

INTERPERSONAL EXPECTATIONS AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SEX

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical models of the interpersonal roots of self-esteem emphasize people's expectations about whether they can anticipate acceptance and affiliation in significant relationships. Men and women ($n = 182$), of high and low self-esteem, were compared in terms of their if-then expectations regarding interactions with significant others. Participants completed the Interpersonal Schema Questionnaire (Hill & Safran, 1994), which assesses the degree of affiliation and dominance that people expect from others. Overall, participants expected response complementarity, with their own friendliness leading to affiliation from others, and submission leading to dominance. Consistent with interpersonal models of self-esteem, high self-esteem individuals reported greater confidence that being friendly would draw affiliative responses from others. Compared with men, women expected more affiliative responses to their friendly overtures, and also expected affiliative responses to submissiveness.

KEY WORDS • interpersonal expectations • self-esteem • sex

People often anticipate very different things in their interactions with others: One person expects that being warm and friendly toward others will elicit warmth in response; another anticipates that being warm and friendly will instead lead to being manipulated or dominated. Interpersonal expectations of this sort are thought to strongly influence people's social perceptions, sense of self, and behavior in relationships (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1985; Mischel, 1973).

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Interpersonal expectations are particularly relevant to the link between close relationships and self-esteem. Indeed, numerous theorists have suggested that self-esteem is largely derived from interpersonal experience, with high self-esteem representing a feeling that one is accepted and valued by significant others (e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Harter, 1993; M. Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). This perspective is consistent with findings in the attachment and social support literatures (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Sarason et al., 1991), in which high self-esteem has been found to co-occur with positive working models of relationships with others.

Pertinent to this issue is recent social cognitive research into interpersonal knowledge, which suggests that models of self and other are linked together in *relational schemas* or knowledge structures representing regularities in patterns of interaction (see Baldwin, 1992, for a review). The sense of self as 'worthy of acceptance', for example, is hypothesized to be associated with the sense of other as 'accepting'. Views of self and other are embedded in scripts or event schemas representing expectancies about patterns of interaction in significant relationships. Research has indicated that relational schemas function in a manner similar to other knowledge structures, demonstrating priming effects, the biasing of interpretations, and so on.

Based on interpersonal approaches, self-esteem should be associated with the expectation that positive responses will be forthcoming from others. One might hypothesize that high self-esteem individuals have a globally positive view of interpersonal relations and walk through the world perceiving other people as consistently accepting, while low self-esteem individuals perceive others as consistently rejecting. However, such a gross difference in outlook seems unlikely. To maintain reasonably adequate social relations, each of us must attend to 'if-then' contingencies of interpersonal feedback, whereby some behaviors (e.g., friendliness, generosity) tend to lead to positive responses from others but other behaviors (e.g., hostility, abusiveness) tend to lead to negative responses. Against this backdrop, however, individual differences in feelings of self-worth might arise from fairly small differences in if-then expectancies about the kinds or range of behaviors that lead to social acceptance and rejection. In a recent set of studies (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996), a reaction-time paradigm revealed that low self-esteem individuals were more likely than high self-esteem individuals to associate *failure* with interpersonal *rejection*, indicating that their self-esteem insecurity might have derived in part from the expectation that acceptance was tenuous, and ultimately conditional on successful performances.

For the current study, we sought a broader framework for people's if-then expectations about different kinds of interpersonal behavior. We adopted the circumplex approach (e.g., Benjamin, 1974; Carson, 1969; Foa, 1961; Kiesler, 1983; T. Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1991) as a general framework for examining different types of expected responses. The common ground of circumplex models is that interpersonal behavior can be characterized along two dimensions, sometimes termed *affiliation* and *dominance*. The

affiliation dimension refers to the extent to which a behavior is *friendly* versus *hostile*; the dominance dimension refers to the extent to which a behavior is *dominant* versus *submissive*. Circumplex models have been discussed extensively and have stimulated much research (e.g., Kiesler, 1983; Wagner, Kiesler, & Schmidt, 1995; Wiggins & Broughton, 1985).

