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Perceived partner idealization: Is there an optimal level?

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Perceived partner idealization: Is there an optimal level?

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This dissertation explored the possibility of feeling over-idealized or “put up on a pedestal” by a romantic partner. Previous research showed that feeling under-idealized had detrimental effects on a relationship, but no work had considered the effects of the opposite extreme. The present study proposed that there is an optimal level of perceived partner idealization (PPI) from a partner, such that too little or too much PPI leads to decreased relationship satisfaction (this implies a curvilinear effect). It was hypothesized that, in addition to decreased relationship well-being, overly high PPI would be associated with (a) decreased relationship accommodation, (b) a decreased sense of autonomy in the relationship, (c) a fear of discovery of one’s true self and (d) decreased responsiveness to the partner. These hypotheses and research questions were examined in (a) a questionnaire study of 159 undergraduates in relationships and (b) a laboratory experiment designed to manipulate over-idealization in a sample of 70 dating couples.

Study 1 found that perceived partner idealization of traits had mainly linear associations with relationship satisfaction, relationship accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness; however, perceived partner idealization of abilities

had the predicted curvilinear association with all of the dependent variables. Thus PPI of traits seemed to have uniformly positive relationship effects, while PPI of abilities has positive effects up to a point but negative effects at high levels. Study 2 found that individuals who underwent an over-idealization manipulation experienced increased fear of discovery of their true selves and felt that their personal autonomy was threatened. These results suggest that the over-idealization manipulation seems to cause increases in negative relationship experiences, while it did not have a significant effect on positive relationship perceptions. Taken together, these studies support the notion that there is an optimal level of perceived partner idealization of abilities and that manipulating over-idealization may lead to negative relationship processes. This research builds on a central current theme in relationships research--the importance of feeling understood, validated, and cared for by a partner--and applies it to issues that have been minimally studied and which promise to have important implications for relationship functioning.

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I. Introduction

“A pedestal is as much a prison as any other small space.”

-Gloria Steinem

People in relationships devote a great deal of time attempting to understand how relationship partners feel about the self. If a partner returns one's feelings of affection, the world seems like a beautiful place. If a relationship partner does not reciprocate one's feelings, the experience can be quite painful. However, there can be considerable variability in perceptions of a partner's feelings toward oneself. In a situation of over-idealization, one might feel uncomfortable with a relationship partner who puts one up “on a pedestal,” expecting great things that one could never achieve. It is also anxiety provoking to feel that a partner undervalues oneself (Murray, Aloni, Holmes, Derrick, & Stinson, 2009). Such examples suggest that there must be an optimal level in between such extremes where one feels loved but not overwhelmed by a relationship partner.

Previous work suggests that idealizing a partner has positive effects on the relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), as a partner's idealization can communicate positive regard. I hypothesize that being overly idealized may also be detrimental because being put on a pedestal may threaten one's sense of personhood or create fears of being unable to meet partner's expectations or having to meet undesired expectations. In addition, over-idealization might create a perceived imbalance of power in a relationship, such that the partner who feels over-idealized may perceive their partner to be relatively more dependent than the self on the relationship.

A growing body of literature suggests that perceptions of how a partner feels about oneself may matter more than how the partner actually feels or how one feels about the partner (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray, et al., 1996). Recent research has made a compelling case that one's perceptions of various aspects of relationship partners' feelings have an important impact on relationship well-being (Reis, 2007; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). The three core aspects of this sense of "perceived partner responsiveness" are feeling understood, validated, and cared for by the partner (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, it would seem essential that the partner understands and values one's true self.

Defining perceived partner idealization

This project focused on perceived partner idealization (PPI), which I define as one's perception of how positively a relationship partner sees one's traits and abilities over and above how positively one sees one's traits and abilities. A large body of work has considered the benefits of one's own idealization of the partner for relationship satisfaction and longevity (e.g., Miller, Niehus, & Huston, 2006; Murray, et al., 1996). However, only a handful of studies have considered the importance of feeling idealized by one's partner. Some research has suggested that feeling positively regarded by one's partner helps buffer the effects of stressful life events (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003) and promotes relationship well-being (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Another recent study (Murray, Aloni et al., 2009) found that feeling inferior to a romantic partner (or under-idealized) can lead to anxiety, especially for low self-esteem individuals, and may activate an exchange script within the relationship. As these examples demonstrate, the majority of work on perceived partner idealization has focused on the low end of the

spectrum of perceived partner idealization. Research suggests that feeling under-idealized can be uncomfortable and that in general, being thought of positively by one's partner is a good thing. However, no systematic research of which I am aware has considered the experience of feeling very highly regarded, and thus perhaps overly idealized by a relationship partner. Over-idealization might occur when one perceives the partner to have a much more positive view of oneself than one's own self views.

Importance of perceptions of the partner

People in general want to be accurate perceivers (Swann, 1984). However, as commitment in a relationship increases, monitoring of the partner declines and perceptions may be based on earlier stages in the relationship (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). Kenny and Acitelli systematically tested the effects of accuracy (the extent to which one correctly perceives the partner's feelings) and bias (the extent to which the perceiver assumes similarity) for measures of closeness, caring, equity, enjoyment of sex, and job satisfaction. Results showed support for both accuracy and bias effects, but the effects for bias were stronger, suggesting that perceptions of the partner's views of the self or relationship are based more on one's own feelings than the partner's actual feelings. Kenny and Acitelli argue that the support for bias effects may reflect the fact that it is easier to assume one's partner is similar to the self and also prevents the self from dealing with the threat that the partner could differ from the self.

Lemay, Clark, and Feeney (2007) found additional support for the bias perspective in two dyadic marriage studies, demonstrating that spouses project their own care and supportiveness for their partner onto their perceptions of their partner's caring and supportiveness for the self. As in Kenny and Acitelli (2001), participants' self

reports of their own feelings about their partner's care predicted perceptions of the partner more so than the partner's actual feelings (Lemay et al., 2007). A series of experimental manipulations further demonstrated that perceived partner responsiveness (operationalized as perceptions that the partner is responsive to one's needs) is largely determined by one's own responsiveness to the partner in both dating couples and new acquaintances (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Idealization

There is some literature on one's own idealization of one's self-concept. Baumeister (1989) theorized that a slight to moderate distortion of the world would lead to optimal functioning. Taylor, Collins, Skokan, and Aspinwall (1989) were some of the first to study idealization of the self-concept, or what they called positive illusions. They posited that positive illusions could be maintained in spite of negative information to minimize damage to positive beliefs about the self. A study of cancer patients showed that patients did not ignore negative information, but instead acknowledged the negative effects of their disease while maintaining a positive view of other areas of their lives (Taylor et al., 1989). Frese (1992), in contrast, argued that illusions lead to unrealistic optimism, which can be detrimental to well-being. In a longitudinal study (Frese, 1987), unemployed blue-collar workers were surveyed on their hope for control of their job situation. In the short term, positive illusions of hope decreased depression about unemployment. However, in the long term, people who remained unemployed experienced more depression if they initially had higher hopes (Frese, 1987). These results suggest that if positive illusions are disappointed, well-being can be negatively influenced. There has been considerable debate about whether unrealistic optimism

allows one to better cope with stressors or if it might lead to risky choices. The answer seems to depend on the context, as some studies have shown that there are benefits of positive thinking (e.g., Taylor et al., 1992) and others have shown that it leads to more negative outcomes (e.g., Dillard, Midboe, & Klein, 2009). This literature focused on individual beliefs about their risk for various health outcomes, but relationships researchers have debated similar issues about the benefits of seeing a relationship in a realistic or idealistic light.

Research on positive illusions in relationships indicates that both idealizing one's partner (projected illusions) and being idealized (reflected illusions) contributes to greater relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996). This work supports Baumeister's notion that slight to moderate positive illusions are optimal. Idealized perceptions of the partner are rooted in reality, and are less likely to last if they are too far from the partner's self-perceptions (Murray et al., 1996). As Murray and Holmes (1999) stated, "perceptions are not created in a vacuum, and even the most motivated individuals will have difficulty turning a frog into a princess or prince" (p. 22). Thus, perceptions of the partner seem to be based on a kernel of truth (Murray et al., 1996).

Another important study on idealization considered the effect of positive expectations on changes in marital satisfaction in newlywed couples (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Communication skills demonstrated by spouses during a discussion of an area of difficulty in their marriage moderated the benefits of positive expectations. Thus, couples that had positive expectations and engaged in more positive relationship behaviors during the problem discussion had more stable satisfaction over time. Those who had positive expectations and engaged in more negative relationship behaviors

during the discussion, in contrast, had steeper declines in satisfaction over time (McNulty & Karney, 2004). This study demonstrates that positive expectations may actually be detrimental to couples that face bigger challenges in their relationships, because those expectations represent goals that may not be achieved with the skill level of the couple. McNulty and Karney's findings suggest that averages do not tell us everything, and that it is important to understand how variability among couples might influence the effects of positive expectations. These findings provide evidence that there indeed may be an optimal level of idealization, and that the optimal level might vary depending on the skill levels of an individual couple.

Swann and colleagues argued that people have a desire for self-verification, which means having a partner who knows who one really is, because it feels good to have one's self-concept validated (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). However, in relationships, people have a desire to be seen as exceptionally positive on relationship-relevant dimensions (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). Another study found that couples strive to achieve "pragmatic accuracy," which is a type of accuracy meant to facilitate interaction goals in a relationship (Gill & Swann, 2004). The results showed that pragmatic accuracy was more predictive of relationship quality for relationship relevant traits than for non-relationship relevant traits. Thus this work provides some evidence that accuracy is most important for relationship relevant domains, but also suggests that accuracy is not important in all domains. Neff and Karney (2005) further reconciled the positive illusions and self-verification literatures by providing evidence that idealization at the global level must be grounded in specific accuracy or an accurate understanding of the partner's positive and negative traits and abilities. Newlywed wives

who had more accurate perceptions of specific qualities provided better support for their partners and were less likely to divorce (Neff & Karney, 2005). Thus, these results suggest that global idealization must be grounded in a more specific understanding of the spouse's self-views. Taken together, these studies support Reis, Clark, and Holmes's (2004) definition of perceived partner responsiveness, which maintains that individuals need to feel loved and cared for by their partners, but at the same time the partner must understand one's true self. Thus, a combination of idealization and accuracy seems necessary for optimal relationship functioning.

Murray, Aloni et al. (2009) demonstrated that low perceived partner idealization may be problematic. Optimal perceived partner idealization is likely to be slightly higher than one's actual perception of the self, because research has suggested the benefits of such rosy images. However, overly high perceived partner idealization (operationalized as the perception that the partner views the self much more positively than one's own self-image) is likely to be uncomfortable because it is not grounded in one's own reality and may create a sense of expectations that cannot be achieved.

Most work on idealization has used a measure of interpersonal traits to operationalize both one's own idealization of the partner and the perception of the partner's idealization of the self (e.g., Murray et al., 1996). It is likely that people may feel that their partner over-idealizes such traits, but it is also possible that over-idealization might be even more salient for specific abilities. An example of over-idealization of an interpersonal trait might be if Jane considers herself to be a fairly kind person, it may feel slightly uncomfortable if her partner, Bob, thinks of her as an extremely kind person. Similarly, an example of over-idealization of ability might be if

Jane knows that she is not a very good dancer, and Bob thinks that she is an amazing dancer, this could be very uncomfortable for Jane. She may worry that Bob will expect her to showcase her dance skills at the next party they attend or fear that he will no longer love her if he realizes her true lack of dancing ability. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (2000) attempted to differentiate between idealization of traits and abilities. The effects of idealization of traits and abilities were similarly positive in their study of normal levels of PPI. However, at high levels of PPI, this distinction may become more important. It is possible that overly high PPI of abilities may be more uncomfortable than overly high PPI of traits. This may be due to the fact that abilities are more easily disconfirmed (Neff & Karney, 2005).

There has been some work regarding the presence of optimal levels of closeness with a relationship partner, which provides an example of the type of effect that I expected for PPI. A fundamental issue in romantic relationships is negotiating the balance of intimacy and autonomy (e.g., Baxter & Erbert, 1999). When not in balance, partners may feel insecure with each other, become polarized into unhealthy demand-withdraw patterns, lose the ability to support each other, and ultimately become dissatisfied with the relationship. Some work has suggested that in a relationship that feels “too close,” a partner’s attempts to increase closeness may be seen as unwelcome and even intrusive. A desire for less closeness may be a result of feelings of the partner threatening personal control or personal identities (Mashek & Sherman, 2004).

Effect of overly high PPI on accommodation behavior. There are several possible mechanisms behind the proposed curvilinear relationship between PPI and relationship well-being. First, it is possible that an over-idealized partner may start to become selfish

due to the perceived high evaluation by the other of the self. One may quickly realize that there is no need to work to maintain the affections of the partner. In a situation of under-idealization, people were on their best behavior after a manipulation designed to elicit concern about the partner's regard (Murray, Aloni et al., 2009). This effect of increasing good behavior when one feels under-appreciated was explained as a subconscious mechanism to make the partner dependent on the self. Thus, if one feels over-appreciated, one may decrease the amount of good behavior that he or she exhibits because it takes work to behave well and it is clear that the partner already highly values the self.

