You Don't Really Love Me, Do You?

Negative Effects of Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking on Lower Self-Esteem Individuals'

Relationship Well-Being

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Abstract

Two studies demonstrated that active efforts to appreciate a romantic partner's unique point of view (imagine-other perspective-taking) lead individuals lower in self-esteem (LSEs) to feel less loved by their partner and less satisfied with their relationship as a result. These effects were evident regardless of whether individuals' perspective-taking efforts involved reflecting specifically on a disagreement with their partner (Study 2) or not (Study 1). The studies thus identify a new path through which perspective-taking efforts can detract from relational well-being, one to which LSEs are uniquely vulnerable. Results from an open-ended thought-listing task administered in Study 2 confirmed that increased cognitive energy LSEs devoted to drawing (negative) metaperceptual inferences about their partner's evaluation of them contributed to the negative effect of imagine-other perspective-taking on their perceived regard. No such effects were evident for HSEs and imagine-self perspective-taking instead exerted a general positive influence on individuals' evaluations of their partner.

Many relationship problems are experienced at greater rates by individuals who are lower in self-esteem (LSEs), and the problems that arise in relationships tend to have more negative consequences for them. For example, more so than individuals with higher self-esteem (HSEs), LSEs are overly ready to interpret evidence that their partner perceives they have flaws as reflective of their partner's declining commitment to the relationship (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002), and miscommunications during interactions with their partner lead LSEs to perceive their partner as unsupportive to a greater extent than is the case for HSEs (Cameron & Robinson, 2010). Unsurprisingly, then, LSEs report less generous perceptions of their partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000), and behave more negatively toward their partner than do HSEs (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2007).

Notably, much of the negativity exhibited by LSEs is tied to insecurity about their partner's love for them: LSEs dramatically underestimate how positively they are regarded by their partner (Murray et al., 2000), which then sets the stage for destructive responses to threat and a range of problematic interpersonal dynamics, such as defensively derogating their partner after disclosing negative information to him or her instead of drawing on him or her for support (Cameron, Holmes, & Vorauer, 2009).

How Can LSEs' Relationship Difficulties Be Assuaged?

Numerous strategies that have been found to improve LSEs' experiences involve directing them toward more positive thoughts. For example, Marigold et al.'s (2007) abstract reframing intervention (ARI), which involves leading individuals to think about a time when their partner complimented them and then to explain why their partner admired them, encourages individuals to draw abstract conclusions along these lines and has a variety of beneficial effects on LSEs. Consider as another example research by Murray et al. (2005). Here LSEs perceived

that their partner regarded them more positively when they had been pointed toward strengths in themselves or faults in their partner via various forms of false feedback or artificially induced inferences. Notably, however, extremely direct approaches such as having individuals repeat externally supplied positive self-statements have been shown to backfire and have negative effects on LSEs (Wood, Perunovic, & Lee, 2009), likely because the inconsistency of the positive information with LSEs' more negative self-beliefs stands out here and leads them to focus on how they fall short of their personal standards.

Can Perspective-Taking Help?

In line with the differential effectiveness of these various approaches, somewhat oblique strategies seem advisable by virtue of their ability to short-circuit LSEs' resistance to positive information that conflicts with their own beliefs about themselves. One often advocated strategy for improving relationship well-being that would seem sufficiently indirect to potentially be of particular benefit to LSEs in this respect is perspective-taking. Considerable research underscores that perspective-taking can lead individuals toward more generous perceptions of others, both inside (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998) and outside of close relationships (e.g., Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Most relevant here, actively trying to adopt their partner's perspective and see the world through his or her eyes, thinking about how his or her personal qualities and history give him or her a unique and different viewpoint, might lead LSEs away from their overly pessimistic perceptions regarding their partner's caring for them. That is, stepping outside of themselves might help LSEs step away from some of their negativity such that they feel more secure in their partner's love and thus more positively about the relationship.

But, can LSEs actually do this? Research demonstrating that perspective-taking can foster more accurate judgments (Yaniv & Choshen-Hillel, 2012) and greater openness to information

that conflicts with pre-existing belief structures (Todd, Galinsky, & Bodenhausen, 2012), reduce

judgment biases in negotiation (Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001), and lead individuals to be more

creative and discover new ways of thinking about situations (Galinsky, Maddux, Glin, & White,

2008) suggest reason for optimism. Moreover, such an approach to boosting LSEs' relational

well-being might even have an advantage over other methods in that it does not require the

availability of any form of positive anchor (such as recalling a compliment from the partner or

identifying a strength in the self).

However, an alternative, and less salutary, outcome is suggested by research highlighting

how perspective-taking can lead individuals to become preoccupied with how the target of their

perspective-taking efforts views them (Vorauer, 2013; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). So long as

there is the potential for evaluation, as would always be the case in a relationship context where

each person possesses ample information about the other, trying to see the world through another

person's eyes is apt to lead individuals to wonder how they themselves appear to that person.

Ironically, then, what starts as an effort to understand someone else leads individuals to focus on

drawing inferences that are egocentric by virtue of focusing on how the target views them

("metaperceptions"). This dynamic, which undoubtedly reflects individuals' enduring interest in

monitoring and managing their social standing with others (Leary & Downs, 1995), has been

shown to block the prejudice-reducing effects of intergroup contact by diverting individuals

away from drawing inferences about outgroup members (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009).

The implications of devoting a lot of cognitive energy to thinking about how one appears

to a romantic partner are not necessarily negative: Individuals could conceivably dwell on their

partner's love and admiration for them. For LSEs, however, such preoccupation will result in

negative conclusions that undermine felt security if the metaperceptions they form about their

partner's feelings for them are colored by their own negative self-beliefs. In light of evidence that perspective-taking heightens activation of self-knowledge (Davis et al., 2004) and thus makes individuals' own self-views more cognitively accessible, this would seem to be a likely turn of events. Research on self-generated attitude change, which indicates that merely thinking about an issue leads attitudes to become more extreme in the direction of their initial leaning (Tesser, 1978), further suggests that the combination of heightened accessibility of negative self-views and increased cognitive energy devoted to drawing metaperceptual inferences is a recipe for disaster for LSEs that is apt to propel them in an increasingly negative direction.