Unlike most previous research, which has used the interpersonal circumplex to classify people according to their style of behaving toward others, we used this approach as a means of assessing people's *if-then expectations* about responses from others in social interaction. We built on the research of Hill and Safran (1994), who developed the Interpersonal Schema Questionnaire (ISQ). In the questionnaire, participants are asked to imagine behaving in certain ways (e.g., in a dominant, submissive, friendly, or hostile manner) toward a significant other, and then to choose which of several responses they would likely receive. The response options are based directly on the circumplex model. For example, 'He/she would take charge, or try to influence me' represents a dominant, highly controlling response; while 'He/she would be warm, or friendly' corresponds to a highly affiliative response.

In their test-construction research, Hill and Safran (1994) found a number of results consistent with interpersonal theory. Most germane to the current research is the phenomenon known as response *complementarity*, such that specific behaviors by self tend to 'pull' for specific responses from the other person (e.g., Kiesler, 1983). The ISQ shows that people's if-then expectations were consistent with the two specific complementary patterns identified in actual social behavior. As predicted by interpersonal theory, on the affiliation dimension, participants anticipated the interpersonal pattern known as *similarity*: They expected friendly behavior in response to friendly behavior from them, and hostile responses following hostile behavior. On the dominance dimension, participants expected complementarity in the form of *reciprocity*: In particular, they were most likely to expect dominant responses to submissive behavior on their part.

Beyond such baseline expectations of interpersonal complementarity, people may differ in important ways in their expectations regarding affiliation and dominance. We extended previous work on expectations by comparing people of different levels of self-esteem. There is good reason to expect self-esteem differences in expectations of affiliative interactions, in particular, as this dimension captures the sense of acceptance central to interpersonal theories of self-esteem (e.g., Leary et al., 1995). Our first hypothesis based on these models was that high self-esteem individuals would have expectations of positive, affiliative responses from significant others, whereas low self-esteem individuals would anticipate less affiliation.

The sense of one's social acceptability likely is not a constant, however, and we were interested in links between self-esteem and specific if-then contingencies of affiliation. A person might anticipate, for example, that 'If I am friendly then others will like me' or 'If I am pushy then people will want to avoid me.' The ISQ allowed us to examine specific if-then expectations more likely to be held by people with high and low self-esteem.

Because self-esteem theoretically involves the belief that one can elicit affiliation from others, we hypothesized that, in general, high self-esteem individuals would be particularly confident in their ability to elicit friendly responses from significant others, particularly by behaving in a friendly manner themselves.

The interpersonal circle also allowed us to test the centrality of affiliation in the determination of self-esteem. Although models of the interpersonal roots of self-esteem often tend to focus on affiliation and acceptance, some emphasize the dominance or status dimension. In a questionnaire study, for example, Paulhus and Martin (1987) found that high self-esteem correlated with both extraversion and dominance. Relatedly, in their study validating the ISQ, Hill and Safran (1994) found that depression — a common correlate of low self-esteem — was associated with the expectation that acting dominantly would lead to hostile responses from others. We examined, therefore, whether high self-esteem would be associated with expecting affiliative reactions from others when behaving in a dominant fashion. We also examined whether self-esteem would be associated with different expectations about how dominant versus submissive others would be, that is, whether others were expected to be overbearing and controlling, as opposed to deferent and respectful.

We also predicted that interpersonal expectations would show sex differences. Much theory and research has suggested that men and women often differ in their orientations to social interaction (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Wiggins, 1991). Women have been suggested to function with a 'communal' orientation, in which they seek connection with others, particularly by establishing harmonious personal relationships. Men are thought to function with a comparatively 'agentic' orientation, in which they are concerned with separating themselves from others, particularly by outperforming others on various dimensions. Extrapolating from these findings, we anticipated that women would report greater expectations of affiliation from others, and particularly in response to their own friendly behavior. Men's greater tendency toward an agentic orientation, on the other hand, might lead them to have greater expectations that being dominant would lead to positive outcomes.

Finally, a more exploratory research question involved an interaction effect between sex and self-esteem on people's if-then expectations. Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992), who argued that self-esteem involves a sense that one is fulfilling one's social role, predicted and found that high self-esteem women were particularly attuned to maintaining positive social interactions, and high self-esteem men were particularly attuned to dominating others on various performance dimensions (see also Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; Schwalbe & Staples, 1991; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1992; Thorne & Michaelieu, 1996). Following this reasoning, we hypothesized that if women derive their self-esteem from success in relationships, then high self-esteem women would be especially likely to expect friendly responses from others in their social interactions. Similarly, because high self-esteem in men has been linked to an agentic

orientation, it was anticipated that high self-esteem men might be more likely than low self-esteem men to expect dominance to lead to affiliation from others.