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) emphasizes relative dependence on the relationship, which is defined as the extent to which an individual relies on a relationship for fulfillment of needs (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). People are more dependent on a relationship when they have a lower comparison level for alternatives to that relationship and must rely on their partner to fulfill their needs. Thus, the person who is more dependent on the relationship has lower relative power (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). In a situation of perceived over-idealization, the one who perceives he or she is over-idealized may come to believe that the partner is more dependent on the relationship. This creates a situation of perceived nonmutuality of dependence and leaves the one perceiving he or she is over-idealized with greater perceived power in the relationship, perhaps giving him or her the perceived freedom to behave in ways that do not take the partner's interests into account.

According to interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), relationship partners are motivated to inhibit bad behavior, in an effort to promote relationship well-

being in interdependent relationships. Behavioral accommodation is defined as the tendency to inhibit destructive behavior and to act in a constructive manner when one's relationship partner has behaved badly (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Individuals are more willing to accommodate when they are happy, have lower quality of alternatives, and are committed to a relationship (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Individuals with overly high PPI may feel misunderstood by their partner and as a result become more aware of alternatives and less committed to the relationship. Thus, it is likely that being put on a pedestal might lead one to exhibit less good behavior in a relationship. Ultimately, such behavior may undermine the partner's idealization over time, but initially one who feels over-idealized may feel the freedom to behave however he or she would like without taking the partner's interests into account; that is, there may be an increased sense of behavioral latitude.

Effect of overly high PPI on autonomy threat. Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that humans have three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In a meta-analysis of 8 samples, the perception that a partner supports one's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). In a situation of overly high PPI, a relationship partner might impinge on a person's sense of autonomy by imposing goals or expectations on the self that one does not desire. By its very nature, interdependence does impose on autonomy. One must inhibit one's natural tendencies, to engage in accommodation behavior, be willing to forgive transgressions, and even be willing to sacrifice one's own desires at times. This process is actually an opposite effect of feeling freed up because one imagines one has more power

(as in the case of decreased accommodation behavior). Both processes may operate, one offsetting the other so that the net effect is zero.

Murray, Holmes et al. (2009) define such autonomy costs as “the ways in which being part of a relationship restricts one’s freedom to pursue one’s goals autonomously.” When primed with ways in which their partners thwart their autonomy, high self-esteem participants compensated by increasing their perceptions of the partner, while low self-esteem participants thought less of the partner. These results suggest that low self-esteem individuals may see an over-idealizing partner less positively when the partner impinges on their sense of autonomy in the relationship. Perhaps at very high levels of being over idealized this might also apply to high self-esteem individuals.

Effect of overly high PPI on fear of discovery. Another caveat to overly high PPI is the fear that the partner will discover that one cannot live up to the overly idealized image of the self. People have a desire to feel understood and validated by their partners (Reis et al., 2004), and overly high PPI might undermine feelings that the partner recognizes and values the true self. In one experiment, participants were lead to believe that their partner was likely to discover their secret self. Low self-esteem individuals especially feared that discovery of their “secret self” would lead to decreased acceptance from partners (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). The concept of fear of discovery ties in with the concept of fear of success. People who feel like they do not deserve the success that they achieve often feel like impostors. People who suffer from the impostor phenomenon have lower self-appraisals and also expect that their partners think less of them (Leary, Patton, Orlando, & Wagoner Funk, 2000). Thus, an individual who feels that the partner over-idealizes the self may feel like an impostor waiting for the

partner to discover that one's true self does not live up to the partner's expectations. In addition, the impostor hypothesis suggests that impostors might sabotage themselves such that outcomes meet their expectations, and it is possible that individuals who feel over-idealized might similarly undermine their relationships.

Effect of overly high PPI on own responsiveness. As demonstrated with the example of good behavior, if one is confident that the partner thinks highly of the self, one may have less motivation to be responsive to one's partner's needs. People choose not to behave in a communal manner if they do not desire a relationship with a partner (Clark, Graham, & Grote, 2002). Feeling over-idealized by a partner might lead one to be less motivated to maintain the relationship. There is evidence that suggests that people project their own levels of responsiveness on their relationship partners (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). Thus if one chooses not to attend to the partner's needs, over time, one may come to think that the partner is not responding to one's own individual needs, which would be likely to lead to decreases in both relationship satisfaction and longevity.

Individual differences that might moderate PPI. Extensive work on adult attachment (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) suggests that attachment anxiety is likely to be especially relevant here. Those high in attachment anxiety have a negative model of self and a fear of abandonment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Thus, anxiously attached individuals may be especially likely to presume the partner undervalues the self. On the other hand, even realistic valuing of the self by the partner, to the extent it is observed, may be perceived as over-valuing the self (that is, if one has a negative self image, then if the partner sees the self as even adequate, one may feel overvalued).

Self-esteem is also related to perceptions of partner regard. People who are low in self-esteem have a similarly negative model of the self that is related to worries about partner acceptance and responsiveness. High self-esteem individuals, in contrast, generally feel valued by their partners and expect that they will be responsive to the self's needs. Low self-esteem individuals underestimate how positively their partners see the self and as a result think less highly of their partners, which ultimately undermines their relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 2000). However, low self-esteem individuals also see themselves more negatively (by definition) so that they may be as likely as others to perceive over-idealization with these two factors offsetting each other. As a result of their relationship insecurities, low self-esteem individuals seek to protect the self and are less likely to engage in behaviors that would increase relationship dependence (Murray, Aloni et al., 2009; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

The Present Research and Hypotheses

I tested the following hypotheses and research questions in two studies (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the conceptual model). Study 1 was a large-scale questionnaire study to obtain descriptive data and correlational results about the phenomena of under and over-idealization. Study 2 was an experiment designed to manipulate over-idealization in dating couples and to further understand the associated mechanisms. Based on the above reasoning for how overly high PPI might influence relationship satisfaction, I tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (Basic Effect on relationship well being): There is an optimal level of self's perceived partner idealization (PPI), such that too little or too much PPI predicts self's lower relationship satisfaction.

Research Question 1: To the extent there is an over-idealization effect on relationship satisfaction, which predicts a greater sense of general PPI overvaluing of one's general traits or overvaluing of one's specific abilities (or do they both do so about equally)?

Hypothesis 2 (Direct Effect on relationship accommodation): Overly high levels of self's PPI predict self's less relationship accommodation.

Research Question 2 (Mediation of effect on satisfaction by behavior): Does relationship accommodation mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 3 (Direct Effect of Autonomy Threat): Overly high levels of self's PPI predict self's sense of autonomy threat in the relationship (because one has to live up to partner's expectations).

Research Question 3a (Mediation of effect on satisfaction by autonomy threat): Does autonomy threat mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 4 (Direct effect on fear of discovery): Overly high levels of self's PPI predict self's fear of discovery of one's true self.

Research Question 4a (Moderation by self-esteem). Do low self-esteem individuals experience a greater fear of discovery because they have a negative self-concept to begin with?

Research Question 4b (Mediation of effect on satisfaction by fear of discovery): Does fear of discovery mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 5 (Direct effect on own responsiveness to the partner): Overly high levels of self's PPI predict decreased responsiveness to the partner.

Research Question 5 (Mediation of effect on satisfaction by own responsiveness to the partner): Does one's own responsiveness to the partner mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on relationship satisfaction?

In sum, the specific aims of the current study were to determine (a) whether there is an optimal level of perceived partner idealization and (b) to identify the specific mechanisms that underlie the relationship between perceived partner idealization and relationship satisfaction.

II. Study 1: Over-Idealization Questionnaire Study

Method

Participants. All participants in the mass testing session were invited to complete the questionnaire, and those who were currently in a relationship were asked to complete the measures about their romantic partner. Those who were not currently in a romantic relationship were asked to complete the measures about their mother (these data are not presented here). Participants were 159 college students (113 women) with a mean age of 19.33 ($SD = 2.62$) who were currently in a romantic relationship (mean relationship length = 20.81 months and ranged from 1 month to 7.16 years; $SD = 19.98$ months). There were 13 people who reported that they were casually dating, 130 in a committed relationship, 10 who were engaged, and 3 who were married. The sample was ethnically diverse with 38.4% Caucasian, 25.2% East Asian, 10.1% Hispanic or Latino, 8.2% South East Asian, 5.7% African American, 5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 6.3% Other or Mixed.

Procedure. Data were collected as part of two online mass testing sessions through the psychology department at Stony Brook University, completed at the beginning of the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters. Due to length restrictions, during the second mass testing session, some questionnaires were shortened to fewer items. Items included in the second session were selected based on the highest loading items from each scale in the first mass testing session. When creating scale scores, the mean was created using all available items for each participant. The length of shortened scales is noted in the description of each measure. To ensure that the number of items or testing session did not influence the results, I controlled for testing session in all analyses. In addition, I tested whether any of the obtained effects had interactions with study and none did. Participants completed the measures in the following order: perceptions of self (traits and abilities), attachment style, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, fear of discovery, autonomy threat, relationship accommodation, responsiveness, perceptions of partner's feelings about self (traits and abilities), over-idealization questionnaire, and demographics.

Perceptions of the self. The 21-item Interpersonal Qualities Scale (IQS, $\alpha = .76$; Murray et al., 1996) contains positive and negative trait attributes which participants rated for how well each describes the self on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all characteristic, 7 = completely characteristic). Sample traits include: "kind and affectionate," "self-assured," and "thoughtless." Negative items were reverse-scored, so that a high score represented a more positive self-perception. A 4-item version of the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ, $\alpha = .80$; Pelham and Swann, 1989) was used as an additional measure of more ability focused items including, "leadership ability," "emotional

stability,” “sense of humor,” and “social skills/social competence.” Each attribute was rated for how well each describes the self on a 10-point scale asking people to rate themselves relative to other people their own age (A = bottom 5%, J = upper 5%)

Perceived partner idealization. Participants also described how they think the partner sees the self, using the same 21-item IQS measure ($\alpha = .85$). This provided the key measure of how positively people perceive their partner to regard the self. Perceived partner idealization for traits was computed by creating an unstandardized residual score of self IQS predicting perceived partner IQS. Thus, the result represents perceived partner IQS scores controlling for one’s self-perceptions. Similarly, the 4-item SAQ was also administered from the perspective of perception of the partner ($\alpha = .74$). Perceived partner idealization for abilities was computed by creating an unstandardized residual score of self-SAQ predicting perceived partner-SAQ. Thus, the result represents perceived partner-SAQ scores controlling for one’s self-perceptions.

Relationship satisfaction. The 11-item Marital Opinion Scale (MOS; Huston, McKale, & Crouter, 1986) asks participants to rate 10 bipolar word-pairs on a scale from 1 to 6, describing how they have felt about their relationship during the past two months. Sample word pairs include “miserable...enjoyable” and “rewarding...disappointing.” The last item asks participants to make a general rating of “how satisfied or dissatisfied you have been with your relationship over the past two months” on a 7-point scale (1 = completely dissatisfied, 7 = completely satisfied). Responses to all 11 items were added together to create a scale score that could range from 11 to 67 ($\alpha = .94$). Due to a technology error during the first mass testing session, the data were lost for items 1-10 for those 77 participants. Thus, for participants in the first session, we used MOS item 11 as

the index of relationship satisfaction, created a Z-score, and combined the data with a Z-score of the composite scale for the participants in the second session. This composite Z-score was used as the dependent variable in all analyses involving relationship satisfaction.

Accommodation. The 16-item measure of accommodation to partner (Rusbult et al., 1991) asks participants to rate how frequently they engage in a variety of problem solving behaviors. The responses are based on the two dimensions of active/passive and constructive/destructive, creating four categories of response-- exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect--with 4 items that fall into each category. The scale ranged from 0 (never) to 7 (constantly) Sample item: "When we've had an argument, I work things out with my partner right away." The 16 items were averaged to create a composite score of accommodation ($\alpha = .83$). It is standard to use a total score of accommodation and previous research has used the measure in this way (e.g., Finkel & Campbell, 2001). During the second mass testing session, 8 of the 16 items were administered ($\alpha = .79$).

Autonomy threat. A 5-item measure assessed how much independence people give up to be in their relationship ($\alpha = .86$, Murray, Holmes et al., 2009). Sample items include: "I've made a number of changes in my life to adjust to my partner" and "I've given up a lot my independence since I've gotten involved with my partner." Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1(not at all true) to 7 (completely true).

Fear of discovery. I created an 8-item scale to assess fear of discovery by the partner ($\alpha = .93$). Some items were adapted from the self-concealment scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990). Sample items include: "If my partner knew the "real me" he or she might not want to be with me," and "If I shared my faults with my partner, my partner

might like me less.” During the second mass testing session, 4 of the 8 items were administered ($\alpha = .95$ for those 4 items). Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). See Appendix for the full measure.

Own responsiveness to the partner. The 18-item version of the Reis (2003) perceived partner responsiveness measure was adapted to assess one’s own responsiveness to the partner ($\alpha = .94$). Thus, the items that normally ask about one’s perceptions of the partner were revised to ask about one’s own responsiveness to the partner. Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all true, 7 = completely true). Sample items include: "I am responsive to my partner's needs" and "I esteem my partner shortcomings and all.” During the second mass testing session, 4 of the 18 items were administered ($\alpha = .84$ for those 4 items). See Appendix for the full measure.

Trait measures. The 10-item Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale was used to assess self-esteem ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others”). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). Due to length restrictions during the second mass testing session, I administered a 5-item version of the scale for those participants ($\alpha = .90$). Attachment style was measured using a 12-item version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Revised questionnaire (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) that contains subscales measuring anxiety ($\alpha = .76$) and avoidance ($\alpha = .72$). The scale ranged from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly).