Two experiments were designed to test this hypothesis that active efforts to appreciate a romantic partner's unique point of view lead LSEs to feel less secure about their partner's love and caring for them and thus less satisfied with their relationship and less close to their partner. Because HSEs have more favorable self-views, any effects of perspective-taking on their felt security were expected to be in the opposite (positive) direction.

<center>Why Expect the Worst?</center>

Although some previous research has documented negative effects of perspective-taking, the vast majority has suggested instead that perspective-taking fosters more favorable reactions to other people (see Vorauer, 2013, for a review). What are the grounds, then, for predicting detrimental effects for LSEs here rather than the salutary effects of perspective-taking documented in most previous work? Experimental research showing positive effects of perspective-taking has typically minimized the potential for evaluation by having the target of individuals' perspective-taking efforts have access to minimal or no individuating information about them. Moreover, experimental research showing positive effects has not usually examined situations where there is any pre-existing emotional bond between individuals and the target.

Vorauer and Sucharyna (2013) found that perspective-taking was more apt to prompt individuals to make egocentric (i.e., self-knowledge-driven) inferences about how a target viewed them when they started out feeling at least some minimal sense of a bond with the target as compared to when they did not. Given that the present research focused on romantic relationships, which involve significant levels of potential for evaluation and of closeness, negative consequences of perspective-taking for LSEs as a function of enhanced evaluative concern and egocentric projection seemed most probable.

<center>Imagine-Self versus Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking</center>

Importantly, the predictions guiding the present experiments centered on *imagine-other* perspective-taking, which involves trying to adopt another person's unique way of looking at things, rather than *imagine-self* perspective-taking, which involves imagining the self in the other person's position (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Davis et al., 2004). Although these two forms of perspective-taking have sometimes been found to have similar effects (e.g., Davis et al., 2004; Davis, Conklin, & Luce, 1996), in situations characterized by the potential for evaluation there is good reason to expect that imagine-other perspective-taking will prompt individuals to focus more on how the target views them than will imagine-self perspective-taking (see Vorauer, 2013; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). For example, by virtue of centering on understanding another person's point of view, as opposed to one's own perspective from a different position, imagine-other perspective-taking should more readily activate individuals' concerns about their social standing with others (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Moreover, because it is more difficult for individuals to imagine how another person's unique history and personal qualities might shape his or her point of view than what they themselves might think from a different vantage point, imagine-other perspective-taking is likely to invoke greater uncertainty

and thus lead individuals to be more preoccupied with how they are evaluated (Vorauer, 2006). In contrast, by virtue of more directly prompting individuals to connect with a target by putting themselves in the target's place and using themselves to understand the target, imagine-self perspective-taking seems more apt to facilitate a positive focus on the target without accompanying evaluative concern. Numerous previous studies have yielded data consistent with this prediction (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2013; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013).

A More Direct Path to Dissatisfaction

The current experiments build on Vorauer and Sucharyna's (2013) research, in which trying to take the unique perspective of a romantic partner (imagine-other perspective-taking) led individuals to overestimate the number of their own values, preferences, traits, and feelings that were readily "transparent" to him or her. This link between imagine-other perspective-taking and transparency overestimation, which was mediated by enhanced focus on the self as an object of evaluation, had negative implications for individuals' relationship satisfaction when it arose in the context of back-and-forth interaction where it could trigger miscommunications.

The present studies extend this work by examining the implications of imagine-other perspective-taking for perceived regard, which plays a critical role in determining individuals' relationship experiences (Murray et al., 2000, 2006). The current studies also probe whether shifts in perceived regard triggered by imagine-other perspective-taking efforts can lead LSEs to feel less satisfied with their relationship and less close to their partner. Given that the negative consequences of imagine-other perspective-taking identified by Vorauer and Sucharyna (2013) were attached to miscommunications that arose during ongoing interaction, support for the current prediction would indicate an additional and arguably more direct path through which this

type of perspective-taking can have detrimental effects on relationship perceptions, one to which LSEs are uniquely vulnerable.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to provide an initial test of the main hypothesis that active efforts to appreciate a romantic partner's unique point of view (imagine-other perspective-taking) leads LSEs to feel less secure about their partner's love and caring for them and thus less satisfied with their relationship. These effects were not expected to be evident for HSEs or for imagine-self perspective-taking, which, if anything, should lead individuals to adopt a more positive stance toward their partner.

Participants completed a self-esteem measure, received the perspective-taking manipulation, and then indicated their perceptions of their partner's love for them, their trait metaperceptions (i.e., estimates of how their partner would rate their traits), and relationship satisfaction. Perceptions of partner's love and metaperceived traits were both assessed so as to determine whether the effects were specific to more relational judgments about the partner's feelings or also extended to individuals' sense of how their partner viewed their personal qualities. Although these constructs are somewhat similar, it is possible for individuals to think that a partner perceives them to have flaws but loves them anyways. The effects of imagine-other perspective-taking were expected to be stronger for relational judgments about the partner's love and commitment because these issues should be of greatest importance to individuals and thus more prone to be the center of their preoccupation with evaluation.

Participants also rated their partner after receiving the manipulation so that the effects of each type of perspective-taking on these perceptions could be examined for comparison purposes. An absence of effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on individuals' perceptions

of their partner would rule out an interpretation of the predicted findings in terms of simple projection-to-partner processes whereby LSEs are less satisfied after imagine-other perspective-taking as a function of directly projecting their negative self-views onto their partner such that he or she seems less desirable (see Galinsky & Ku, 2004).