Our primary research questions, then, involved identifying differences between high and low self-esteem individuals in their if-then interpersonal expectancies — particularly those regarding the contingencies of affiliation from others. Supplementary questions centered on sex differences and a possible interaction between sex and self-esteem on expectations.

Method

Participants

Participants were 182 (134 female, 48 male) introductory psychology students at the University of Winnipeg, ranging in age from 17 to 47, with a median of 18 years.

Procedure

After signing consent forms, participants completed the ISQ (see Hill & Safran, 1994, for a detailed description). Participants were asked to imagine themselves behaving in a number of different ways with three different target persons: (i) 'your relationship partner' (their current partner, or, if unattached, a recent partner), (ii) 'your mother', and (iii) 'your father'. There were 16 different behaviors, which were selected by Hill and Safran to represent varying degrees of dominance and affiliation. Of these, three represented a high level of dominance, such as 'Imagine that you and he/she are working together on something. You have more knowledge and expertise in this area than he/she, so you take the lead in making decisions.' Three others represented submission, such as 'Imagine yourself feeling weak or passive and wanting him/her to take the lead.' Three represented friendliness, such as 'Imagine yourself being friendly and helpful with him/her.' Finally, three represented a degree of hostility, such as 'Imagine yourself feeling angry and argumentative toward him/her.'

For each situation, participants were asked to indicate which of eight responses they would expect to receive from the target person in response to their behavior. Each of these responses was designed to reflect different degrees of dominance and affiliation. The response options were as follows: A, Would take charge, or try to influence me; B, Would be disappointed, resentful, or critical; C, Would be impatient, or quarrelsome; D, Would be distant, or unresponsive; E, Would go along with me, or act unsure; F, Would respect me, or trust me; G, Would be warm, or friendly; and H, Would show interest, or let me know what he/she thinks.

Thus, for each of the three significant others (relationship partner, mother, father), the participant indicated how the person would respond to each of the four types of Subject Behavior (dominant, submissive, friendly, or hostile). Coding procedures are described below.

Participants then completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (1965) ($\alpha = .87$), responding to each item on a 7-point scale. This 10-item scale is used extensively in the self-esteem literature (e.g., Josephs et al., 1992; M. Leary et al., 1995), and measures a person's feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth. Items include, 'I feel I have a number of good qualities,' and 'On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.' In the current sample, men ($M = 57.42$, $SD = 8.72$) reported higher self-esteem scores than did women ($M = 53.48$, $SD = 10.68$),

$F(1,180) = 5.26, p < .05$). Participants were therefore designated as high or low self-esteem following a median split procedure conducted within sex. This split yielded 26 low self-esteem men, 74 low self-esteem women, 22 high self-esteem men, and 60 high self-esteem women.

Coding of the ISQ. Participants received a dominance score and an affiliation score for each of the responses they endorsed. Responses were scored as 1, .5, 0, -.5, or -1 on dominance or affiliation, following the scoring system devised by Hill and Safran (1994). For example, 'Would take charge, or try to influence me' — a response that is very dominant but relatively neutral with respect to affiliation — was scored 1 for dominance and 0 for affiliation. 'Would respect me, or trust me' — a somewhat submissive and relatively friendly response — was scored -.5 for dominance and .5 for affiliation.

Two sets of indices were then created, representing the affiliation and dominance of expected responses. Each index represented how significant others would respond in one of the four Subject Behavior contexts (dominant, submissive, friendly, or hostile). Each index was the mean of the participant's scores across the three significant others and the three behaviors representing that context; means could therefore range from 1 (expecting maximum affiliation or dominance) to -1 (expecting maximum hostility or submission).