Over-Idealization Index. I created a 3-item scale about the experience of being over-idealized ($\alpha = .74$). Participants rated each item on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The items were: “How much do you feel that your partner puts you on a

pedestal or thinks of you much more positively than is real?,” “How much do you feel that your partner has unrealistically high expectations for how you might behave in a situation?,” “How much do you feel that your partner has an ideal image of you that does not match the type of person that you want to be or could be?,” I had originally included the following item: “How much do you feel that your partner sees you or treats you as if you are your partner’s ideal parent?” but it lowered the alpha level, and in retrospect did not seem entirely appropriate for college students in most dating relationships.

Results

Incidence of over-idealization. Before beginning data analysis, I examined the distribution for the over-idealization composite variable to get a sense of the incidence of over-idealization. The measure was normally distributed, with all scores falling within 3 standard deviations of the mean (see Figure 2 for the histogram). In addition, the over-idealization index was correlated in the expected direction with the dependent variables. Over-idealization was negatively correlated with satisfaction, relationship accommodation, and responsiveness. Over-idealization was positively correlated with autonomy threat and fear of discovery. These correlations provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships between over-idealization and the dependent variables. See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for the key variables.

Removal of outliers. Because I was testing for curvilinearity, I wanted to be sure that extreme scores did not drive the effects. Thus before beginning data analysis, I checked for outliers more than three standard deviations above and below the mean on each of the main independent and dependent variables. For each variable, the number of

outliers removed ranged from zero to four cases.

Procedure for testing for predicted curvilinear patterns. To test hypotheses 1-6 for a curvilinear relationship between perceived partner idealization (PPI) and each of the dependent variables, I squared residual scores for perceived partner traits (IQS) and abilities (SAQ). For each of these variables (residualized IQS and SAQ), I performed a series of hierarchical polynomial regression analyses including both the linear component (original residual scores on the IQS or SAQ) and the quadratic component (squared residual scores on the IQS or SAQ) as predictors of each dependent variable. I chose to use residual scores rather than difference scores because previous work has used this method (e.g., Murray et al., 1996). I also tested all analyses reported below using difference scores and results were similar.

Hypothesized basic curvilinear effect on satisfaction. (a) Traits: To test Hypothesis 1 using perceived partner idealization of traits (IQS), I conducted a hierarchical polynomial regression analysis with the unstandardized IQS residual predicting relationship satisfaction. The linear relationship between the two variables contributed a significant increment, accounting for 15% of variance ($\beta = .35$; $F(1, 152) = 26.11, p < .001$). Adding the quadratic term did not add a significant further increment, ($sr^2 = .01, \beta = .07, F(1, 151) = .89, ns$; see Table 2). Thus, the best fitting model was the linear relationship. As illustrated in Figure 3a, the pattern is greater perceived partner idealization predicting greater relationship satisfaction. (b) Abilities: Using the abilities measure of perceived partner idealization (SAQ), there were significant linear and quadratic relationships with satisfaction (see Table 3). As shown in Figure 3b, the pattern of the quadratic effect was such that relationship satisfaction increased to a point, then

leveled off and decreased at high levels of PPI. It is possible that there may be a ceiling effect such that the generally high ratings of relationship satisfaction are influencing the curvilinear effect. I will return to this issue in the general discussion. In sum, Hypothesis 1 was supported for abilities but not for traits.

Research Question 1. What leads to a greater sense of PPI, over-valuing of traits or abilities? To examine this question, I created two additional residual terms. First, I created an unstandardized residual of the unstandardized residual of IQS (perceived partner idealization of traits) predicted by the unstandardized residual of SAQ (perceived partner idealization of abilities). This residual represented the unique part of PPI of traits that is not accounted for by PPI of abilities. I then predicted relationship satisfaction from the residual term and its square using a hierarchical polynomial regression analysis. Results showed a significant linear effect ($sr^2 = .09$, $F_{Change}(1,65) = 6.55$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .30$) and a non-significant quadratic effect ($sr^2 = .01$, $F_{Change}(1,64) = .57$, ns ; $\beta = .09$). To test for the unique effect of PPI of abilities, I created an unstandardized residual of the unstandardized residual of IQS (perceived partner idealization of traits) predicted by the unstandardized residual of SAQ (perceived partner idealization of abilities) and performed a hierarchical polynomial regression. Results showed a non-significant linear effect ($sr^2 = .02$, $F_{Change}(1,65) = 1.16$, ns ; $\beta = .13$) and a significant quadratic effect ($sr^2 = .07$, $F_{Change}(1,64) = 4.64$, $p < .05$; $\beta = -.26$). These results suggest that perceived partner idealization of traits is linearly related to satisfaction, while perceived partner idealization of abilities has a curvilinear relationship with satisfaction such that it has positive effects to a point and begins to have negative effects at high levels.

Moderating variables. To test for moderation by self-esteem, attachment anxiety,

and relationship length, I conducted a series of regression interaction analyses. In each regression, I included the centered linear term for perceived partner idealization (either of traits or abilities), the centered quadratic term for perceived partner idealization (either of traits or abilities), the centered moderating variable, the product of the centered linear term for PPI with the centered moderating variable, and the product of the centered quadratic term for PPI with the centered moderating variable, all as predictors of the dependent variable. In each analysis, a significant product term of the linear or quadratic term with the moderating variable would suggest that variable moderates the effect on the dependent variable.

When I tested for moderation of the effect of PPI of traits on satisfaction by self-esteem, I found non-significant interactions between self-esteem and the linear and quadratic terms for PPI of traits (interaction β 's = $-.11, p = .12$ and $-.02, p = .87$). Thus, the basic effect of PPI of traits was not significantly moderated by self-esteem. For PPI of abilities, again there was a non-significant interaction with self-esteem for both the linear and quadratic effects, suggesting that self-esteem did not moderate the effect (interaction β 's = $-.01, p = .97$ and $.12, p = .49$)¹.

I tested for moderation of the basic effect by attachment anxiety and again found non-significant interactions with the linear and quadratic terms for PPI of traits (interaction β 's = $-.03, p = .76$ and $.11, p = .33$). The interaction of attachment anxiety

¹ Because the variables for perceived partner idealization of traits and abilities controlled for one's own self-perceptions, it is possible that this might have affected the test for moderation by self-esteem. To eliminate this possibility, I also used the variable of perceptions of the partner's views of one's traits and abilities (not controlling for one's own self-perceptions) to test for moderation of the effects on satisfaction and fear of discovery. Nonetheless, all four interactions with self-esteem remained non-significant.

with PPI of abilities also yielded non-significant interactions with both the linear and quadratic terms (interaction β 's = $-.25, p = .14$ and $.17, p = .36$).

Finally, I tested for moderation by relationship length for the effect of PPI of traits and abilities. Because relationship length was positively skewed (and because the subjective meaning of length is skewed so that, for example the difference between 1 and 2 months is much greater than between a longer relationship length such as 20 and 21 months), I performed a log transformation to create a normal distribution of scores. For PPI of traits, there were non-significant interactions with both the linear and quadratic terms for PPI of traits (interaction β 's = $.13, p = .11$ and $-.05, p = .62$). For PPI of abilities, there was a significant interaction of relationship length with the linear term ($\beta = -.28, p = .05$) and a non-significant interaction with the quadratic term ($\beta = .04, p = .86$). Examination of the pattern of the interaction showed that the linear effect had a much steeper slope in shorter relationships ($\beta = .70, p < .001$) compared to longer relationships ($\beta = .21, ns$). However, the pattern of the quadratic effect was similar for people in both short and long relationships. (Using the original—non log-transformed lengths yielded similar effects.)

Hypothesized effect on relationship accommodation. Next I tested the effect of PPI on behavior (Hypothesis 2). For PPI of traits, there were significant linear and quadratic effects on behavior (see Table 2). The curvilinear pattern shows that as PPI increases, accommodation behavior initially increases, but then levels off and decreases slightly (see Figure 4a). Because there was not a direct curvilinear effect of PPI for traits on relationship satisfaction, I could not test accommodation as a mediator of the basic effect (Research Question 2). For PPI of abilities, again there were significant linear and

quadratic effects on accommodation behavior (see Table 3). As Figure 5a shows, the quadratic effect shows an initial increase in accommodation as PPI of abilities increases, but then there is a steep decline at the higher levels.

To test for mediation of the basic curvilinear effect of PPI of abilities on satisfaction by accommodation, I followed the basic steps for mediation analysis as outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). In all mediation analyses, I first tested for the significance of the unmediated path from the predictor variable to the criterion variable, then tested the path from the predictor to the mediator, and finally included both the predictor and mediator as predictors to test for a reduction in the path from cause to effect. To account for the curvilinearity of the data, I included both the original (unsquared) term and the squared term for perceived partner idealization in each regression involving the predictor variable. The direct effect of PPI for abilities had a significant linear and curvilinear effect on satisfaction (β 's = .34 and -.25 respectively, both $p < .05$). In addition, the path from PPI for abilities to accommodation (predictor to mediator) had a significant linear and curvilinear effect (β 's = .28, $p < .05$ and -.40, $p < .001$ respectively). When I entered accommodation and PPI for traits as simultaneous predictors of relationship satisfaction, as predicted, the paths from PPI for abilities to satisfaction were reduced to below significance for both the linear and quadratic terms (β 's = .11 and -.13 respectively), while the path from accommodation to satisfaction remained significant ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). In addition, the paths from PPI for abilities were reduced significantly, and were consistent with a pattern of full mediation (Sobel's $Z = 2.12, p < .05$ for linear and $Z = -2.95, p < .01$ for quadratic). These results answer Research Question 2, that relationship accommodation indeed mediates the effect of PPI

of abilities on satisfaction (see Figure 6a).

Hypothesized effect on autonomy threat. For PPI of traits, there was a significant linear effect on behavior and a non-significant quadratic effect (see Table 2). As Figure 4b shows, as PPI increases, autonomy threat increases. Because there was no direct curvilinear effect on satisfaction, I could not test research question 3 for traits. For PPI of abilities, there were significant linear and quadratic effects on autonomy threat (see Table 3). The best fitting model included the quadratic term. As Figure 5b indicates, the quadratic pattern suggests that at low and high levels of PPI, autonomy threat is high, but in the middle, autonomy threat is low. Because the paths from PPI of abilities to autonomy threat were significant, I tested for mediation of the direct effect of PPI on satisfaction. When autonomy threat and PPI for abilities were entered simultaneously, the paths from PPI of abilities to satisfaction were reduced to below significance (β 's = .19 and -.16 for linear and quadratic terms respectively), while the path from autonomy threat to satisfaction remained significant ($\beta = -.33, p < .01$; See Figure 6b for the pattern). Again, this was a significant reduction and the model was consistent with a pattern of full mediation with the quadratic term, supporting the model proposed in research question 3 (Sobel's $Z = 1.58, p = .11$ for linear and $Z = -2.10, p < .05$ for quadratic).

Hypothesized effect on fear of discovery. For PPI of traits, there was a significant linear effect on fear of discovery and a non-significant quadratic effect. Thus, the linear model was strongest again. The pattern showed that as PPI of traits increased, fear of discovery decreased (see Figure 4c). Because the direct curvilinear effect was not significant, I did not test research question 4 for PPI of traits. For PPI of abilities, there

were significant linear and quadratic effects on fear of discovery (see Table 3). The pattern showed that fear of discovery was high at low and high levels of PPI but lowest when PPI was at a moderate level (see Figure 5c).

To test research question 4a (moderation of the fear of discovery effect by self-esteem) I performed a regression interaction similar to that detailed above for testing moderation of hypothesis 1. There was a significant interaction between self-esteem and the linear term for PPI of traits (interaction $\beta = .29, p < .01$) and a marginally significant interaction with the quadratic term (interaction $\beta = -.19, p = .09$). Thus, the effect of PPI of traits on fear of discovery was moderated by self-esteem. As shown in Figure 7, for both low and high self-esteem individuals, there is a linear pattern such that as PPI increases, fear of discovery increases. However, fear of discovery is in general higher for low self-esteem individuals, and in addition has a steeper slope compared to the pattern for high self-esteem individuals. For PPI of abilities, there were non-significant interactions with self-esteem for both the linear and quadratic effects on fear of discovery, suggesting that self-esteem did not moderate the effect (interaction β 's = .14 and .003).

Because of the significant curvilinear effect of PPI of abilities, I tested the proposed meditational model (Research Question 4b). When fear of discovery and PPI of abilities were entered simultaneously as predictors of satisfaction, the paths from PPI of abilities to satisfaction were reduced to below significance (β 's = .13 and -.09 for linear and quadratic terms respectively), while the path from fear of discovery to satisfaction remained significant ($\beta = -.44, p < .01$; See Figure 6c). Again, this was a significant reduction and the model was consistent with a pattern of full mediation, supporting the

model proposed in research question 4b (Sobel's $Z = 2.06, p < .05$ for linear and $Z = -2.55, p < .05$ for quadratic).