An additional measure allowed us to rule out a further alternative account. According to our theorizing, greater cognitive energy that LSEs devote to analyzing their partner's evaluations is critical in contributing to the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on their perceptions of their partner's love for them, a possibility we directly test in Study 2. Conceivably, however, it is instead the case that when imagine-other perspective-taking makes LSEs' relatively negative self-views more accessible, these accessible negative self-views directly prompt less favorable perceptions of their partner's love for them. We do maintain – consistent with previous research (Davis et al., 2004) – that perspective-taking generally enhances self-activation, and indeed that LSEs' accessible negative self-views color the metaperceptual inferences that they draw about their partner's feelings when imagine-other perspective-taking leads them to be preoccupied with evaluation. Yet we did not expect that self-activation in and of itself, without the critical cognitive energy ingredient, would constitute a mediator. To test this alternative account centering solely on self-activation, participants indicated their own self-perceptions of their traits immediately after completing the self-esteem measure but before the perspective-taking manipulation. By examining the congruence between individuals' self-views and the metaperceptions that they later reported on the same trait dimensions, we indexed the accessibility of individuals' self-views. Although this measure was admittedly somewhat indirect, previous research clearly indicates that metaperceptions are more congruent with self-perceptions when self-knowledge is accessible (Vorauer & Ross, 1999).[1]

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty-six (118 female, 38 male) introductory psychology students who reported being in an exclusive romantic relationship completed this online study in exchange for partial course credit (*M* age = 19.68, *SD* = 3.11 yrs).[2] Participants were randomly assigned to the Imagine-Other, Imagine-Self, or Control condition.

Procedure

Self-Esteem and Relationship Information. Participants began by completing the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; e.g., "I feel that I'm a person of worth"), *M* = 6.84, *SD* = 1.43 on the 9-point scale; α = .92, and rating their own traits using a 20-item version of Murray et al.'s (2000) Interpersonal Qualities Scale (IQS; e.g., "I consider myself to be moody"; α = .81). They also answered a variety of questions about their relationship, including how long they and their partner had been involved in an exclusive romantic relationship (*M* = 1.7, *SD* = 1.58 yrs; range 2 months to 10.5 yrs).

Perspective-Taking Manipulation. Participants then received the perspective-taking manipulation, which was based on Galinsky and Moskowitz's (2000) procedure but modified to apply to a romantic partner and to distinguish imagine-other versus imagine-self perspective-taking. Participants were told: "The remainder of the survey includes more in-depth questions about your partner and your relationship. Because you are answering this survey alone and away from your partner, we ask that you do an "orienting task" before going any further, to help you focus your attention on your partner." All participants, regardless of condition, were then asked to write a short essay about a day in the life of their partner. They were instructed to "Please choose a day in which you and your partner spent at least a couple of hours together. To the best

of your ability, describe your partner's day, *including both the time that you spent together and the time that you were apart*." Those in the control condition received no further instructions.

Those in the imagine-self condition were further instructed that as they did the task they should imagine how they themselves would think and feel if they were in their partner's position: "Imagine as clearly and vividly as possible everything that you would think and feel if you still had your own preferences and way of looking at things, but were in your partner's position."

Those in the imagine-other condition were instead told to try to take their partner's perspective and to look at the day being described through their partner's eyes: "Imagine as clearly and vividly as possible everything that you would think and feel if you were your partner, taking into account everything that you know about him/her and trying to adopt his/her own way of looking at things." Note that this manipulation provided quite a conservative test of our hypothesis, in that it directly prompted individuals to use information about their partner to draw inferences at the same time as we predicted that it would enhance the influence of their ingoing self-views. In line with previous research in which completing this task in the first person is taken as evidence of perspective-taking (Galinsky & Ku, 2004), participants in both perspective-taking conditions were instructed to write in the first person to reinforce the manipulation.

Dependent Measures. Participants then completed a 4-item measure of perceptions of partner's love (e.g., "I am completely confident that my partner loves me;" $\alpha = .68$) based on measures developed by Murray and colleagues (e.g., Murray et al, 2005), and a metaperceptual version of the IQS that assessed individuals' estimates of how their partner viewed their traits (e.g., "My partner considers me to be moody," $\alpha = .86$). Next they completed parallel versions of these scales that focused on their love for their partner (e.g., "I am completely confident that I love my partner;" $\alpha = .63$) and their impressions of their partner's traits (e.g., "I consider my

partner to be moody," α = .90). Finally, participants completed Murray et al.'s (2000) 4-item

relationship satisfaction scale (e.g., "I have a very strong relationship with my partner," α = .92).

All of these items were answered on 9-point scales and were reversed-scored as necessary so that

higher numbers reflected more positive judgments.

After completing a variety of corollary measures, participants provided demographic

information. To alleviate any negative reactions potentially induced by the experimental

procedures, participants completed Marigold et al.'s (2007) ARI before being fully debriefed.

<div align="center">Results</div>

All dependent measures were analyzed in the same fashion using hierarchical multiple

regression. Predictors were participants' level of self-esteem (centered), two dummy-coded

contrast vectors comparing each of the perspective-taking conditions to the control condition

(i.e., for the imagine-other contrast, imagine-other = 1, control = 0, imagine-self = 0; for the

imagine-self contrast, imagine-other = 0, control = 0, imagine-self = 1), and the interactions

between self-esteem and the contrasts; participants' sex (male = -1, female = 1) was centered and

included as a covariate. Simple effects analyses involving the continuous self-esteem variable

were conducted at one standard deviation above and below the mean. All significant effects ($p <$

.05) are reported, with predicted values and significance levels for simple effects presented in

Table 1.

