dismissive/avoidant attachment style is associated with low interdependence, trust, commitment, and satisfaction in relationships (Simpson, 1990). Furthermore, people with this attachment style feel uncomfortable in caregiving and support-seeking roles: avoidant men tend to be unresponsive to their partners' needs, especially when their partners express a need for support; avoidant women seek less support from partners the more anxious they feel (Feeney & Collins, 2001; Simpson et al., 1992). In both of these cases, the link between avoidant attachment and ineffective caregiving and support seeking may be mediated, in part, by dismissive/avoidant people's CSWs and self-validation goals (e.g., independence from others, self-reliance). Although validating these qualities may help alleviate dismissive people's anxiety under threatening conditions, this may ultimately drive others away, hindering the development of close, mutually caring relationships.

In sum, we propose that negative relationship outcomes resulting from insecure attachment styles may be due, in part, to people's CSWs and self-validation goals aimed at proving qualities in contingent domains. Although the specific content of CSWs and self-validation goals may differ from person to person, we think that the underlying goal—to manage anxiety and protect the self from dangers experienced in childhood—is the same. Moreover, people's attempts to manage anxiety, via CSWs and self-validation goals, may ultimately create and perpetuate a dysfunctional cycle of relationship functioning.

High, Fragile Self-Esteem

Although high self-esteem (HSE) signals positive self-evaluations (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989), self-concept clarity (Campbell, 1990), and feeling socially accepted by others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), researchers have distinguished between different types of HSE that are likely to affect relationship outcomes. In particular, researchers have distinguished

between HSE that is stable, secure, and "true," versus HSE that is unstable, fragile, defensive, or contingent (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kernis & Waschull, 1995). Compared with people who have stable HSE, those with fragile HSE tend to experience greater fluctuations in self-feelings in response to daily events (Kernis & Waschull, 1995) and are highly ego involved in everyday activities, chronically perceiving that their self-worth is "on the line" (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993).

Although it is unclear where fragile HSE comes from, one possibility is that early attachment experiences in which caregivers were inconsistent or unreliable may lead people to conclude that others cannot be trusted, and therefore, they must be self-reliant. In attachment terms, this translates into having a positive mental model of the self and a negative mental model of others, which characterizes the dismissive attachment style (Bartholomew, 1990). Although dismissive people typically report having HSE, their self-esteem is likely to be defensive and fragile; dismissive people refuse to acknowledge personal weaknesses that might expose their flaws to others and make them vulnerable to rejection (Mikulincer, 1995). Furthermore, they frequently engage in defensive projection by suppressing their flaws and projecting them onto others, and maintain interpersonal distance by being averse to others' feedback or support (Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999; Brennan & Bosson, 1998; Brennan & Morris, 1998). Accordingly, people with fragile HSE (e.g., a dismissive attachment style) may base their self-worth on domains that emphasize competence and self-reliance. Along these lines, research has shown that after ego threat, HSE people become more independent in their self-construal, focusing on their competencies and unique traits (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001).

Previous research by Heatherton and Vohs (2000) found that after an ego threat (e.g., negative feedback on the Remote Associates Test) HSE people were rated as more antagonistic and unlikable by others in the context of a structured dyadic interaction. A series of follow-up studies by Vohs and Heatherton (2001) showed that differences in likability following threat were due to HSE people's increased focus on personal versus interpersonal aspects of the self. HSE people who received an ego threat sought competency feedback (e.g., "What areas of intellectual performance do I excel in?") over interpersonal feedback (e.g., "How do others really see me?"), and adopted an independent self-construal, which statistically accounted for HSE people's decreased likeability following threat.

Although these effects occurred broadly in the group of HSE people (i.e., stability of self-esteem was not measured in these studies), administering an ego threat among people with fragile HSE is likely to result in even stronger effects (Kernis et al., 1993). Indeed, studies have shown that people with fragile HSE react to ego threat with defensiveness, anger, and hostility toward others (Kernis et al., 1993; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989).