Hypothesized effect on responsiveness. For PPI of traits, again there was a linear effect on responsiveness and a non-significant quadratic effect (see Table 2). The pattern showed that as PPI increased, one's own responsiveness to the partner increased (see Figure 4d). Due to the lack of a curvilinear effect of PPI for traits, I did not test the relevant research question for traits. For PPI of abilities, there were significant linear and quadratic effects of PPI on responsiveness. As shown in Figure 5d, the quadratic pattern was such that responsiveness increased with PPI to a point, but then leveled off and decreased slightly. Because of the significant curvilinear effect of PPI of abilities, I tested the proposed meditational model (Research Question 5). When responsiveness and PPI of abilities were entered simultaneously as predictors of satisfaction, the paths from PPI of abilities to satisfaction were reduced (linear $\beta = -.01, ns$ and quadratic $\beta = -.20, p < .05$), while the path from responsiveness to satisfaction remained significant ($\beta = .61, p < .001$; see Figure 6d). This was a significant reduction and the model supported a pattern of partial mediation, supporting the model proposed in research question 4b (Sobel's $Z = 2.84, p < .01$ for linear and $Z = -2.33, p < .05$ for quadratic).

Gender differences. To test for gender differences of the effect of PPI of traits and abilities, I performed a series of regression interactions. In each regression, I included the centered linear term for perceived partner idealization (either of traits or abilities), the centered quadratic term for perceived partner idealization (either of traits or abilities), a dummy code for gender, the product of the centered linear term for PPI with gender, and the product of the centered quadratic term for PPI with gender as predictors of the

dependent variable. For perceived partner idealization of traits, none of the interactions of gender with the linear PPI term or quadratic PPI term were significant, which suggests that gender did not moderate the effects. For perceived partner idealization of abilities there were several interactions with gender, suggesting that the pattern of results may differ for men and women. With relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, neither interaction with gender was significant (linear interaction $\beta = -.01, p = .99$, quadratic interaction $\beta = -.28, p = .66$). For accommodation, there was a marginally significant interaction of the linear term with gender (linear interaction $\beta = -.84, p = .07$, quadratic interaction $\beta = -.32, p = .64$). With autonomy threat as the dependent variable, there was a significant interaction of the quadratic term with gender (linear interaction $\beta = .42, p = .34$, quadratic interaction $\beta = 1.30, p < .05$). For fear of discovery, there was a significant interaction of the linear term with gender (linear interaction $\beta = .96, p < .05$, quadratic interaction $\beta = .71, p = .27$). Finally, with responsiveness as the dependent variable, both interactions with gender were non-significant (linear interaction $\beta = -.17, p = .71$, quadratic interaction $\beta = -1.08, p = .12$). For the three variables that had significant or marginally significant interactions with gender (accommodation, autonomy threat, and fear of discovery), examination of the pattern of results for men and women revealed that for men, the pattern was almost completely linear, but for women the quadratic pattern was much stronger. Thus the linear trends were similar for both men and women, but it seems that women tend to have more of an optimal level for PPI of abilities. These results are tentative due to the relatively smaller number of men in the sample and should be further explored in future research.

Discussion of Study 1

Study 1 provided correlational evidence to support some of the hypothesized effects. For perceived partner idealization of traits, there was a linear relationship with relationship satisfaction, accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness. The only variable that had a curvilinear association was accommodation, which showed the predicted pattern of association. These results suggest that it may not be threatening to feel that one's partner over-idealizes one's traits. Because traits are not easily visible, it is possible that even if one perceives the partner to have unrealistic views, it might not be threatening to be overly positively regarded.

For perceived partner idealization of abilities, there was a curvilinear association with relationship satisfaction, accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness. In addition, accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery and responsiveness mediated the basic effect of PPI of abilities on relationship satisfaction. The curvilinear effects with PPI of abilities suggest that over-idealization on more visible qualities might be seen as more threatening and have detrimental effects on the relationship. In addition, the ability items seem to be less relationship-relevant than the trait items might be, and Swann et al. (2002)'s work suggests that people prefer to be thought of overly positively on relationship-relevant characteristics and accurately on non-relationship relevant characteristics. Thus these findings are in line with their work and suggest that because the ability items are not as relationship-relevant, people might prefer to be seen by their partners for who they really are. In addition, it seems that women may be more affected by over-idealization, as they had a curvilinear pattern,

while men had a mainly linear pattern for PPI of abilities. To further understand these results, I next conducted an experiment to manipulate over-idealization.

III. Study 2: Egregious Virtue Experiment

Method

Participants. Participants were 70 dating couples (67 heterosexual couples and 3 lesbian couples) recruited through the psychology department subject pool, email advertisements, and flyers. Two couples in the control condition were excluded because they reported feeling under-idealized by their partner in the manipulation check. Three couples in the experimental condition were excluded; one due to language difficulty, one due to suspicion that they were not in a relationship, and one because the female guessed that her partner had received a different questionnaire. Thus, the final sample consisted of 65 couples (64 heterosexual couples and 1 lesbian couple), with 35 in the experimental condition and 31 in the control condition and a mean relationship length of 18.44 months ($SD = 12.61$, length ranged from 1 to 53 months). The age of participants ranged from 17 to 36 with a mean age of 20.02 ($SD = 2.15$ years). The majority of participants were Caucasian (44.8%), but 26.7% were Asian, 17.2% were African American, 1.7% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, .9% were American Indian or Alaska Natives, and 8.6% reported Other.

The experiment was advertised as a study about thoughts and feelings that couples in dating relationships commonly experience. For participants recruited through the subject pool, one member of the couple signed up for the experiment via the subject pool website and was asked to bring his or her partner. If both members of the couple were in the subject pool, they each received one research credit for participating in the study. If

only one member of the couple was in the subject pool, that person received research credit and the other partner was paid \$5 for his or her participation (due to slow recruitment, I raised the payment to \$10 after the first few months of data collection). If neither member of the couple was in the subject pool, they both received \$5 (\$10 after the raised payment level).

Procedures. The protocol was closely modeled after the “egregious fault experiment” (Murray et al. 2002, Study 3), which was a manipulation intended to make a participant think their partner found many faults in the self. I modified that experiment to manipulate over-idealization by making one participant think that their partner over-values them. Couples were seated on at opposite ends of a long table, with one partner seated on the end and the other seated on the side of the table so that they were perpendicular to one another with a partition in between them. Before beginning the questionnaires, the experimenter reminded them not to communicate with each other and that they would only proceed from one questionnaire to the next when both members of the couple have finished. After this introduction, participants completed a packet of pretest measures, which included half of the items from each of the same key dependent variables used in Study 1. For couples in the over-idealization condition, one member of the couple (the target participant) was randomly assigned to be led to believe that their partner was spending an excessive time listing their positive qualities. To achieve this, the target participant received a one-page questionnaire with the following instructions: “Please list all of the qualities of your partner that are extremely valuable and positive. You should not list any more than one such quality if that was all that easily came to mind.”

Although the target participants were lead to believe that their partners received the identical questionnaire, in reality, their partner received a one-page questionnaire with the following instructions: “Please list as many of the items in your dormitory room, bedroom or apartment as possible (and a minimum of 30 items).” In order to reach 30 items, participants had to flip the page over and continue writing on the back of the page; this was done to ensure that the target participant would notice how much their partner was writing. To further strengthen the manipulation, each packet of questionnaires was color-coded and partners always received the same color questionnaire as their partner. The pre-test measures were light blue, the over-idealization/dorm-writing questionnaire was light green, and the post-test measures were yellow.

As expected, target participants typically finished earlier than their partners and had to wait for their partner to finish. The experimenter timed participants from the time that they were given the questionnaires, and if the partner did not stop naturally, they stopped the partner from detailing their room contents after 5 minutes passed. Couples in the control condition were both given the same questionnaire asking them to list the extremely valuable and positive qualities of their partner. As a result, target participants in the control condition finished at the same time as their partner (and thus would have no reason to believe that their partner over-idealizes the self).

Following the experimental manipulation, all participants completed a questionnaire packet containing the MOS measure of relationship satisfaction (Huston et al., 1986) and the other half of the dependent measures administered in Study 1. After completing the dependent measures, all participants completed a manipulation check and were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked.

Pretest measures. Participants completed the 8-item Relationship Assessment Scale, although one item was removed due to low reliability ($\alpha = .77$, RAS; Hendrick, 1988). Each participant completed an 8-item measure of accommodation to partner and one item was removed from the analysis due to low reliability ($\alpha = .75$, Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), a 5-item measure of autonomy threat ($\alpha = .83$, modeled after the items written by Murray, Holmes et al., 2009. See Appendix for the full measure), 4-items of fear of discovery ($\alpha = .88$, adapted from Larson & Chastain, 1990), and 9-items from the measure of responsiveness ($\alpha = .86$, adapted from Reis, 2003). In addition, all participants completed the same trait measures as in Study 1. The inter-item reliabilities were strong for attachment anxiety ($\alpha = .75$), attachment avoidance ($\alpha = .86$), and self-esteem ($\alpha = .85$). See Table 4 for means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between measures.

Post-Test Measures. First was the 11-item Marital Opinion Scale of relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .93$, MOS; Huston, McKale, & Crouter, 1986). In addition, participants completed the remaining items from the Study 1 measures that were not completed in the pretest. These included an 8-item measure of accommodation to partner (two items removed due to low reliability; $\alpha = .66$, Rusbult et al., 1991), a 5-item measure of autonomy threat ($\alpha = .88$, adapted from Murray, Holmes et al., 2009), 4-items of fear of discovery ($\alpha = .82$, adapted from Larson & Chastain, 1990), and a 9-items from the measure of responsiveness ($\alpha = .86$, adapted from Reis, 2003). See Table 4 for means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between measures.

Manipulation check. Four items adapted from Murray et al. (2002) asked target experimental participants and target and control participants whether their partner listed

more or fewer positive qualities than they expected (1 = a lot less than expected, 4 = about the number expected, 7 = a lot more than expected), wrote more or less quickly than expected (1 = a lot less quickly than expected, 7 = a lot more quickly than expected), the number of qualities they guessed their partner had listed, and how concerned they were that their partner was writing about their positive qualities (1 = not at all concerned, 7 = extremely concerned). Due to low inter-item reliability, these items were considered separately. Finally, as an additional manipulation check, participants completed the self and perceived partner versions of the IQS (α 's = .73 and .81 respectively; Murray et al., 1996) and the SAQ (α 's = .74 and .80 respectively; Pelham & Swann, 1989), and the 3-item assessment of over-idealization used in Study 1 (α = .69).

Results

Analysis strategy. In this experiment, the comparison of interest was between the people in the over-idealization condition who were led to believe that their partner was spending an excessive time listing their positive qualities and those in the control condition, whose partners were doing the same task, thus leaving no reason to feel over-idealized. However, because both members of the couples in the control condition were writing about the positive qualities of their partner, I took the average of their responses for the manipulation check and dependent variables. In the analysis reported below, each comparison by condition represents a comparison between people whose partners were completing the dorm-writing task and the average of the ratings for each couple in which partners were also writing about positive qualities. Note that taking the average of the two couple members in each control condition couple is likely to be conservative in that it reduces the overall N; it also solves issues of non-independence that would arise if they

were considered separately. The one concern, however, was that couple averages might have less variance than individual scores in the experimental condition. Thus, in every analysis I checked for whether there was any substantial difference in variance between the two conditions that would suggest violation of assumptions. In no case was this a problem. Note also that this strategy meant that participants listing the items in their dorm rooms (the partners of the experimental target participants) were not included in any of the analyses presented below, as they would not be comparable. That is both control and target experimental participants were writing about positive qualities of their partner with exactly the same questionnaire—the difference was that for the target experimental participants, their partner was making a long list of items in their room.

Manipulation checks. I conducted a series of between subject t-tests on the manipulation check items with condition as the independent variable. Participants in the experimental condition thought that their partner listed more qualities than expected ($t(59) = 3.03, p < .01; M's = 5.53$ and 4.72 respectively) and guessed that their partner had written significantly more positive qualities ($t(58) = 5.28, p < .01; M's = 22.04$ and 11.38 respectively) compared to those in the control condition. In addition, participants reported that their partners were writing more quickly than expected ($t(52) = 1.65, p = .11; M's = 4.73$ and 4.29 respectively) in the experimental compared to the control condition. Surprisingly, there was not a significant difference by condition for the concern ($t(59) = .60, p = .55; M's = 3.07$ and 2.82 respectively) that people felt about their partner listing their positive qualities.

To test whether the manipulation had an effect on perceived partner idealization, I created two residuals, one of perceived partner IQS controlling for self IQS (PPI of traits)

and one of perceived partner SAQ controlling for self SAQ (PPI of abilities). I then performed a between subject t-test with condition (experimental or control) as the independent variable and found that condition did not have a significant effect on PPI of traits ($t(63) = .38, p = .78; M's = .02$ and $-.02$ respectively) or abilities ($t(54) = -.70, p = .49; M's = -.07$ and $.07$ respectively). In addition, the 3-item over-idealization index did not differ by condition ($t(63) = -.07, p = .94; M's = 3.68$ and 3.70 respectively). However, the over-idealization index was correlated in the expected direction with post-test measures of satisfaction ($r = -.41, p < .05$), accommodation ($r = -.40, p < .05$), autonomy threat ($r = .26, p = .14$), fear of discovery ($r = .57, p < .05$), and responsiveness ($r = -.42, p < .05$) for those in the experimental condition.

To assess the effect of the over-idealization manipulation on the dependent measures, I conducted a series of analysis of covariances (ANCOVA's) on each of the dependent measures (relationship satisfaction, accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness to the partner) with condition as the independent variable and post-test score as the dependent variable. Pre-test scores were included as a covariate to control for initial levels on the dependent variable of interest. In analyses to evaluate the potential moderating role of the individual difference variables (self-esteem, attachment style, and relationship length), I tested for main effects and interactions with each of these variables. Unfortunately, due to the fact that I used couple means for all people in the control condition, I could not include gender as an additional factor. However, to check for gender effects I also ran all analyses using individuals (thus treating people in the control condition separately) and in spite of the added power from larger N, there were no main effects or interactions with gender.