Results

Overview of analyses

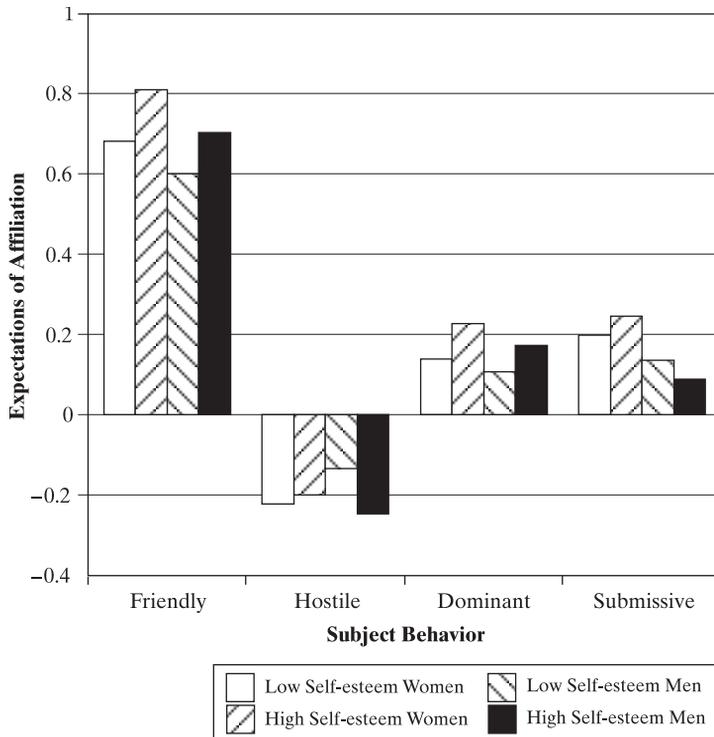
Two parallel $4 \times 2 \times 2$ (subject behavior \times self-esteem \times sex) analyses of variance were conducted, with repeated measures on the subject behavior variable. In the first analysis, the dependent measure was the *affiliation* of expected responses in reaction to participants' friendly, hostile, dominant, and submissive behavior; in the second analysis the dependent measure was the *dominance* of expected responses.

Expectations of affiliative responses

Contrary to the most straightforward prediction based on interpersonal models of self-esteem, high self-esteem individuals did not expect more affiliation than low self-esteem individuals overall. Neither was this a function of sex differences in sources of self-esteem: although women ($M = .24, SD = .18$) expected more affiliation than men ($M = .19, SD = .17$), $F(1, 178) = 4.18, p < .05$, sex did not interact with level of self-esteem.

If-then contingencies. There were more self-esteem and sex differences, however, when if-then contingencies were taken into account. First, as predicted by interpersonal theory, there was strong evidence for *complementarity* in if-then expectations of affiliation (Table 1). There was a highly significant effect for subject behavior, $F(3, 534) = 380.73, p < .001$, with participants expecting more affiliation when acting friendly ($M = .71, SD = .24$) than when acting dominant ($M = .19, SD = .26$) or submissive ($M = .20, SD = .26$), with the least affiliation expected when acting hostile ($M = -.19, SD = .29$). In addition, and as predicted, these if-then expectations differed as a function of level of self-esteem and sex, as indicated by a significant two-way interaction between self-esteem and subject behavior, $F(3, 534) = 4.18, p < .01$, and a marginal sex \times subject behavior interaction, $F(3, 534) = 2.26, p = .08$ (see Figure

FIGURE 1
Expectations of affiliation as a function of subject behavior, sex, and self-esteem



1; Note that, again, the higher order interaction involving both self-esteem and sex was non-significant).

Specific expectations. To interpret these interaction effects, expectations were next analyzed within each of the four levels of the subject behavior variable. There were neither self-esteem nor sex (nor interaction) effects when examining expected responses to either dominant or hostile behavior: In gen-

TABLE 1
Expectations of affiliation, dominance, and desirability responses as a function of subject behavior

Domain	Subject behavior			
	Friendly	Hostile	Submissive	Dominant
Affiliation	.72 (.24)	-.19 (.29)	.20 (.25)	.19 (.26)
Dominance	-.08 (.18)	-.08 (.23)	.29 (.38)	-.10 (.25)
Desirability	6.01 (.89)	3.99 (1.07)	4.89 (1.10)	5.06 (1.03)