Perceptions of Partner's Evaluations

Perceptions of Partner's Love. The analysis of perceptions of partner's love yielded a

Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction, $b = 0.42$, β = .26, $t(148) = 2.30$, $p < .025$. In line with

predictions, actively trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view led LSEs to

feel less secure about their partner's feelings for them, $b = -1.21$, $t(148) = 3.25$, $p = .001$; there

was no such effect for HSEs, $b = 0$, $t < 1$. Further, a significant relationship between self-esteem and perceived regard was evident in the imagine-other perspective-taking condition, $b = 0.56$, $t(148) = 4.57$, $p < .001$, but not in the control condition, $b = 0.14$, $t < 1$. Also evident were main effects for self-esteem, $b = 0.29$, $\beta = .29$, $t(148) = 3.64$, $p < .001$, and imagine-other perspective-taking, $b = -0.62$, $\beta = -.21$, $t(148) = 2.26$, $p = .025$, that were qualified by the aforementioned interaction.

Trait Metaperceptions. The analysis of trait metaperceptions yielded only a self-esteem effect, $b = 0.29$, $\beta = .40$, $t(151) = 5.31$, $p < .001$.

Relationship Satisfaction

The analysis of relationship satisfaction yielded a Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction, $b = 0.36$, $\beta = .24$, $t(148) = 2.05$, $p < .05$. The results of simple effects analyses here directly paralleled those for perceptions of partner's love. Specifically, trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view led LSEs but not HSEs to feel less satisfied with their relationship, $b = -0.71$, $t(148) = 1.99$, $p < .05$, and $b = 0.33$, $t < 1$, respectively. Self-esteem was related to satisfaction in the imagine-other perspective-taking condition, $b = 0.46$, $t(148) = 4.03$, $p < .001$, but not in the control condition, $b = 0.10$, $t < 1$. Also evident was a self-esteem effect, $b = 0.26$, $\beta = .26$, $t(151) = 3.30$, $p < .001$, that was qualified by the aforementioned interaction.

Partner Evaluations

Love for Partner. The analysis of love for partner yielded only a self-esteem effect, $b = 0.21$, $\beta = .21$, $t(149) = 2.64$, $p < .01$.

Impressions of Partner's Traits. The analysis of individuals' impressions of their partner's traits yielded main effects for self-esteem, $b = 0.30$, $\beta = .36$, $t(151) = 4.80$, $p < .001$, and sex, whereby being male was associated with more negative impressions, $b = 0.48$, $\beta = .18$,

$t(151) = 2.31$, $p < .025$. The analysis also yielded a main effect for imagine-self perspective-

taking, $b = 0.45$, $\beta = .17$, $t(151) = 1.96$, $p = .05$, that was not qualified by self-esteem (interaction

$t < 1$).

Do Perceptions of Partner's Love Account for the Effects of Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking

on Satisfaction?

To test whether the Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction on relationship satisfaction

was mediated by perceptions of partner's love, bootstrapping procedures (Shrout & Bolger,

2002) were used to compute a confidence interval around the indirect effect (i.e., the path

through the mediator). If zero falls outside this interval, mediation can be said to be present. We

used the SPSS macros that Preacher and Hayes (2004) provide for this procedure. The Self-

Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction was the independent variable, relationship satisfaction was

the dependent variable, and perceptions of partner's love were the mediator. In this and all other

mediation analyses reported, all remaining predictors and covariates were controlled. Results of

this procedure revealed a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.019 to 0.510. The fact that

zero fell outside this interval indicates a mediation effect significant at $p < .05$. There was no

residual direct effect, $t < 1$.

Self-Activation

Activation of self-knowledge was assessed indirectly by computing the mean absolute

difference between individuals' self-perceptions (assessed before the manipulation) and their

metaperceptions across the 20 traits in the IQS (assessed after the manipulation). We then

analyzed these scores (square-root transformed to reduce positive skew) in a regression identical

to that used for the other dependent measures. Significant effects for both the imagine-self and

imagine-other contrasts were evident, $b = -.10$, $\beta = -.20$, $t(151) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, and $b = -.10$, $\beta = -$

.21, $t(151) = 2.26$, $p = .025$, respectively, indicating that both types of perspective-taking enhanced the extent to which individuals' metaperceptions were consistent with their self-perceptions (back-transformed $\hat{Y}$s = 1.00, 0.99, and 1.21 for the imagine-other, imagine-self, and control conditions respectively). These results suggest that, consistent with previous research (Davis et al., 2004), both types of perspective-taking enhanced activation of self-knowledge. There were no other significant or marginal effects apart from a self-esteem effect, $b = -.03$, $\beta = -.18$, $t(151) = 2.21$, $p < .05$.

Does Self-Activation Account for the Effects of Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking on Perceptions of Partner's Love?

The pattern of results on self-activation was not clearly consistent with the idea that self-activation mediated the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking: There were effects for both types of perspective-taking and no Self-Esteem X Imagine-Other interaction was evident. However, it was possible that imagine-other perspective-taking generally enhanced self-activation, but this heightened self-activation only had negative implications for LSEs. To test this possibility we conducted a mediation analysis in which the Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction was the independent variable, perceived partner's love was the dependent variable, and a computed Self-Esteem X Self-Activation interaction term was the mediator (the main effect of self-activation was also controlled). Results revealed no evidence of mediation here (90% CI -0.046 to 0.080) or for satisfaction as an outcome (90% CI -0.014 to 0.208).

Do Negative Effects of Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking Arise Even for Positive Relationship Events?

To probe whether the negative effects of imagine-other perspective-taking might not apply when individuals reflect on positive relationship experiences, we had three coders

categorize the day-in-the-life descriptions according to whether they involved primarily positive relationship experiences, primarily negative relationship experiences, or were ambiguous or neutral in this respect (α = .78). As no coder rated more than 5% as primarily negative, these were combined with the ambiguous/neutral category to represent non-positive descriptions. There was 100% agreement regarding 56 non-positive cases and 44 positive cases. To test the effects of positivity as cleanly as possible, we restricted our analysis here to these cases involving 100% agreement.