Hypothesized basic effect on relationship satisfaction. There was a non-significant effect of condition on satisfaction ($F(1,62) = .77, p = .39$). (The marginal means were in the expected direction such that people in the over-idealization condition were less satisfied compared to controls-- M 's = 55.74 and 57.04 respectively; see Figure 8 for the pattern). Thus, these results do not support Hypothesis 1, that too much PPI predicts lower relationship satisfaction. Because there was not a direct effect of over-idealization on relationship satisfaction, I could not test Research Questions 2-5 for mediation of the basic effect by the other dependent variables.

I next tested for interactions of condition with each of the three moderator variables, self-esteem, attachment anxiety, and relationship length. For each moderator variable, I conducted a regression in which the criterion variable was post-test relationship satisfaction. The predictor variables in each analysis were condition (experimental or control, dummy coded), the moderator variable (centered), and their product. In addition, to control for pre-test scores, I included pre-test relationship satisfaction as another predictor variable. Results showed that there were no significant main effects or interactions with self-esteem ($\beta = .39, p = .22$ and $\beta = -.34, p = .28$ respectively), attachment anxiety ($\beta = .34, p = .26$ and $\beta = -.47, p = .12$ respectively), or relationship length ($\beta = .31, p = .31$ and $\beta = -.43, p = .17$ respectively).

Hypothesized effect on relationship accommodation. The effect of condition on accommodation behaviors was not significant ($F(1,62) = .28, p = .45, M$'s = 5.19 and 5.06 respectively). These results did not support Hypothesis 2 (that high levels of PPI predict increased accommodation). See Figure 9 for the pattern. I next tested for interactions of condition with each of the three moderator variables, self-esteem,

attachment anxiety, and relationship length (following the same procedure as with relationship satisfaction). There were no significant main effects or interactions with self-esteem ($\beta = .17, p = .57$ and $\beta = -.05, p = .86$ respectively) or attachment anxiety ($\beta = -.07, p = .82$ and $\beta = -.15, p = .60$ respectively). There was a marginally significant main effect of relationship length ($\beta = -.56, p = .06$) such that people in shorter relationships report more relationship accommodation compared to those in longer relationships, but the interaction with relationship length was not significant ($\beta = .47, p = .12$).

Hypothesized effect on autonomy threat. There was a significant effect of condition on autonomy threat ($F(1,62) = 13.30, p < .01$) and the marginal means were in the predicted direction, such that autonomy threat was higher in the over-idealization condition ($M = 4.64$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.42$). These results support Hypothesis 3 (that overly high PPI predicts greater autonomy threat; see Figure 9 for the pattern). I next tested for interactions of condition with each of the three moderator variables. There were no significant main effects or interactions with self-esteem ($\beta = -.33, p = .33$ and $\beta = .30, p = .37$ respectively). For attachment anxiety there was a significant main effect and a significant interaction with attachment anxiety ($\beta = -1.01, p < .01$ and $\beta = 1.26, p < .01$ respectively). Examination of the pattern showed that in general, people high in attachment anxiety experienced less autonomy threat than people who were low in attachment anxiety. For people low in anxiety, there was a much larger effect of the manipulation, such that those in the experimental condition experienced more autonomy threat compared to controls (see Figure 10a). There was a significant main effect of relationship length ($\beta = -.62, p < .05$), which was qualified by a significant interaction ($\beta = .80, p < .05$). Examination of the regression lines showed a similar

pattern to attachment anxiety, such that those with longer relationships in general experienced less autonomy threat but for those in shorter relationships, people in the experimental condition experienced much greater autonomy threat compared to controls (see Figure 10b).

Hypothesized effect on fear of discovery. There was a significant effect of condition on fear of discovery ($F(1,62) = 41.62, p < .001$) and again the marginal mean was higher in the experimental condition ($M = 3.07$) when compared to the control ($M = .77$). This suggests that over-idealization was strongly related to fear of discovery and supports Hypothesis 4. Next I tested for the effect of the three moderators of interest. There was no main effect or interaction with self-esteem ($\beta = -.24, p = .43$ and $\beta = .21, p = .51$ respectively), which fails to support Hypothesis 4a (that self-esteem would moderate the effect on fear of discovery). There was a non-significant main effect of attachment anxiety ($\beta = -.28, p = .33$), which was qualified by a significant interaction ($\beta = .58, p < .05$). The pattern was such that across levels of attachment anxiety, people in the control condition experienced less fear of discovery. In the experimental condition, people with lower attachment anxiety experienced higher levels of fear of discovery compared to those in the experimental condition (see Figure 11). There was not a significant main effect or interaction with relationship length ($\beta = .04, p = .91$ and $\beta = -.02, p = .95$ respectively).

Hypothesized effect on responsiveness to the partner. Condition did not have a significant effect on one's own responsiveness to the partner ($F(1,62) = .04, p = .39, M's = 5.95$ and 5.93 respectively). These results do not support Hypothesis 5 (that over-idealization predicts decreased responsiveness to the partner). There were no significant

main effects or interactions with self-esteem ($\beta = .23, p = .32$ and $\beta = -.33, p = .15$ respectively), attachment anxiety ($\beta = .22, p = .33$ and $\beta = -.28, p = .24$ respectively), or relationship length ($\beta = -.17, p = .46$ and $\beta = .12, p = .60$ respectively).

Discussion of Study 2

The results of the manipulation check suggest that people in the over-idealization condition were aware that their partners were writing more positive qualities than expected and more quickly than expected compared to people in the control condition. In addition, they thought that their partner had listed significantly more positive qualities compared to the people in the control condition. These results suggest that the manipulation had the intended effect in creating a sense that the partner over-idealizes the self.

However, surprisingly, there were not significant differences between conditions in how concerned people felt about their partners listing their positive qualities, but this may be due to the fact that in both conditions, people believed that their partner was writing about their positive qualities. In the Murray et al. (2002) study, there may have been a more dramatic effect on people's concern because in that study people believed their partners were writing about their faults. In addition, there were not differences by condition in measures of perceived partner idealization of traits or abilities or in the 3-item measure of over-idealization. It is possible that these measures are not sensitive enough to detect the effect of the manipulation. In addition, these measures may reflect perceptions of the partner in general, rather than specific feelings at the time of the experiment. Perhaps if the instructions had been more specific, for example asking about perceptions of the partner's feelings about the self "right now," the effect of the

manipulation would have been stronger. Also, perhaps if there had been a pretest on the measure (so I could control for it) the results would have been more similar to what was seen on some of the dependent measures. (I could not include a pretest on over-idealization in this study because it might make participants aware of the manipulation).

Analyses with each of the five key dependent variables showed that the manipulation did not have effects on the positive relationship variables, including relationship satisfaction, accommodation, and responsiveness. These results did not support Hypotheses 1, 2, and 5. However, the manipulation did have effects on the negative relationship variables, causing increases in autonomy threat and fear of discovery (providing support for Hypotheses 3 and 4). These results suggest that over-idealization seems to cause increases in negative relationship experiences rather than decreases in positive relationship perceptions. One alternative explanation for these results could be that participants in the experimental condition felt like a bad partner for not being able to list as many positive qualities as their partner seemed to be writing. To examine the possibility that this was the case, I tested for changes in perceptions of oneself from the beginning of the experiment to the end of the experiment. I created a variable from the IQS items to represent traits that indicate one feels like a good person (I included the following items: kind and affectionate, tolerant and accepting, critical and judgmental, and thoughtless). I then performed an ANCOVA with post-test self-perceptions as the dependent variable, pre-test self-perceptions (as measured by the Rosenberg self-esteem scale) as the covariate, and condition as the independent variable. As expected, there was a non-significant effect of condition ($F(1,62) = .66, p = .42$). These results suggest that the effect of the manipulation was not due to feeling like a bad

person.

In addition to the main effects of condition, there were some effects of the three moderating variables: self-esteem, attachment anxiety, and relationship length. For relationship satisfaction, accommodation, and responsiveness, there were no effects of any of the three moderating variables. For autonomy threat, there were interactions with attachment anxiety and relationship length. The pattern showed that people lower in attachment anxiety and in shorter relationships experienced greater autonomy threat in the experimental compared to the control condition. The manipulation did not make much difference for those who were high in attachment anxiety and in longer relationships. For fear of discovery; there was an interaction with attachment anxiety such that fear of discovery was similarly low across levels of attachment anxiety in the control condition, but in the experimental condition fear of discovery was greater for people low in attachment anxiety compared to those who were higher in anxiety. In these interactions, people low in attachment anxiety (and in shorter relationships for autonomy threat) experienced higher levels of autonomy threat and fear of discovery. It is possible that less anxious people felt more threatened because they had something to be anxious about after the over-idealization manipulation. Less anxiously attached people generally have better relationships because they can trust that their partner won't abandon them, but perhaps they are less well equipped to deal with their partners being overly positive about them. For those high in attachment anxiety, over-idealization might be a good thing because they have a strong desire to feel their partner cares about them, even if it also is threatening their autonomy.

IV. General Discussion

The key results of Study 1 were that perceived partner idealization of traits had mainly linear associations with relationship satisfaction, relationship accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness; however, perceived partner idealization of abilities had the predicted curvilinear association with all of the dependent variables. Thus PPI of traits seems to have uniformly positive relationship effects, while PPI of abilities has positive effects up to a point but negative effects at high levels. Study 2 found that individuals who underwent an over-idealization manipulation experienced increased fear of discovery of their true selves and felt that their personal autonomy was threatened. These results suggest that the over-idealization manipulation caused increases in negative relationship experiences, but did not have a significant effect on positive relationship perceptions. Taken together, these studies suggest that there is an optimal level of perceived partner idealization of abilities and that manipulating over-idealization may lead to negative relationship processes. However, for perceived partner idealization of traits, there does not seem to be a limit to the benefits of perceiving one's partner to think of oneself positively. These findings support Neff and Karney's (2005) work on specific accuracy, and suggest that for more general traits it is good to feel positively regarded, but for more specific abilities accuracy may be preferable.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that there would be a curvilinear effect of over-idealization on satisfaction. Study 1 provided some support for this hypothesis with the curvilinear association of perceived partner idealization of abilities with satisfaction. Thus, there may be too much of a good thing when it comes to idealization of abilities. Interestingly, the effect was almost completely linear for perceived partner idealization of

traits, which suggests that for traits it is good to feel positively regarded by a relationship partner, no matter how high the level. In Study 2, there was not a significant effect of over-idealization by a partner on relationship satisfaction. Research Question 1 asked whether traits or specific abilities would create a greater sense of feeling over-valued, and the results of Study 1 suggest that PPI of abilities has a curvilinear effect on satisfaction even after controlling for the unique effect of PPI of traits. Indeed, one possibility for why an effect was not found in Study 2 is that participants may have presumed their partners were writing about traits. Hypothesis 2 posited that overly high PPI would predict decreased relationship accommodation. In Study 1, there was a curvilinear effect of perceived partner idealization of both traits and abilities on accommodation. In Study 2, this hypothesis was not supported, as the over-idealization manipulation did not have a significant effect on accommodation. Research Question 2 suggested that accommodation might mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on satisfaction, and because there was only a significant effect of PPI on satisfaction in Study 1, this could only be tested in that sample. However, a pattern of full mediation was supported with PPI of abilities as the cause and satisfaction as the effect.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that overly high PPI would predict an increased sense of autonomy threat in the relationship. This hypothesis was supported in Study 1 for PPI of traits and in Study 2, where the over-idealization manipulation caused an increase in autonomy threat. Research Question 3 proposed that autonomy threat might mediate the basic relationship between overly high PPI and satisfaction, and again this hypothesis was supported for PPI of abilities in Study 1. Hypothesis 4 proposed that overly high PPI would predict a sense of fear of discovery of one's true self. Again, this hypothesis was

supported in Study 1 for PPI of abilities and also in Study 2. Research Question 4a suggested that self-esteem would moderate the effect of PPI on fear of discovery. Study 1 provided some support for this hypothesis, as the linear effect of PPI on fear of discovery was moderated by self-esteem. However, there was not a significant pattern of moderation for PPI of abilities in Study 1 or in Study 2. Research Question 4b suggested that fear of discovery would mediate the basic effect of PPI on satisfaction and was supported for PPI of abilities in Study 1.

Hypothesis 5 posited that overly high PPI would predict decreased responsiveness to the partner. This hypothesis was supported of PPI of abilities in Study 1, but was not supported in Study 2. Research Question 5 asked whether responsiveness might mediate the basic effect of overly high PPI on relationship satisfaction. In Study 1, responsiveness partially mediated the curvilinear effect of PPI of traits on satisfaction.

Thus, Study 1 supported Hypotheses 1-5 for perceived partner idealization of abilities, and Study 2 provided additional support for Hypotheses 3 and 4. The most consistent effect across studies was that overly high perceived partner idealization predicted increases in autonomy threat and fear of discovery. These results fit in well with the notion that “being put on a pedestal” creates unrealistic expectations. In addition, these variables are most closely related to a lack of understanding from one’s partner. This research builds on a central current theme in relationships research--the importance of feeling understood, validated, and cared for by a partner--and applies it to issues that have been minimally studied and which promise to have important implications for relationship functioning.