Note. Higher means indicate greater expectations of affiliation, dominance, and desirability. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

eral, all participants expected hostility to produce low levels of affiliation, and dominance to be relatively unrelated to affiliative outcomes. In response to friendly behavior, however, there were two significant main effects. As hypothesized, high self-esteem individuals ($M = .78, SD = .19$) expected more affiliative responses to their friendly overtures than low self-esteem individuals did ($M = .66, SD = .27$), $F(1, 178) = 9.10, p < .01$. Also, women ($M = .74, SD = .23$) expected more affiliative responses to their friendly overtures than men did ($M = .65, SD = .25$), $F(1, 178) = 5.50, p < .05$. Finally, there were two interesting effects in the domain of submissive behavior. Women ($M = .23, SD = .26$) expected significantly more affiliative responses when being submissive than men did ($M = .12, SD = .22$), $F(1, 178) = 7.19, p < .01$. There was no main effect for self-esteem in this analysis, but there was a marginally significant self-esteem \times sex interaction such that for women, high (versus low) self-esteem was characterized by expecting more affiliation in response to submissiveness, whereas, for men, high (versus low) self-esteem was characterized by expecting less affiliation from others in response to submissiveness, $F(1, 178) = 2.81, p = .09$.

To summarize, in addition to an overall finding that friendliness was expected to produce the most affiliation from others, interaction effects showed both self-esteem and sex differences in if-then expectancies of affiliation. High self-esteem individuals were more likely than low self-esteem individuals to anticipate affiliation in response to affiliation. Women were more likely than men to anticipate affiliation in response to both friendliness and submissiveness. Finally, there was an indication that high-self esteem in women was associated with expecting affiliation in response to submissiveness, but high self-esteem in men was associated with less affiliation in response to submissiveness.

Expectations of dominant responses

Next, participants' expectations about how much dominance others would try to exert over them were analyzed in a similar fashion. Again, the clearest effect was, as predicted by interpersonal theory, a pattern of if-then reciprocity in this domain, $F(3, 534) = 72.36, p < .001$. Participants expected little dominance from others in response to dominant behavior ($M = -.10, SD = .25$), friendly ($M = -.08, SD = .18$), or hostile ($M = -.08, SD = .23$) behavior, but more in response to submissive behavior ($M = .28, SD = .38$).

There were no main effects or interactions involving self-esteem. There was a marginally significant effect for sex, $F(1, 178) = 3.54, p = .06$, indicating that women expected somewhat more dominant responses from others ($M = .02, SD = .16$) than men did ($M = -.03, SD = .14$). Exploratory analyses revealed that this sex difference was significant only in expectations in response to friendliness, with men ($M = -.14, SD = .18$) expecting less dominance than women did ($M = -.06, SD = .17$), $F(1, 178) = 7.19, p < .01$.

Discussion

A basic premise of the social cognitive approach is that individual differences in such variables as social behavior and self-esteem may arise from knowledge structures about self, other, and relationships. Views of self have been hypothesized to be inextricably embedded in relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992) representing patterns of interaction with others.

Consistent with this formulation, in the current study differences in self-esteem mapped on to differences in interpersonal expectations.

Contrary to the most straightforward interpretation of the interpersonal roots of self-esteem, high self-esteem individuals in this study were not blithely secure in an expectation that others would respond to them in a positive, affiliative manner equally across all situations. Rather, interpersonal expectations showed clear if-then, behavior-outcome patterns. Overall, there was a general expectation of response complementarity, such that both high and low self-esteem individuals expected affiliative responses to friendly behavior, and less affiliative responses to hostile behavior. Against this backdrop, however, significant differences between high and low self-esteem individuals were evident in expected responses to friendly behavior. Under these circumstances, high self-esteem individuals had more positive expectations than low self-esteem individuals about their ability to bring about affiliation from others. Thus, interpersonal models of self-esteem appear correct in implicating the importance of affiliation and interpersonal acceptance, but a critical interpersonal script differentiating high and low self-esteem individuals may be the specific pattern whereby friendliness begets friendliness from others.

