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 (α = .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 (α = .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 (α = .61; e.g., “On the first date with (insert date’s initials), I felt . . . Excited”)

Negative emotions: 3-items (α = .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, β = -.30, r (215) = -.430, p < .001

• LSE individuals who concealed their self-esteem more reported greater negative emotions than those who concealed less, β = -.78, r (215) = .883, p < .001

• Although not as strong, self-esteem concealment had a similar effect on individuals with HSE, β = -.30, r (215) = 3.51, p = .001.

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?

Contact: arshnooa@myumanitoba.ca
Jessica.Cameron@umanitoba.ca