Why Do People Hide Low Self-Esteem?

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**Methods**

**Introduction**

In Western society, people with high self-esteem (HSE) are viewed as more desirable than people with low self-esteem (LSE; Cameron et al., 2013). People with LSE may conceal their self-esteem to avoid rejection and boost relational values with others.

- Yet individuals who hide important traits from others experience reduced well-being.

**Research Goals**

1. Do people with LSE conceal their self-esteem more than people with HSE?
2. Do people with LSE conceal their self-esteem because they expect rejection from others and expect to react negatively themselves?

**Participants**

233 participants living in North America

- Age: $M = 36.52$ years; 125 men, 107 women, and 1 person who did not identify

**Procedure**

Participants used the following scale for all measures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Moderately Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Moderately Agree</td>
<td>Very Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These measures included:

- **Self-esteem** (Rosenberg, 1965).
- **Self-esteem Concealment** (Cameron, 2016, unpublished).
- **Negative Reactions** (Cameron, 2016, unpublished).
- **Anticipated Rejection** (generated for this survey).

**Results (Mediation)**

Do people with LSE conceal their self-esteem because they expect rejection from others and expect to react negatively themselves?

- Yes, greater concealment is correlated with more negative reactions and anticipated rejection.

**Results (Correlations)**

Do people with LSE try to conceal their self-esteem more than those with HSE?

- Yes, LSE is correlated with greater concealment.

Do people with LSE expect more negative outcomes when their self-esteem is made apparent?

- Yes, LSE is correlated with greater negative reactions and anticipated rejection.

**Summary**

Although causation cannot be inferred from the present cross-sectional, correlational design, the results suggest:

- The lower a person’s self-esteem, the more likely they are to conceal their self-esteem, anticipate rejection from others and expect negative emotional consequences upon the revelation of their self-esteem.
- People with lower self-esteem appear to conceal their self-esteem to avoid rejection and the negative feelings that come with revealing LSE to others.
- Thus, both anticipated rejection and negative reactions explain at least some of why lower self-esteem participants conceal their self-esteem.

**Implications**

- Western society’s negative view of self-esteem may be driving self-esteem concealment.
- Those who conceal their self-esteem may experience reduced personal and relational well-being.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Direct Effect</th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Rejection</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Reactions</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; 95% confidence intervals.