The sex differences observed were generally consistent with previous findings in the literature on gender roles that women are more attuned than men to ways of maintaining close and harmonious relationships (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Wiggins, 1991). Overall, women expected more affiliation from others, and this outlook was framed in specific if-then expectations that both friendliness and submissiveness would lead to affiliation. There was only minimal evidence of sex differences in links between self-esteem and interpersonal expectations, but a marginally significant pattern was consistent with the view that high self-esteem women, in particular, saw submissiveness producing desirable responses from others; high self-esteem men, in contrast, anticipated somewhat undesirable outcomes when being submissive. Taken together, these differences in working models are consistent with research showing that submissiveness is seen as less acceptable for men than for women (Josephs et al., 1992). Indeed, this expectation may reflect social reality: In a study by Costrich, Feinstein, Kidder, Maracek, and Pascale (1975), submissive men did tend to be devalued by others. We are reluctant to draw many strong conclusions about sex differences from the current data, however, because some of the effects did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance and clearly must be viewed cautiously until replicated. The lack of robust sex differences in determinants of self-esteem may have been because of shortcomings in our design, including the unequal numbers of men and women and the restriction of the sample to a college population. At the same time, other research has shown that sex differences, particularly with respect to status and dominance, often prove to be minimal in comparison both to sex similarities and to the effects of other variables such as social role or interactional context (Eagly, 1987; Moskowitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994).

There was little additional evidence for any link between

dominance/submissiveness and self-esteem. Dominance expectations primarily showed the complementarity pattern, in that people generally anticipated dominance in response to their own submissiveness. Before concluding that social dominance expectations are largely irrelevant to self-esteem, we would of course want to replicate these findings, and also extend the range of situations under consideration. Kirkpatrick, Williams, and Glenn (1998), who argued from the point of view of evolutionary psychology, recently suggested that self-esteem might derive from the assessment of characteristics such as physical attractiveness and social status, which once factored strongly in dominance hierarchy and mate selection processes in the ancestral environment. Thus, whereas self-esteem does not appear related to if-then contingencies between one's interpersonal *behavior* and dominance/submission from others, there might be links found if social status and appearance were considered.

Research of this sort could investigate people's 'social-cognitive maps' across a variety of situations. Although the interpersonal circle has proven to be a useful general model for parsing the flow of interaction, future studies could examine any number of specific behavioral patterns. Some recent research (Fehr, Baldwin, Collins, Patterson, & Benditt, 1999), for example, has revealed sizable sex differences in expectations of a romantic partner's behavior, especially in the context of angry, aggressive exchanges. As mentioned earlier, Baldwin and Sinclair (1996) found self-esteem differences in the association between failure and rejection. Ultimately it might be possible to generate a set of if-then maps that tend to characterize people with high versus low self-esteem, conflictual relationships, proneness to depression, and so on. For example, what exactly do high self-esteem women and men do when acting in a friendly or submissive manner toward others, and which behaviors do they believe will lead to positive or negative outcomes?

In our view, the primary advantage of conceptualizing interpersonal expectations as relational schemas is that it facilitates social cognitive research into the way individuals perceive, interpret, and recall their interactions (Baldwin, 1992). Studies such as the current research, in which people self-report their if-then expectations, can form the basis of follow-up research into the cognitive processes that underlie and arise from these expectations. In research into adult attachment orientations, for example, Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, and Thomson (1993) found that insecurely attached individuals were more likely than securely attached individuals to self-report expectations that trusting a partner would result in being hurt. In a subsequent reaction-time study, when insecurely attached participants read the context phrase 'If I trust my romantic partner,' this facilitated processing of the word *hurt*. Other research has shown that interpersonal expectations can be experimentally activated: Priming representations of critical, judgmental significant others, for example, can produce negative self-evaluations in a subsequent performance situation (e.g., Baldwin & Holmes, 1987).

Future research, therefore, could study the information processing

effects of if-then expectancies involving affiliation. The overall complementarity findings suggest that, in general, when people act in a friendly manner they should anticipate affiliative responses, interpret and remember neutral or ambiguous responses as affiliative, and so on. Low self-esteem people, however, being somewhat less inclined to have such positive expectancies, may also be less inclined to make positive inferences about ambiguous interactions. This can produce a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, as low self-esteem individuals may become less likely to seek out social interaction because they are not confident of positive responses (e.g., Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1999). They may also attribute any lack of positive feedback to something negative about themselves, leaving them even less optimistic about their social interactions. In this way, even minor differences between people in their if-then social expectations can influence both information processing and social behavior and, ultimately, lead to important differences in self-esteem and security in significant relationships. The current study shows that there are such differences, particularly in the strength of the expectation that being friendly to significant others will lead to friendliness in return. Future research can build on this finding by exploring the impact and information processing dynamics of these expectations.

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