When we modified the original analyses to also include the positivity of participants' descriptions and its interactions with the other predictors, there was no evidence it qualified the Self-Esteem X Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking interaction on perceptions of partner's love or satisfaction, both 3-way interaction ts < 1. Moreover, separate analyses of these measures including just the descriptions unanimously coded as positive yielded significant Self-Esteem X Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking interactions in each case (ps < .05) parallel to those obtained in the original analysis. Self-esteem was not correlated with description positivity, r = .16, *ns*. In light of low power and the absence of random assignment these results are not definitive. Nonetheless, they suggest that the effects that we found do apply when individuals reflect on positive relationship experiences. It is less clear, however, that they apply in cases involving reflection on negative experiences. Study 2 addresses this issue.

Discussion

Results of this study indicated that active efforts to appreciate a romantic partner's unique point of view lead LSEs to feel less secure about their partner's love for them and thus less satisfied with their relationship. In line with the idea that the negative implications of imagine-other perspective-taking might center on relational judgments of primary concern to LSEs,

effects were evident on perceptions of partner's love but not on trait metaperceptions. There were no effects on HSEs' perceptions of their partner's feelings. One possible account for the absence of effects here is that there was little room for HSEs' perceptions to move because they were quite positive to begin with (i.e., a ceiling effect), although the predicted values in Table 1 are not completely supportive of this explanation. Alternately, consistent with the tenets of sociometer theory (Leary & Downs, 1995) as well as research and theory on risk regulation in relationships (Murray et al., 2006), it may be that individuals' thoughts about their partner's evaluation of them are more likely to take hold and become preoccupying when combined with negative possibilities being salient. This would be the case for LSEs, as a function of their negative self-views and insecurities, but not for HSEs. Study 2 probes this issue.

Consistent with predictions and previous research, the effects of perspective-taking on individuals' perceptions of their partner's love for them were specific to imagine-other perspective-taking and did not extend to imagine-self perspective-taking, presumably because of the closer link between imagine-other perspective-taking and a focus on the self as an object of evaluation (Vorauer, 2013; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2013; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). Notably, however, imagine-self perspective-taking did lead both LSEs and HSEs to evaluate their partner's traits more positively. In some ways, then, this form of perspective-taking may constitute a ray of hope for LSEs, although its effects centered on their impressions of their partner rather than perceived regard. Conceivably, exactly because this form of perspective-taking does not orient individuals toward thinking about how they are evaluated, it both paves the way for more positive effects but also directs the positivity toward judgments about their partner instead of relational judgments about their partner's feelings.

Finally, the absence of any significant effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on partner evaluations suggests that its effects on satisfaction (or perceptions of partner's love) were not due to LSEs directly projecting their negative self-views onto their partner. Results from the indirect measure of self-activation suggested, as expected, that both forms of perspective-taking enhanced self-activation, but that self-activation per se did not account for the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on LSEs' perceptions of their partner's love for them.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend Study 1 in two key ways. First, to directly examine our hypothesis that increased cognitive energy devoted to drawing metaperceptual inferences is a key mechanism by which imagine-other perspective-taking leads LSEs to feel more insecure about their partner's love, participants completed an open-ended thought-listing task after the manipulation that was coded for whether participants spontaneously mentioned thoughts about their partner's feelings for them. Though it likely provides a rather conservative estimate of such thoughts, when individuals freely and of their own initiative report thinking about how their partner feels toward them, this indicates quite directly that they are devoting cognitive energy to analyzing their standing with their partner (see, e.g., Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Ickes, Robertson, Tooke, & Teng, 1986). Because for LSEs greater cognitive energy devoted to dwelling on their partner's feelings toward them should be accompanied by salient negative self-views, as suggested by the results for self-activation in Study 1, spontaneous negative metaperceptions in particular were expected to be apparent and to help account for the negative effect of perspective-taking on LSEs' perceptions of their partner's love for them. The measure of spontaneous metaperceptions also allowed an examination of whether HSEs

exhibited any such preoccupation in a positive direction, that is, spontaneous positive

metaperceptions, or instead did not appear to be thinking much about how they were evaluated.

Second, the corollary analyses of the day-in-the-life descriptions in Study 1 revealed that

very few participants described negative relationship events. Accordingly, Study 2 tested the

generalizability of the effects obtained in Study 1 by examining the effects of perspective-taking

in the context of thinking about a recent conflict or argument. After all, much as people

spontaneously make attributions in response to negative and unexpected events (Weiner, 1985),

they may spontaneously engage in perspective-taking during exchanges with romantic partners

that involve some level of conflict and negativity in an effort to make sense of a partner's

negative behavior. They may also engage in perspective-taking to cope with negative feelings or

to try to be reasonable and act in a manner that they expect to be healthy for the relationship.

Thus, it is important to understand the effects of perspective-taking in such contexts. The main

hypothesis was once again that active efforts to appreciate a romantic partner's unique point of

view would lead LSEs to feel more insecure about their partner's feelings for them and thus less

satisfied with their relationship. A measure of subjective closeness was included along with the

satisfaction measure after the manipulation to examine whether feeling negatively regarded led

LSEs to distance themselves from their partner.

In addition, given that closeness has been found to moderate perspective-taking effects

(Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013), self-other merging was assessed prior to the manipulation to

ensure that the effects involving self-esteem were not somehow tied to levels of initial closeness.

Imagine-self perspective-taking and partner evaluations were not included in Study 2, which

focused on replicating and unpacking the connection between imagine-other perspective-taking

and perceptions of partner's love.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four (67 female, 17 male) introductory psychology students who were in an exclusive romantic relationship completed this online study (the "Romantic Relationship Survey") in exchange for partial course credit (M age = 19.81, SD = 4.21 yrs).[3] Participants were randomly assigned to the Imagine-Other or Control condition.

