

## Introduction

Western society values high self-esteem (HSE) and devalues low self-esteem (LSE; Cameron et al., 2013).

Individuals with lower self-esteem are aware of these societal values, and worry about being rejected if others were to learn about their low self-esteem.

Consequently, lower self-esteem individuals are more likely to conceal their self-esteem from others (Cameron et al., 2016).

Self-esteem concealment might be particularly likely during romantic relationship initiation and this might influence emotional experience.

As individuals who initiate a romantic relationship are bound to feel excitement and fear of rejection (Cameron et al., 2010)

### Research Questions

1. Compared to individuals with HSE, do those with LSE report higher levels of self-esteem concealment, lower positive emotions, and higher negative emotions during relationship initiation?
2. Is greater self-esteem concealment linked with more or less positive and negative emotions during romantic relationship initiation? And is this link dependent on whether individuals are LSE or HSE?

## Methods

### Participants

219 participants residing in North America (106 women; 113 men) were recruited via CloudResearch to participate in an online survey

$M_{age} = 36.67$  years,  $SD = 10.78$

### Measures\*

#### • Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

10-items ( $\alpha = .86$ ; e.g., "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others") measured on a 9-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 9 = *very strongly agree*).

#### Participants then recalled a recent relationship initiation and completed the following measures about that event:

#### • Self-esteem Concealment Scale (Cameron, 2016)

3-items ( $\alpha = .92$ ; e.g., "On my first date with (date's initials inserted) . . . I never shared my opinions about myself.") scored on a 9-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 9 = *very strongly agree*).

#### • Emotional Experience Scale (Author Generated)

**Positive emotions:** 3-items ( $\alpha = .61$ ; e.g., "On the first date with (insert date's initials), I felt . . . Excited")

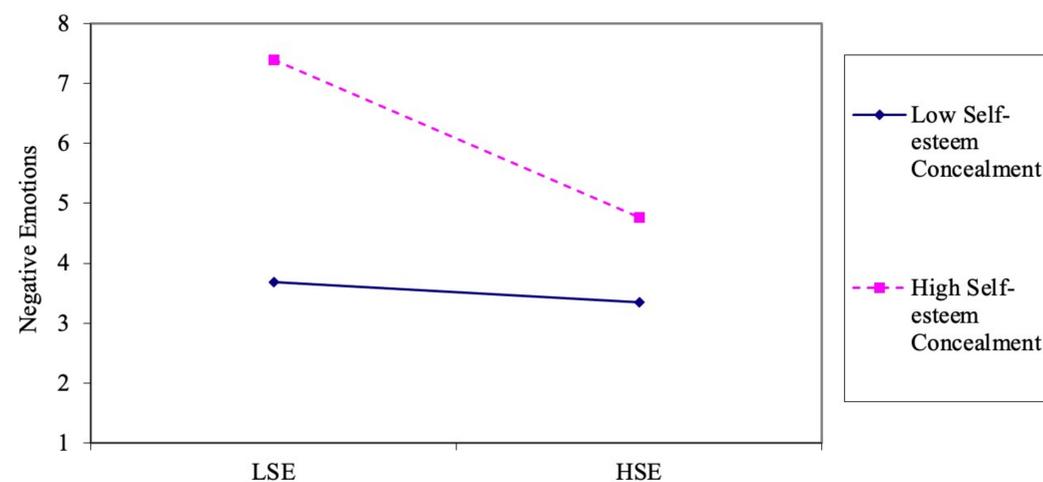
**Negative emotions:** 3-items ( $\alpha = .86$ ; e.g., "On the first date with (insert date's initials), I felt . . . Nervous")

All scored on a 9-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 9 = *very strongly agree*)

\* There were additional self-report measures which could not be included due to the lack of space in the poster.