Along these lines, Park and Crocker (2005a) showed that it is not just level of self-esteem that matters, but CSWs *interacting* with self-esteem level and ego threat that influences likeability and interpersonal perceptions. Specifically, Park and Crocker examined the effects of receiving a threat to a contingent domain (i.e., academics) on people's ability to attend to the needs and feelings of others. In their study, two unacquainted, same-sex students participated in each experimental session. One of the participants (partner) wrote an essay about a personal problem while the other participant (target) completed either a Graduate Record Exam (GRE) test and received failure feedback or completed a non-GRE word associations task and received no feedback. In the second half of the experiment, the essay partner discussed his or her personal problem with the target. Afterwards, partners rated targets on various interpersonal qualities, including how supportive, compassionate, understanding, preoccupied, and bored. the target seemed, and indicated how much they liked the target, wanted to interact with him or her again, and disclose a personal problem to him or her in the future.

Results showed that for targets in the failure feedback condition, the combination of having HSE and highly contingent on academic competence was related to being perceived by their partners as being less supportive, caring, and concerned, and being more preoccupied, interrupting, and bored with the partner's personal problem. In addition, HSE, highly contingent targets who failed were rated as less likable and less desirable for future interactions or to discuss one's problems with in the future. Under no threat, HSE, highly contingent targets were not rated negatively or disliked by their partners. These findings suggest that HSE people, but only those whose self-worth is at stake, may have difficulty disengaging from the pursuit of self-esteem following threat, hindering them from providing support to others. Over time, these self-focused reactions to ego threat could interfere with people's ability to form and maintain close, mutually supportive relationships with others.

Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem (LSE) people possess relatively unfavorable self-evaluations relative to HSE people (Campbell, 1990). As a result of early experiences characterized by failures and low feelings of self-efficacy, LSE people conclude that they are unlikely to meet others' standards for acceptance. According to sociometer theory (Leary et al., 1995; see also Leary, Chapter 12, this volume), LSE people operate at an "inclusion deficit." Because they do not feel included by others, they are highly attuned to signs of potential acceptance and rejection by others, even if the "other" is a stranger (Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997), and prefer to interact with someone who wants to form a relationship, regardless of how positively they are evaluated by them (Rudich & Vallacher, 1999).

In order to compensate for their perceived deficiencies, LSE people look to others to validate their impoverished self. Along these lines, research has shown that LSE people tend to base their self-worth on interpersonally contingent domains that depend on others' reactions and feedback, such as others' approval and physical appearance (Crocker et al., 2003). Accordingly, we would expect LSE people to have self-validation goals aimed at proving their likeability, attractiveness, and other interpersonal qualities. Indeed, Park and Crocker (2005b) found that LSE people were likely to have self-validation goals in the domains of others' approval and appearance. Further evidence for this hypothesis comes from research showing that after ego threat, LSE people are more likeable (Heatherton & Vohs, 2000). In fact, Vohs and Heatherton (2001) found that LSE people's tendency to construe the self as interdependent following threat led them to be more likeable. Similarly, Park and Crocker (2005a) found a trend for LSE people who were highly contingent on academics to become more supportive toward another's personal problem and more likeable following threat.

Because LSE people have less positive self-views and are less certain of their competencies than are HSE people, they are less effective at refuting threats directly when they occur. Instead, they react with indirect strategies by withdrawing from the situation, becoming risk-averse, self-protective, and more interpersonally focused in order to repair self-esteem (Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). At first glance, becoming more relational and likeable after threat may appear to be an effective strategy for fulfilling one's need for relatedness. However, studies of ongoing, close relationships reveal that LSE people often react in ways that undermine their relationships with others. After ego threat, LSE people distrust their partners' expressions of love and support, perceive fewer positive qualities in their partners, and report less satisfaction or optimism about the future than their partner's feelings of love and commitment warrant (Murray, Griffin, Rose, Bellavia, & Holmes, 2001; Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). Indeed, Murray and colleagues propose that LSE people possess relational contingencies of self-esteem, or self-esteem that is contingent on gaining acceptance/ avoiding rejection (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003).