Procedure

Self-Esteem and Relationship Information. In the first section of the survey participants indicated how long they and their partner had been involved in an exclusive romantic relationship (M = 1.95, SD = 1.96 yrs; range 2 months to 11.9 years). They then completed Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) Inclusion of Other in Self scale, which uses a 7-point response scale on which higher numbers reflect greater perceived inclusion (M = 5.37, SD = 1.18), followed by the RSE, M = 6.95, SD = 1.35 on the 9-point scale; α = .90. Self-other merging was not correlated with self-esteem (r = .09) and thus is not considered further.[4]

Perspective-Taking Manipulation. The perspective-taking manipulation was identical to that described in Study 1 except that all participants, regardless of condition, were directed to describe a day on which they and their partner had had a conflict or disagreement: "Please choose a day in which you and your partner spent at least a couple of hours together *and in which you and your partner had a conflict or disagreement*. To the best of your ability, describe your partner's day, *including your conflict or disagreement*." The italicized phrases represent the only changes from Study 1 apart from the fact that the instructions to write in the first person were deleted and there was no imagine-self condition. All other elements (e.g., the introductory

comments regarding the "orienting task" and the wording of the imagine-other instructions)

remained exactly the same.

Dependent Measures. Immediately after completing the manipulation participants did an

open-ended thought-listing task in which they were instructed to "please take two minutes to

write whatever thoughts are on your mind right now… write anything that comes to mind

without worrying about logic or grammar." Three coders counted any negative metaperceptual

comments participants made about their partner potentially or actually viewing them negatively

or not caring enough about the relationship, or about looking bad to their partner (e.g., "He

knows how much (I) hate it when he talks to her yet he won't stop for me," "i wish my boyfriend

acted like he cared," "it bothers him a lot that I don't like pictures"). The coders also counted

positive metaperceptual comments participants made about their partner viewing them positively

or loving and accepting them (e.g., "My boyfriend is very loving and caring and only wants the

best for me," "She … only has the best intentions. She just wants me to make sure my future is

stable"). In each case coders' judgments were standardized and averaged together (αs = .82 and

.84 respectively). Participants then completed the same measures of perceptions of partner's love

(α = .71) and trait metaperceptions (α = .84) as in Study 1. Next they completed the same

relationship satisfaction scale (α = .84) as in Study 1 and Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto's (1989)

2-item Subjective Closeness Index (e.g., "Relative to your other relationships, how close are you

and your partner?," α = .89). Participants then provided demographic information, followed by a

new question about the extent to which they had understood all of the questions in the survey.

Participants responded to these items on 9-point scales on which higher ratings indicated

stronger endorsement. They then completed the ARI and were fully debriefed.

Results

All dependent measures were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression. The analysis was the same as in Study 1 except that there was no imagine-self condition and hence only one perspective-taking contrast. All significant effects ($p < .05$) are reported, with predicted values and significance levels for simple effects presented in Table 2.

Perceptions of Partner's Evaluations

Perceptions of Partner's Love. The analysis of perceptions of partner's love yielded a Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction, $b = 0.66$, $\beta = .43$, $t(79) = 2.96$, $p < .005$. In line with predictions, trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view led LSEs but not HSEs to feel less secure in their partner's love for them, $b = -1.34$, $t(79) = 3.16$, $p < .005$, and $b = 0.46$, $t(79) = 1.07$, *ns*, respectively. Further, the relationship between self-esteem and perceptions of partner's love was significant in the imagine-other perspective-taking condition, $b = 0.70$, $t(79) = 2.51$, $p = .01$, but not in the control condition, $b = 0.03$, $t < 1$. Also evident was a self-esteem effect that was qualified by the interaction, $b = 0.38$, $\beta = .34$, $t(80) = 3.21$, $p < .005$.

Trait Metaperceptions. The analysis of trait metaperceptions yielded only a self-esteem effect, $b = 0.34$, $\beta = .47$, $t(80) = 4.76$, $p < .001$.

Spontaneous Metaperceptions

The analysis of spontaneous negative metaperceptions expressed in the open-ended thought-listings (which also included total word count as a covariate) yielded a Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction parallel to the one evident for perceptions of partner's love, $b = -0.36$, $\beta = -.40$, $t(78) = 2.71$, $p < .01$. Trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view led LSEs but not HSEs to spontaneously focus on how their partner might feel negatively toward them, $b = 0.73$, $t(78) = 2.91$, $p < .005$, and $b = -0.23$, $t < 1$, respectively. The relationship between self-esteem and spontaneous negative metaperceptions was significant in the imagine-

other perspective-taking condition, b = -0.29, t(78) = 3.26, p < .005, but not in the control

condition, b = 0.06, t < 1. The analysis of spontaneous positive metaperceptions yielded no

effects apart from that for the word count covariate.

Relational Well-Being

    Relationship Satisfaction. The analysis of relationship satisfaction also yielded a Self-

Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction, b = 0.48, β = .35, t(79) = 2.39, p < .025. Once again the

results of simple effects analyses directly paralleled those for perceptions of partner's love.

Specifically, trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view led LSEs but not HSEs

to feel less satisfied with their relationship, b = -1.00, t(79) = 2.65, p < .01, and b = 0.28, t < 1,

respectively. Self-esteem was related to satisfaction in the imagine-other perspective-taking

condition, b = 0.60, t(79) = 4.35, p < .001, but not in the control condition, b = 0.12, t < 1. There

was also a self-esteem effect that was qualified by the interaction, b = 0.37, β = .37, t(80) = 3.59,

p = .001.