Limitations. One limitation in Study 1 was that it was difficult to discern whether the curvilinearity was due to a ceiling effect. It might be possible to use other measures that would have more variance among participants or that include more extreme potential positive values. This would be especially helpful for measures that tend to be naturally skewed toward the high end of the scale, such as relationship satisfaction. For example, if participants were asked to mark relationship satisfaction with an ‘X’ on a straight line, one could measure the distance from the edge to the marking. Further, the high end of the scale could describe an emotional extreme such as, “extremely happy at every moment” to ensure that scores do not cluster at the high end of the scale. Another limitation of the study design was that gender could not be included as an additional factor in the analysis, due to the averaging of scores across couples in the control condition. Future research might also seek to replicate the effect with a larger sample of male participants, to ensure that the gender difference for perceived partner idealization of abilities is consistent across studies.

In addition, in Study 2, the experimental task was vague as to whether participants should write about abilities or traits. The findings of Study 1 suggest that it would be useful to explicitly differentiate between over-idealization of traits and abilities. Perhaps there would be a greater change in the dependent variables if participants felt over-idealized on abilities rather than traits. Thus, future research might include over-idealization of traits and abilities as manipulated variables. To further build on Swann et al.’s (2002) work showing that people want to be seen overly positively on relationship relevant characteristics, it would be interesting to ask participants to rate the relationship relevance of each trait and ability. This would make it possible to explicitly determine if

the curvilinear effect is strongest for non-relationship relevant characteristics. In addition to relationship relevance, it would be interesting to consider the personal relevance of traits and abilities or their relevance to goals.

These results are also limited to a sample of American college students, and it is possible that the findings would be different in an older, more representative sample. It is also possible that the results might be different in other cultures. Nonetheless, the findings presented here provide a first step in understanding the processes associated with over-idealization.

Future Directions. Because the present study focused on questionnaire data, it would be useful to include behavioral outcomes in future research. For example, one could use a manipulation of over-idealization followed by a task in which couples have the opportunity to engage in relationship accommodation, or code for responsiveness to the partner during a discussion. I would expect that people who undergo an over-idealization manipulation would engage in less accommodation behavior or perhaps be less responsive to a partner during a discussion of a relationship problem. It would also be interesting to consider the effects of over-idealization in other types of relationships. For example, parent-child relationships might be especially relevant, as parents might have unrealistic perceptions of their child's abilities, or young children have over-idealized images of their parents that are easily disappointed. Another context might be teachers and students or managers and employees. It is likely that there would be a similar difference between perceived partner idealization of traits and abilities in such contexts.

If the results found here are replicated, this research might be applied to couples therapy to help partners take a more realistic view of one another's abilities. In addition, it might be useful across all types of relationships to take caution in one's encouragement of a partner's ability to achieve a goal and to focus more on their possession of traits that would help along the way. There has been some work that suggests that partners can help sculpt one another's selves to attain desired goals (e.g. Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). To successfully achieve such a Michelangelo effect (Rusbult et al., 2009), it is essential that one's own ideals rather than those of the partner drive the movement toward an ideal self. Thus, if a partner encourages growth that is in line with one's desired self-concept, there would be no need for fear of discovery or autonomy threat. In addition, the results of the present study suggest that the Michelangelo effect may work best for sculpting partner's traits. However, if one were to sculpt abilities, it would be best to convey to the partner that one is aware of their current level.

In sum, Study 1 suggests that there is an optimal level of perceived partner idealization of abilities, while for traits it seems that the more positive regard one feels from a partner the better. Study 2 suggests that the over-idealization manipulation lead to increases in negative relationship processes, but did not significantly influence positive relationship perceptions. Thus the chief mechanisms behind the detrimental effects of over-idealization seem to have to do with a fear that the partner will discover one's true self and a feeling that the partner is imposing expectations that might threaten one's autonomy to behave as one chooses. As Gloria Steinem suggests, being put on a pedestal indeed might be uncomfortable because it creates a small space in which one can exist.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 1 Variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perceived Partner Idealization of Traits	0	.59	—								
2. Perceived Partner Idealization of Abilities	0	.68	.49**	—							
3. Relationship Satisfaction Composite	-.05	.97	.39**	.34**	—						
4. Accommodation	4.81	1.09	.37**	.28*	.50**	—					
5. Responsiveness	5.84	.89	.38**	.38**	.57**	.65**	—				
6. Fear of Discovery	2.07	1.26	-.27**	-.30*	-.35**	-.47**	-.49**	—			
7. Autonomy Threat	3.37	1.38	-.27**	-.24*	-.35**	-.40**	-.33**	.41**	—		
8. Self-Esteem	4.78	1.35	.00	-.14	.26**	.28**	.19*	-.32**	-.16*	—	
9. Attachment Anxiety	3.56	1.24	-.24**	-.22	-.33**	-.37**	-.28**	.31**	.36**	-.28**	—
10. Over-Idealization	3.76	1.48	-.18*	-.22†	-.15†	-.36**	-.36**	.32**	.31**	-.08	.33**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

† Correlation is significant at the .06 or .07 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

Polynomial Hierarchical Regression Results for Study 1 Perceived Partner Idealization of Traits.

	Increment	F _{change}	β
Satisfaction			
Linear	.15	$F(1,152) = 26.11$	.38**
Quadratic	.01	$F(1,151) = .89$	.07
Accommodation			
Linear	.13	$F(1,156) = 24.25$	.36**
Quadratic	.02	$F(1,155) = 4.77$	-.16*
Autonomy Threat			
Linear	.07	$F(1,156) = 11.53$	-.26**
Quadratic	.00	$F(1,155) = .18$	.03
Fear of Discovery			
Linear	.07	$F(1,153) = 11.58$	-.27**
Quadratic	.00	$F(1,152) = .58$	.06
Responsiveness			
Linear	.14	$F(1,156) = 25.21$	.37**
Quadratic	.00	$F(1,155) = .02$	-.01

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: The linear betas reported above are independent of the quadratic effect. The quadratic betas are controlling for the linear effect.

Table 3

Polynomial Hierarchical Regression Results for Study 1 Perceived Partner Idealization of Abilities.

	Increment	F _{change}	β
Satisfaction			
Linear	.12	$F(1,65) = 8.55$	.34*
Quadratic	.06	$F(1,64) = 4.46$	-.25*
Accommodation			
Linear	.08	$F(1,69) = 5.92$	.28*
Quadratic	.16	$F(1,68) = 14.04$	-.40**
Autonomy Threat			
Linear	.06	$F(1,69) = 4.09$	-.24*
Quadratic	.12	$F(1,68) = 9.83$	.35**
Fear of Discovery			
Linear	.09	$F(1,68) = 6.79$	-.30*
Quadratic	.15	$F(1,67) = 13.37$	.39**
Responsiveness			
Linear	.14	$F(1,69) = 11.26$	.38**
Quadratic	.00	$F(1,68) = 6.58$	-.28*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: The linear betas reported above are independent of the quadratic effect. The quadratic betas are controlling for the linear effect.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 2 Variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Pre-Test Relationship Satisfaction	5.70	0.75	—										
2. Post-Test Relationship Satisfaction	56.36	7.17	.64**	—									
3. Pre-Test Accommodation	4.79	.99	.58**	.44**	—								
4. Post-Test Accommodation	5.13	.93	.56**	.41**	.67**	—							
5. Pre-Test Responsiveness	5.97	.63	.62**	.51**	.61**	.58**	—						
6. Post-Test Responsiveness	5.94	.56	.55**	.57**	.44**	.50**	.82**	—					
7. Pre-Test Fear of Discovery	3.97	2.19	-.52**	-.28*	.00	-.08	-.10	-.10	—				
8. Post-Test Fear of Discovery	1.98	.93	-.56**	-.51**	-.50**	-.46**	-.41**	-.38**	.24	—			
9. Pre-Test Autonomy Threat	5.02	1.38	-.42**	-.11	-.08	-.03	.03	.11	.80**	.24	—		
10. Post-Test Autonomy Threat	4.06	1.25	-.33**	-.24	-.25*	-.16	-.05	.02	.19	.37**	.45**	—	
11. Self Esteem	4.60	1.07	.14	.13	.00	.13	.01	-.07	-.22	-.04	-.03	.06	—
12. Anxiety	3.14	.96	-.51**	-.41**	-.39**	-.44**	-.32**	-.29*	.13	.38**	.07	.22	-.18

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1

The proposed model.

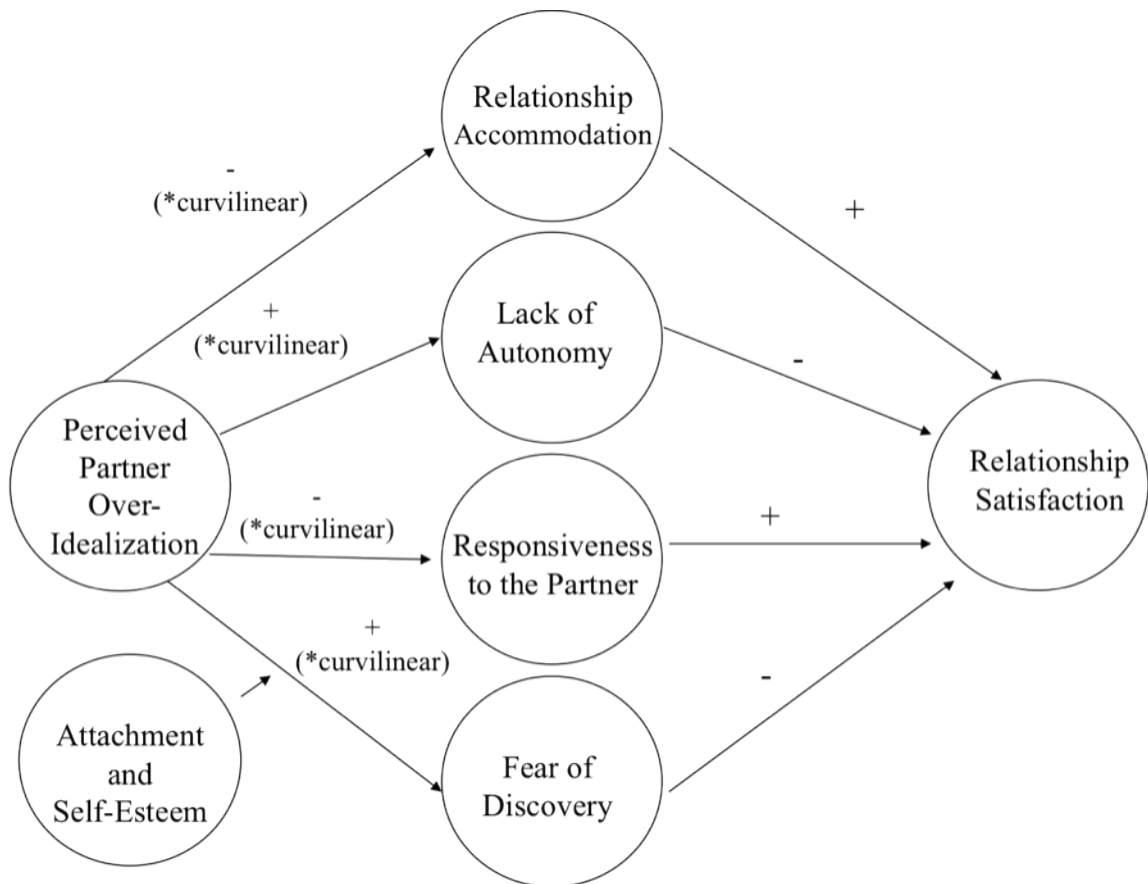


Figure 2

Histogram of scores for mean over-idealization.

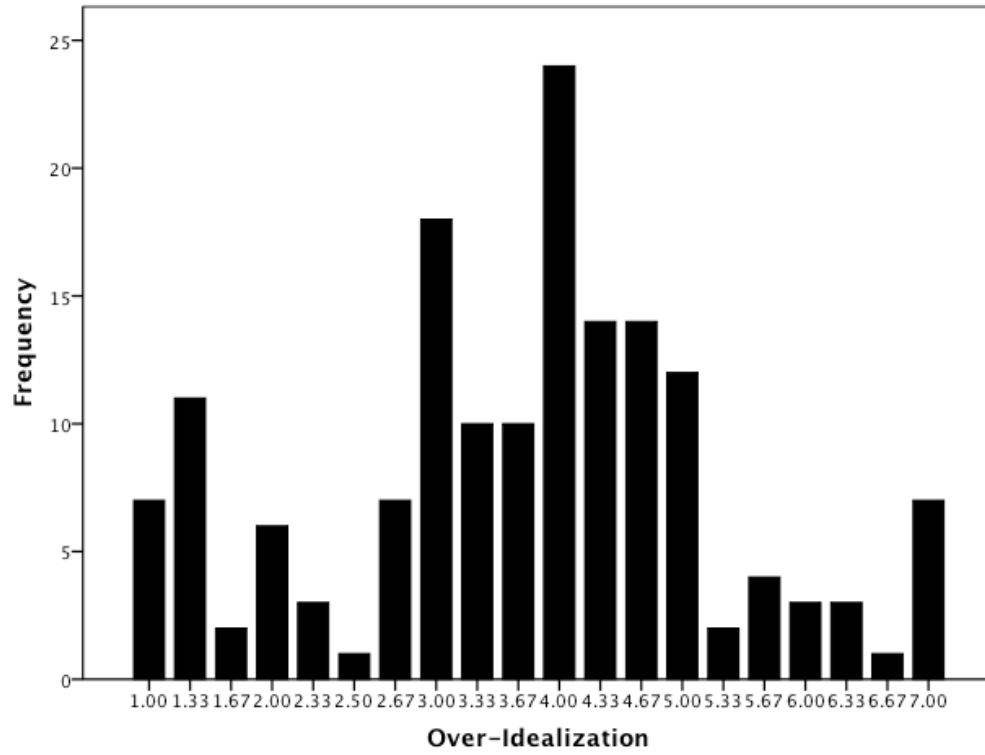
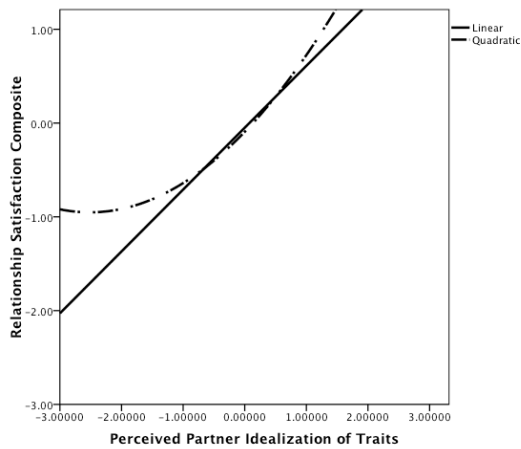


Figure 3

Regression lines (based on hierarchical polynomial regression equation) for linear and quadratic effects of perceived partner idealization of (a) traits and (b) abilities on relationship satisfaction. Please note that the linear equation is not controlling for the quadratic equation, but the quadratic equation does control for the linear effect.