Baldwin and colleagues have also posited that LSE people possess relational schemas of "If . . . then" contingencies of interpersonal acceptance, such as "If I fail, then I will be rejected" (Baldwin, 1992, 1997; Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Indeed, when LSE people experience a threat, or even when simply primed with failure-related words ("lose," "incompetent"), this is likely to automatically activate thoughts of rejection (disliked, ridiculed). Along these lines, we propose that LSE people's negative relationship outcomes may be mediated by the extent to which they base their self-worth on interpersonally contingent sources (others' approval, appearance) and their desire to self-validate in these domains following threat. In a one-time interaction with

strangers, LSE people may be able to satisfy their CSWs and self-validation goals, as reflected by their increased likeability following threat. However, in an ongoing relationship, their self-validation goals may interfere with LSE people's ability to maintain mutually caring, supportive relationships.

In sum, early experiences characterized by feelings of low self-regard and low self-efficacy lead LSE people to conclude that they must be likeable to be accepted by others. Consequently, LSE people base their self-worth on and pursue self-validation goals in interpersonal domains (Crocker et al., 2003; Park & Crocker, 2005b). When LSE people encounter threats, they react in self-protective ways, such as withdrawing and distancing themselves, that temporary relieve anxiety in the short term, but may undermine their close relationships with others in the long term. Future research is needed to investigate the mediating effects of interpersonal CSWs and self-validation goals on relationship outcomes among LSE people.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this chapter, we proposed a theoretical model to explain why some people frequently experience negative outcomes in their relationships. We suggested that significant childhood experiences lead people to draw conclusions about the social world. In response, people adopt specific CSWs about what they must be or do to be a person of worth and adopt self-validation goals to prove their worth in domains of contingency, thereby protecting themselves from rejection, abandonment, criticism, and so on. The manner in which people regulate their anxiety and needs for safety and security may vary as a function of rejection sensitivity, attachment style, self-esteem level, and self-esteem stability. Although research has established associations between CSWs and attachment styles (Park et al., 2004), CSWs and self-esteem level (Crocker et al., 2003), and CSWs and self-validation goals (Park & Crocker, 2005b), further research is needed to examine the associations between CSWs and self-validation goals with rejection sensitivity and stability of self-esteem. Furthermore, in order to test the mediating role of CSWs and self-validation goals in producing relationship outcomes as a function of individual differences, researchers must first examine the associations among CSWs and self-validation goals with specific relationship outcomes, such as caregiving and support seeking, interpersonal conflict, relationship closeness, satisfaction, and other outcomes of interest.

Preliminary evidence suggests that specific contingencies are associated with specific relationship outcomes. For example, a study of over 400 college students showed that the more students based their self-esteem on physical appearance, the more romantic breakups they reported experiencing, whereas basing self-worth on family love and support predicted fewer romantic break-

ups (Park & Crocker, 2004). These effects were found even after controlling for number of romantic relationships, self-esteem level, and attachment styles. These data suggest that people's bases of self-esteem predict important relationship outcomes; future research is needed to determine *why* basing self-worth on certain domains leads to certain relationship outcomes and not others.

Reactions to threat may assuage anxiety temporarily, but produce long-term costs to the self and to others (Crocker, Lee, & Park, 2004; Crocker & Park, 2003, 2004a). Anxiety and vigilance about the potential danger is likely to return, and reactions to the threat may be exacerbated as people increase their efforts to validate the self and manage their anxiety. Ultimately, this pattern may result in a dysfunctional cycle in which people feel increasingly disconnected from others, undermining their ability to form and sustain close, caring relationships with others. Although several programs of research have shown that people respond to threats in ways that undermine their interpersonal functioning (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Murray et al., 2001, 2002, 2003; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001), studies have yet to examine whether people's CSWs and self-validation goals, especially in interpersonally contingent domains, lead to negative relationship outcomes as we have hypothesized.