    Subjective Closeness. The analysis of subjective closeness yielded a Self-Esteem x

Imagine-Other interaction, b = 0.43, β = .37, t(79) = 2.42, p < .025. Imagine-other perspective-

taking led LSEs but not HSEs to feel less close to their partner, b = -0.72, t(79) = 2.14, p < .05,

and b = 0.44, t(79) = 1.28, *ns*, respectively. Self-esteem was related to subjective closeness in the

imagine-other perspective-taking condition but not in the control condition, b = 0.46, t(79) =

3.76, p < .001, and b = 0.02, t < 1, respectively. There was also a self-esteem effect that was

qualified by the interaction, b = 0.25, β = .29, t(80) = 2.69, p < .01.

Do Perceptions of Partner's Love Account for the Effects of Imagine-Other Perspective-Taking

on Satisfaction and Closeness?

Mediation analyses conducted as in Study 1 revealed that the Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction on relationship satisfaction (95% CI: 0.120 to 0.687) and subjective closeness (95% CI: 0.118 to 0.582) were both mediated by perceptions of partner's love. There was no residual direct effect in either case, ts < 1.

Do Spontaneous Negative Metaperceptions Account for the Effects of Imagine-Other

Perspective-Taking on Perceptions of Partner's Love?

Parallel analyses were also conducted to test whether the Self-Esteem x Imagine-Other interaction on perceptions of partner's love were mediated by spontaneous negative metaperceptions. Results indicated significant mediation, 95% CI: 0.008 to 0.495. Here the residual direct effect was significant, $b = 0.49$, $t(78) = 2.16$, $p < .05$, perhaps because the negative metaperceptions that participants reported during the thought-listing task represented only a subset of their thoughts along these lines.

Discussion

In line with predictions and consistent with the findings of Study 1, the results of this study indicated that trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view when thinking about a recent conflict or disagreement led LSEs to feel less secure about their partner's love for them and thus less satisfied with the relationship and less close to their partner. Analyses of the cognitions individuals expressed freely and on their own initiative on the open-ended thought-listing task suggested that perspective-taking led LSEs to spontaneously focus on their partner's (real or imagined) criticisms of them and lack of caring and thereby propelled their sense of his or her overall feelings toward them in a negative direction.

Notably, the results from the open-ended thought-listing task provide a critically important window into the likely effects of imagine-other perspective-taking in more natural real

world contexts in which individuals are not prompted by survey questions to think about their partner's evaluation of them. The kinds of thoughts that participants generally listed indicated that focusing on their partner's evaluations of them was by no means a default type of thought pattern: Many mentioned topics such as schoolwork, the weather, their psychology course, physical states such as being hungry or tired, or how they felt about their partner or relationship, with roughly one third receiving a non-zero score on either of the spontaneous metaperception measures. In line with our theorizing, however, spontaneous negative thoughts about evaluation were disproportionately more likely to arise in the minds of LSEs who were in the imagine-other perspective-taking condition than they were to occur to anyone else.

Once again, the negative implications of imagine-other perspective-taking for LSEs centered on their perceptions of their partner's love for them and did not extend to trait metaperceptions, and no effects were evident for HSEs. The fact that results from the open-ended thought-listing measure did not indicate that HSEs spontaneously reflected on their partner's positive (or negative) evaluations of them suggests that the absence of effects for these individuals on perceptions of partner's love is not due to a ceiling effect. Instead, it seems that imagine-other perspective-taking did not lead HSEs to become preoccupied with evaluation in the same way as LSEs, perhaps because the possibility of negative evaluation was not as salient for them as it was for LSEs. Finally, there was no evidence that the effects of self-esteem were somehow due to individuals' initial feelings of closeness to their partner.

General Discussion

The findings of these two studies reveal that trying to adopt their romantic partner's unique point of view (imagine-other perspective-taking) can have negative implications for LSEs' relationship perceptions, leading them to feel less loved by their partner and thus less

satisfied with their relationship and less close to their partner. These results, which were evident across a variety of circumstances, suggest that perspective-taking is not as universally beneficial for close relationships as it is generally assumed to be.

Mediation analyses in Study 1 suggested, as expected, that although imagine-other perspective-taking generally enhances self-activation (as does imagine-self perspective-taking), self-activation in and of itself does not account for the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on LSEs' relationship perceptions. Rather, as confirmed by mediation analyses conducted on individuals' responses to the open-ended thought-listing task in Study 2, the negative effect of imagine-other perspective-taking on LSEs' perceptions of their partner's love was driven at least in part by increased cognitive energy they devoted to drawing unfavorable metaperceptual inferences about their partner's view of them: LSEs' threshold for worry was so low (see Murray et al., 2006) that even just considering their romantic partner's unique point of view led them to become consciously preoccupied with evaluation, such that cognitive efforts that were, at least on the surface, directed toward reducing egocentrism actually had the opposite effect for these individuals. Analyses of the thought-listing responses also indicated that imagine-other perspective-taking did not prompt HSEs to spontaneously focus on their partner's feelings for them, which may account for the absence of significant effects of perspective-taking on HSEs' perceptions of their partner's love for them.

Notably, the results of Study 1 indicated that in the context of romantic relationships, which are characterized by clear potential for evaluation, the effects of imagine-self perspective-taking are distinct from those of imagine-other perspective-taking. Indeed, the only effect that was evident for imagine-self perspective-taking centered on individuals' impressions of their partner's traits and involved enhanced positivity. Conceivably, imagine-self perspective-taking

had more favorable implications because it did not orient individuals toward thinking about how they were evaluated, and for the same reason affected their judgments about their partner rather than their perceptions of their partner's feelings toward them. Finally, results for individuals' perceptions of their partner in Study 1 were inconsistent with the idea that the effects on perceptions of partner's love were due to LSEs simply projecting their negative self-views onto their partner.