(a)



(b)

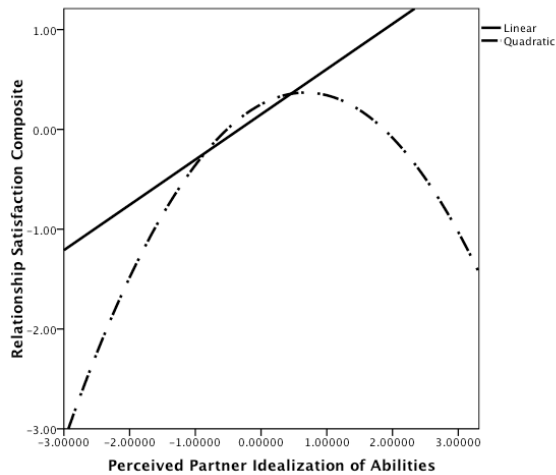
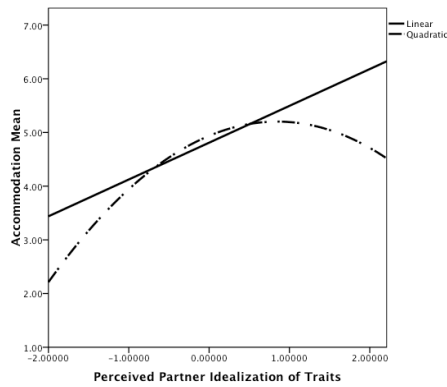


Figure 4

Regression lines (based on hierarchical polynomial regression equation) for linear and quadratic effects of perceived partner idealization of traits on (a) accommodation, (b) autonomy threat, (c) fear of discovery, and (d) responsiveness. Please note that the linear equation is not controlling for the quadratic equation, but the quadratic equation does control for the linear effect.

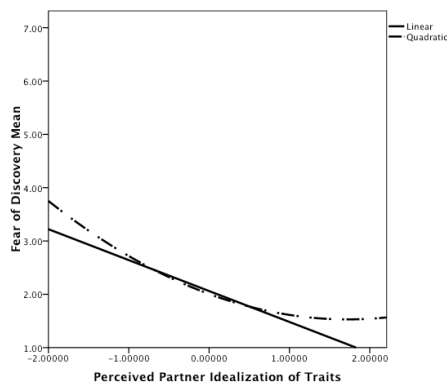
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

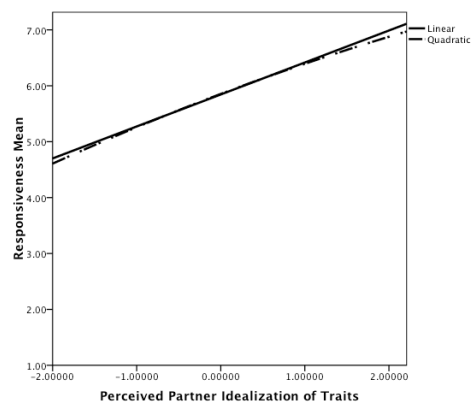
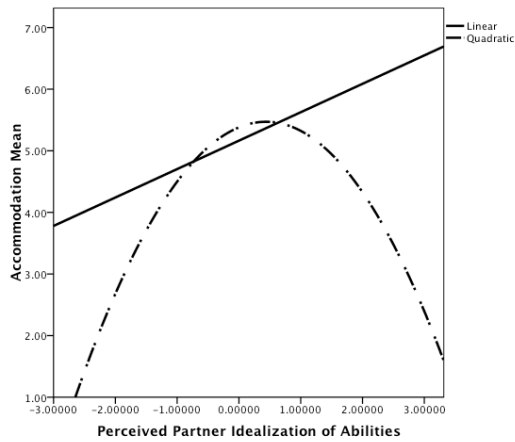


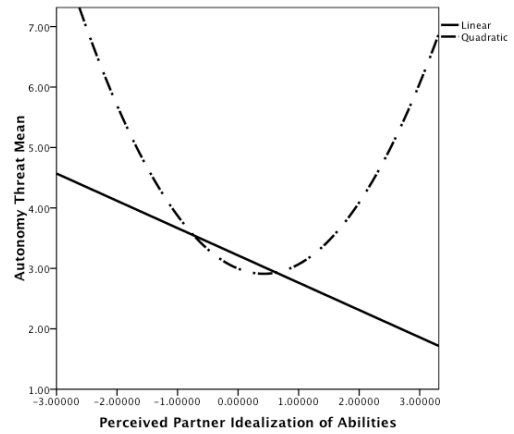
Figure 5

Regression lines (based on hierarchical polynomial regression equation) for linear and quadratic effects of perceived partner idealization of abilities on (a) accommodation, (b) autonomy threat, (c) fear of discovery, and (d) responsiveness. Please note that the linear equation is not controlling for the quadratic equation, but the quadratic equation does control for the linear effect.

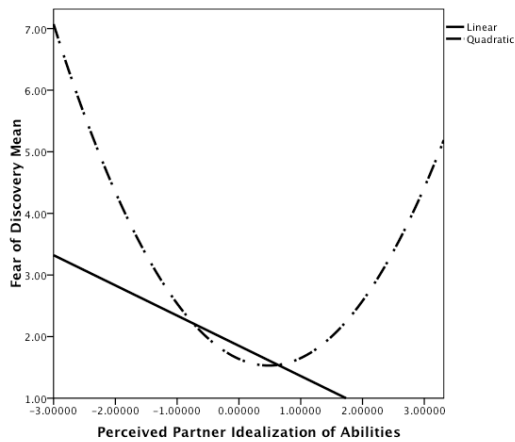
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

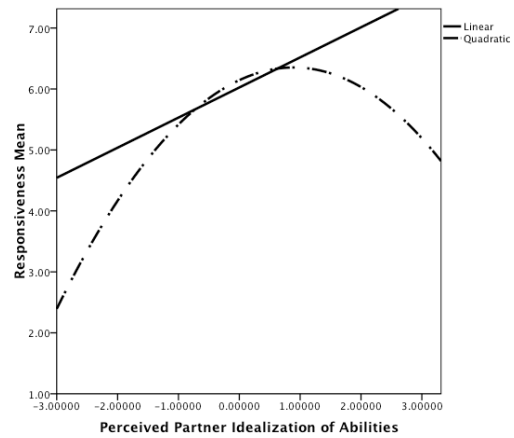


Figure 6

Models testing for mediation of the curvilinear effect of perceived partner idealization on satisfaction by (a) accommodation, (b) autonomy threat, (c) fear of discovery, and (d) responsiveness.

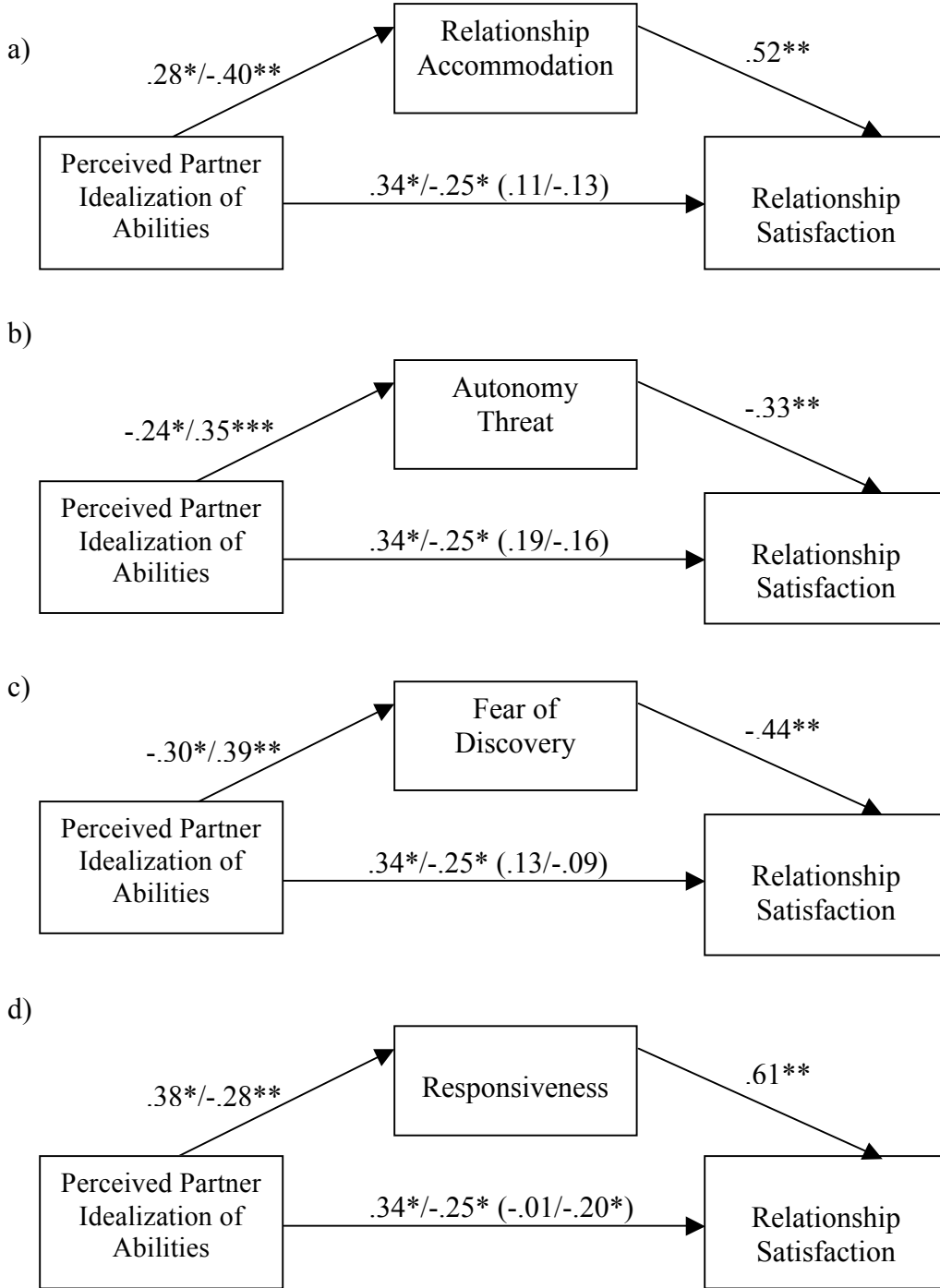
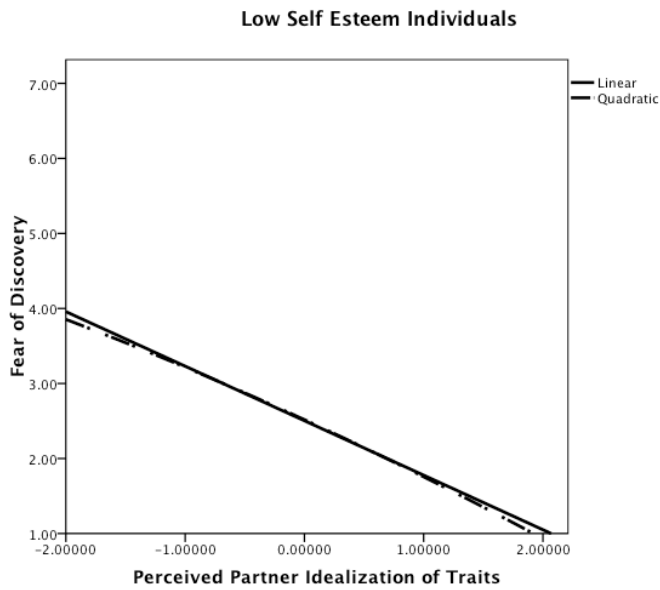


Figure 7

Regression lines (based on hierarchical polynomial regression equation) for linear and quadratic effects of perceived partner idealization of abilities on fear of discovery for individuals with (a) low self-esteem and (b) high self-esteem.