Future research is also needed to investigate chronic versus state-specific aspects of CSWs and self-validation goals. Contingencies have been shown to be relatively stable over time (Crocker et al., 2003), and the pursuit of self-validation goals in domains of contingency are thought to be the default goal pursuit for most people most of the time (Crocker & Park, 2004a, 2004b). However, recent research has shown that after a threat in a contingent domain, HSE, highly contingent people continue to have the goal to self-validate, whereas LSE, highly contingent people tend to disengage their contingency from their self-validation goals, saying it is less important for them to be likeable, after an academic ego threat (Park & Crocker, 2005c), but say it is more important to be perceived as attractive (and less important to be viewed as warm/caring/kind) following interpersonal rejection (Park & Crocker, 2005d).

Experiences in close relationships may also affect the pursuit of self-validation goals. For example, although attachment styles are present at the chronic trait level, they are also present at the state level, varying across relationships and as a function of availability and accessibility of relationships (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Rangarajoo, 1996). Similarly, in the context of secure, unconditionally accepting relationships, people may be less contingent on domains that depend on others' reactions and less intent on proving their worth in these domains. In other words, being in a close, mutually caring relationship may lower anxiety and thereby reduce people's need to validate themselves in domains of contingency. In contrast, in insecure, conditionally

accepting relationships, people may become more contingent on interpersonal domains and strive to validate their worth in those domains to manage their anxiety and feel secure. Thus future research could examine how people's CSWs and self-validation goals change in response to being in unconditional versus conditionally accepting relationships.

Finally, research is needed to disentangle the effects of CSWs from the effects of other personality variables on relationship outcomes. We propose that the CSWs and self-validation goals framework can provide an integrative framework that emphasizes the common core of diverse personality traits. In particular, CSWs and self-validation goals may mediate the relationships between specific personality variables and relationship outcomes. For example, people with a dismissive attachment style may experience less relationship closeness and commitment because they base self-worth on being independent and self-reliant and have the goal of validating these qualities. High rejection-sensitive people may experience more interpersonal conflicts and less relationship satisfaction the more contingent they are on domains that require validation and reassurance from others, such as being attractive or likeable. In sum, when people's self-esteem is invested in a domain and they have the goal of validating the self in that domain, other goals, such as strengthening connections with others, may be sacrificed.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PURSUIT OF SELF-ESTEEM

Given the potentially negative effects of CSWs and self-validation goals on relationship outcomes, what, if anything, can be done to attenuate these effects? Although CSWs and self-validation goals are highly correlated (Park & Crocker, 2004b), we do not think that having CSWs necessitates that people pursue self-validation goals. This point reflects our earlier discussion of the distinction between trait and state-specific CSWs and self-validation goals. Whereas CSWs are relatively stable, we think that self-validation goals are more malleable; at any given moment, people can have the goal of validating their self-worth, or they can adopt a different goal (Crocker & Park, 2004a, 2004b). Thus, whereas CSWs are relatively stable and difficult to change, self-validation goals are more situation-specific and can be consciously chosen by the individual. For example, someone who bases his or her self-esteem on academic competence can be focused on proving that he or she is smart, or he or she can adopt an alternative goal, such as being open to feedback and learning from mistakes.

Along these lines, we argue that people who are highly contingent can consciously decide to adopt a goal that is larger than themselves and includes others, such as wanting to create a mutually caring and supportive relationship, rather than validating their likeability or attractiveness. By adopting

goals that are beneficial to both the self and to others, people can learn to act autonomously instead of being controlled by external feedback. Over time, choosing goals that include the self with others may reduce people's automatic associations between threat and rejection, thereby minimizing the impact of external feedback on self-worth and enabling people to create close, mutually caring relationships with others.

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