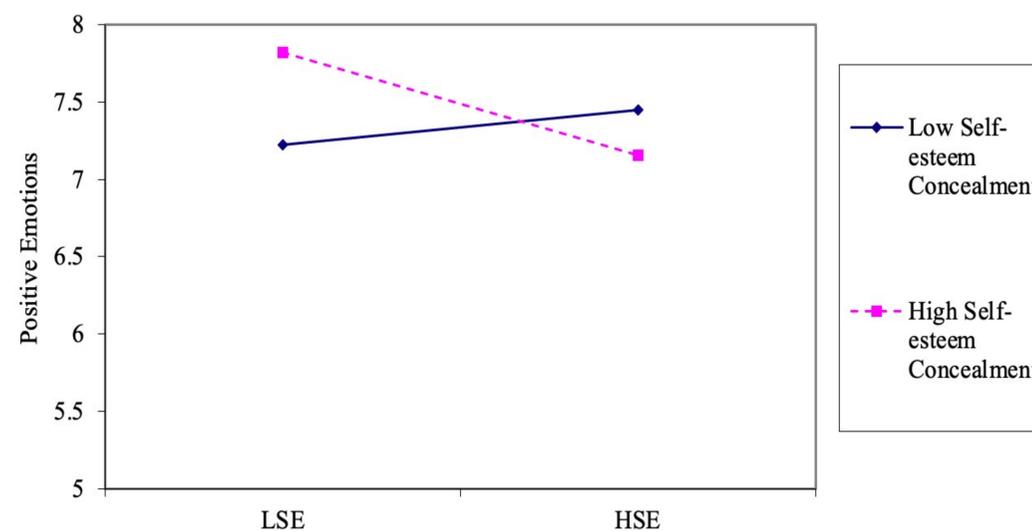
## Results (Moderation)

Does self-esteem concealment moderate the association between self-esteem and emotions during relationship initiation?



Self-esteem (centered) by self-esteem concealment (centered) interaction,  $\beta = -.30$ ,  $t(215) = -4.30$ ,  $p < .001$

- LSE individuals who concealed their self-esteem more reported greater negative emotions than those who concealed less,  $\beta = .78$ ,  $t(215) = 8.83$ ,  $p < .001$
- Although not as strong, self-esteem concealment had a similar effect on individuals with HSE,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(215) = 3.51$ ,  $p = .001$ .



Self-esteem (centered) by self-esteem concealment (centered) interaction,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t(215) = -2.78$ ,  $p = .006$

- LSE individuals who concealed their self-esteem more reported greater positive emotions than those who concealed less,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $t(215) = 2.34$ ,  $p = .020$ .
- Self-esteem concealment was not linked to positive emotions for individuals with HSE,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t(215) = -1.19$ ,  $p = .234$ .

**Summary:** These results suggest that individuals with LSE who conceal their self-esteem experience both the greatest positive and the greatest negative emotions during relationship initiation.

## Results (Correlations)

Do individuals with lower self-esteem report higher levels of self-esteem concealment?

→ Yes, the lower the self-esteem, the higher the self-esteem concealment,  $r(218) = -.63$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Do individuals with lower self-esteem report higher negative emotions and lower positive emotions during relationship initiation?

→ Yes and No. The lower the self-esteem, the higher the negative emotions,  $r(218) = -.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , but, positive emotions were not related to self-esteem,  $r(218) = .02$ ,  $p = .746$ .

Is self-esteem concealment linked with negative and positive emotions during romantic relationship initiation?

→ Yes and No. The higher the self-esteem concealment, the greater the negative emotions reported,  $r(218) = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ , but there was no link between positive emotions and concealment,  $r(218) = .02$ ,  $p = .746$ .

## Summary

- The lower a person's self-esteem, the more likely they are to conceal their self-esteem, and the greater their negative emotions during relationship initiation.
- Among individuals with LSE, those who concealed their self-esteem reported the greatest negative and positive emotions, suggesting an intense ambivalent emotional experience during relationship initiation.

**Implication:** The emotional experience of individuals initiating a romantic relationship is not only influenced by their self-esteem but by how much they try to conceal that self-esteem.

**Limitation:** These results are based on cross-sectional and correlational data which limits our capacity to infer causation.

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### Questions or Comments?

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