(a)



(b)

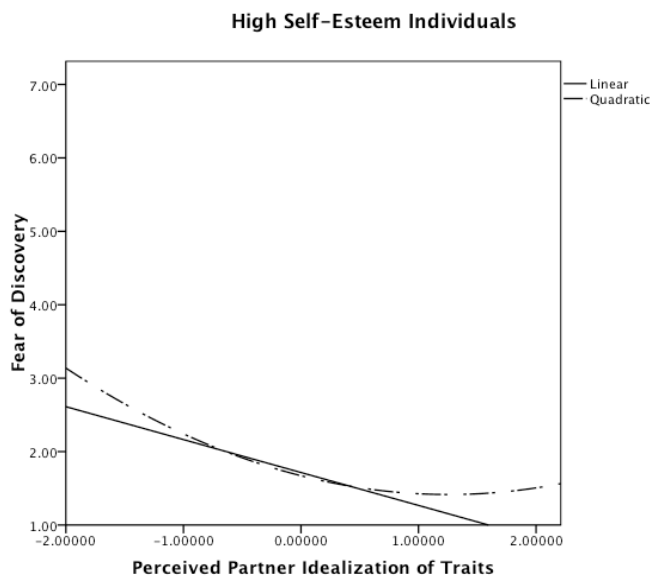


Figure 8

The effect of the Study 2 experimental manipulation on satisfaction.

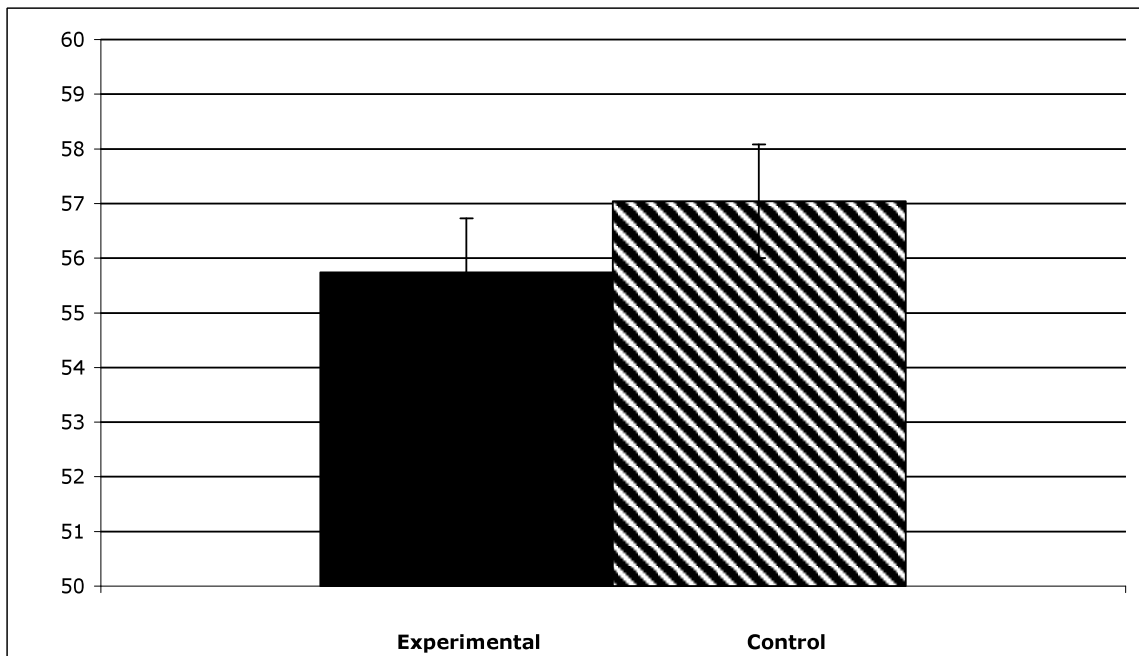


Figure 9

The effect of the Study 2 experimental manipulation on accommodation, autonomy threat, fear of discovery, and responsiveness.

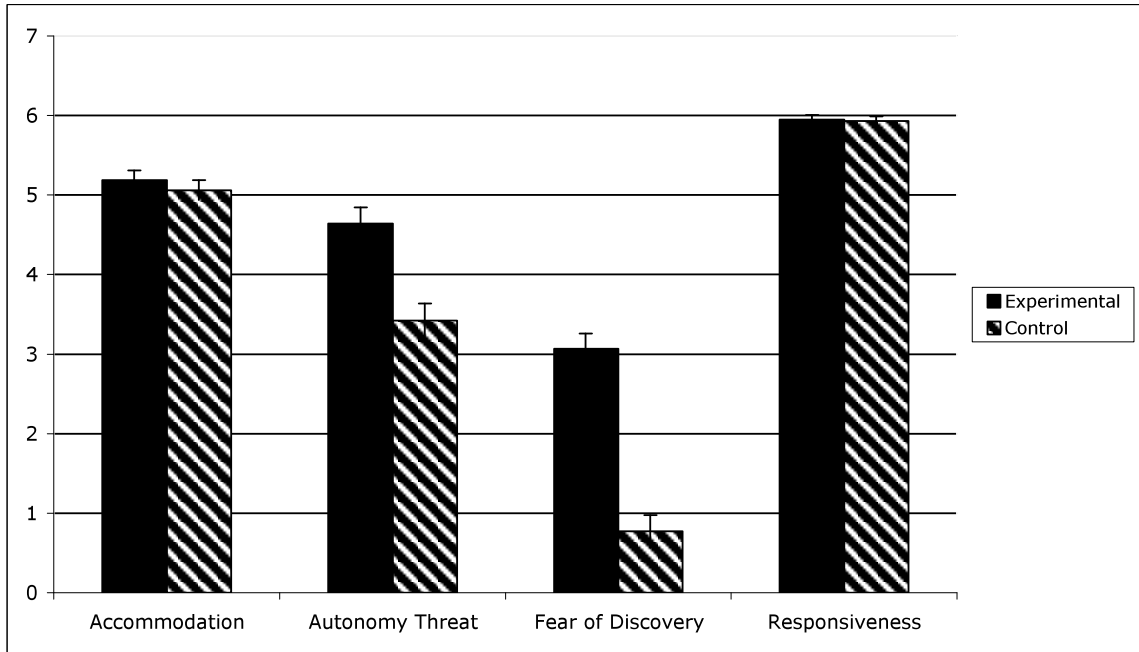
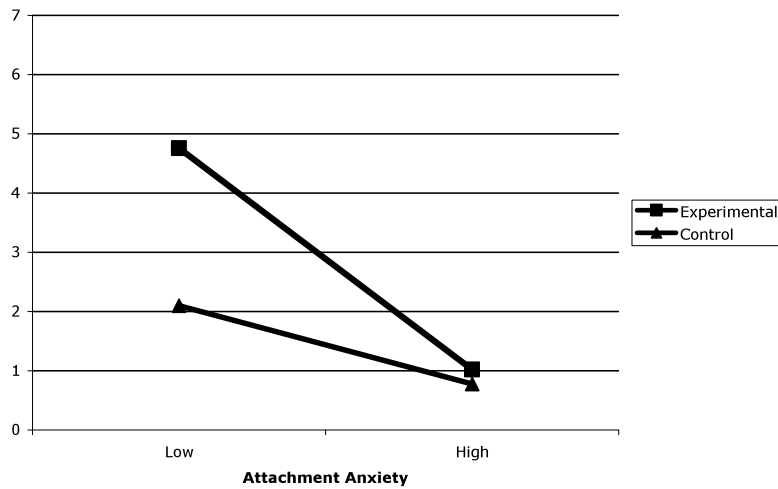


Figure 10

Regression lines (based on solving the overall regression equations) for (a) attachment anxiety as a predictor of autonomy threat and (b) relationship length as a predictor of autonomy threat. The graph ranges from 2 standard deviations below the mean to 2 standard deviations above the mean on attachment anxiety and relationship length.

(a)



(b)

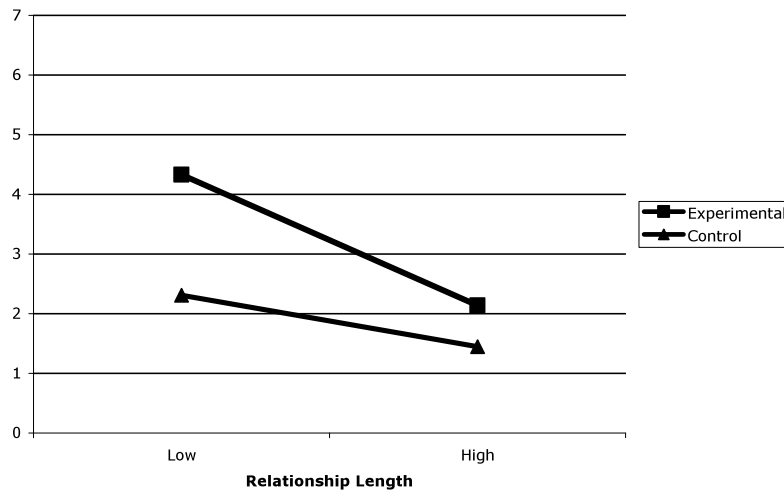
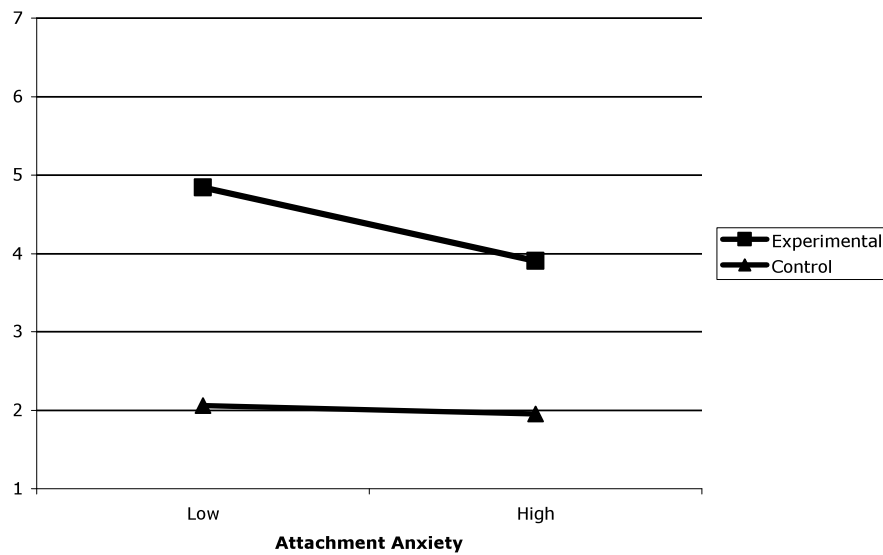


Figure 11

Regression lines (based on solving the overall regression equations) for attachment anxiety as a predictor of fear of discovery. The graph ranges from 2 standard deviations below the mean to 2 standard deviations above the mean on attachment anxiety.



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Appendix

Fear of Discovery (adapted from Larson & Chastain, 1990)

Write the number in the space provided using the following scale:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Disagree Strongly Neutral/Mixed Agree Strongly

- ___ 1. If my partner discovered the kind of person I am, he or she might not respect me.
- ___ 2. I am afraid that my partner will find out that I am not the person my partner thinks I am.
- ___ 3. I have negative thoughts about myself that I do not share with my partner.
- ___ 4. If my partner knew the “real me” he or she might not want to be with me.
- ___ 5. If I shared my true self with my partner, my partner would like me less.
- ___ 6. There are lots of things about the kind of person I am that I do not want my partner to know.
- ___ 7. If I shared my faults with my partner, my partner might like me less.
- ___ 8. I try to hide my negative qualities from my partner.

Responsiveness (adapted from Reis, 2003)

Please answer the following questions about your current romantic partner. If you are not currently involved in a romantic relationship, please answer these questions about your mother.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat moderately very completely
true true true true true

I usually:

- ___ 1. ... see my partner’s “real” self.
- ___ 2. ... see the same virtues and faults in my partner as my partner sees in his or her self.
- ___ 3. ... esteem my partner, shortcomings and all.
- ___ 4. ... know my partner well.
- ___ 5. ... value and respect the whole package that is my partner’s “real” self.
- ___ 6. ... am aware of what my partner is thinking and feeling
- ___ 7. ... express liking and encouragement for my partner.
- ___ 8. ... am interested in doing things with my partner.
- ___ 9. ... am on “the same wavelength” as my partner.
- ___ 10.... am an excellent judge of my partner’s character.
- ___ 11.... “get the facts right” about my partner.
- ___ 12.... usually seem to focus on the “best side” of my partner.
- ___ 13.... understand my partner.
- ___ 14.... really listen to my partner.
- ___ 15.... am interested in what my partner is thinking and feeling.
- ___ 16.... value my partner’s abilities and opinions.
- ___ 17.... respect my partner.
- ___ 18.... am responsive to my partner’s needs.

Autonomy Threat Items for Study 2 Pre-Test (adapted from Murray, Holmes et al., 2009)

Please respond to the questions below using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all true			Moderately true			Completely true

1. _____ I've had to make sacrifices in my life to adjust to my partner.
2. _____ I don't always get to do what I want since I've gotten involved with my partner.
3. _____ In any romantic relationship, people have to make changes to adjust to one another.
4. _____ Being involved in a romantic relationship means giving up some independence to make the relationship work.
5. _____ I have made changes in my life to adjust to my partner's needs and desires.