Limitations

These studies had a number of strengths, such as examining positive and negative relationship events and including both open- and closed-ended measures as well as measures that help to rule out alternative interpretations of the data. Nonetheless, they also have a number of important limitations. Perhaps most notably, as is the case in the vast majority of previous work on perspective-taking, the studies were conducted outside of back-and-forth interaction between individuals and their romantic partner. Although there are grounds for expecting the present results to generalize to such circumstances (see Vorauer, 2013), this remains a question for future research. Regardless, the current findings are clearly applicable to – presumably quite common – situations in which individuals reflect back on times they have spent with their romantic partner or when they reflect on a recent conflict or disagreement with him or her. It will also be important to consider the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking on other outcomes such as individuals' sensitivity to their romantic partner or their ability to read him or her accurately. The present findings speak only to the valence of perspective-takers' own relationship-relevant perceptions.

The question further arises as to how the present findings can be reconciled with previous experimental research documenting benefits of perspective-taking for relationship perceptions

(Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998). Arriaga and Rusbult did not examine self-esteem as a moderator, but this cannot fully account for the inconsistency. It is possible that concerns about evaluation are more easily invoked by perspective-taking efforts when individuals think back to real relationship events that involved back-and-forth interaction, as was the case in the present research, than when they imagine hypothetical scenarios, as was the case in Arriaga and Rusbult's work. It is also possible that differences in the specific nature of the perspective-taking manipulation played a role. For example, participants in Arriaga and Rusbult's studies who were in the perspective-taking condition were also prompted to make attributions for the partner's likely feelings that may have anchored their attention more firmly on judging or evaluating their partner. The fact that the control condition in Arriaga and Rusbult's studies involved direct instructions to participants to focus on their own thoughts and feelings from their own point of view may also have been important to the apparent relative benefits of perspective-taking they identified. Finally, Arriaga and Rusbult's perspective-taking instructions to "visualize the incident from the partner's point of view" were somewhat different than those used in the present research and may have been interpreted by participants more in line with the current imagine-self instructions.

Conclusion

The results of the present studies indicate that although perspective-taking may be beneficial in many circumstances – most notably those not involving the potential for evaluation – trying to appreciate a romantic partner's personal point of view (imagine-other perspective-taking) leads LSEs to feel less loved by their partner and thus less satisfied with their relationship and less close to their partner. Efforts to understand their romantic partner's perspective and see the world through his or her eyes, thinking about his or her personal qualities

and how these qualities give him or her a unique and different viewpoint, prompted these individuals to spontaneously focus on their partner's ostensible lack of caring and criticisms of them. Although imagine-self perspective-taking instead led individuals to view their partner's traits more positively, it did not improve LSEs' perceptions of their partner's love for them. Thus, despite the intuitive appeal of perspective-taking and the relative ease with which such efforts can be invoked, alternative approaches that direct individuals more explicitly to positive relationship information would seem to hold more promise for assuaging LSEs' relationship insecurities.

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Footnotes

1. Enhanced congruence between self-perceptions and metaperceptions could conceivably instead reflect greater self-other merging, as suggested by research examining perspective-taking between strangers (Davis et al., 1996). However, such an interpretation would be inconsistent with the current finding that imagine-other perspective-taking results in lower felt closeness and with research suggesting that in close relationships, where the initial bond is already strong, perspective-taking prompts reduced self-other merging (Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013).

2. These numbers do not include six participants who completed the study more than once (we could not determine which response was entered first), four who reported not having a partner, or six who had missing self-esteem data. Eight additional exclusions were made on the basis of relationship length. In line with typical practice in relationship research (see, e.g., Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998), five participants who reported very short relationships (here, one month, which was the minimum length possible given the response scale, such that the actual durations may have been even shorter) were excluded to ensure that participants were responding with respect to unambiguously real relationships with some stability. Three participants who reported extremely long relationships of 20 years or more were also excluded, in response to initial analyses indicating that these relationships were statistical outliers (the shortest was more than 2.5 standard deviations above the next highest length) that resulted in strong correlations between relationship length and numerous dependent measures that completely disappeared when these cases were excluded. These exclusions on the basis of relationship length also rendered the range of relationship lengths represented the same as in Study 2. When all cases are retained regardless of relationship length, the Self-Esteem X Imagine-Other interactions on

perceptions of partner's love and relationship satisfaction both remain significant, $b = 0.39$, $\beta =$ .25, $t(157) = 2.15$, $p < .05$, and $b = 0.38$, $\beta = .24$, $t(157) = 2.08$, $p < .05$, respectively.

3. These numbers do not include twelve participants who did not complete the manipulation. Sixteen participants who self-reported not understanding the questions (7 or lower on the 9-point scale) and nine who took longer than 1 hour or less than 10 minutes to complete the survey were also excluded. These measures were not obtained in Study 1 and the exclusion criteria were established a priori in light of concerns about participants' careful attention to the survey and limited capacity to seek additional explanation of the questions or perspective-taking instructions in the online study.

4. Analyses conducted to test whether the effects of imagine-other perspective-taking were moderated by initial self-other merging yielded no significant effects, ts < 1 for all 3-way interactions.

Acknowledgements

Table 1

Predicted Values for Perceptions of Partner's Love and Relationship Satisfaction as a Function

of Self-Esteem and Perspective-Taking Condition (Study 1)

	Perspective-Taking Condition		
	Control	Imagine-Other	Imagine-Self
Perceptions of Partner's Love			
Lower Self-Esteem	7.19_a	5.99_a**	7.09_a
Higher Self-Esteem	7.59_a	7.58_b	7.32_a
Relationship Satisfaction			
Lower Self-Esteem	7.83_a	7.12_a*	8.08_a
Higher Self-Esteem	8.11_a	8.44_b	8.44_a

Note. All items were answered on 9-point scales on which higher numbers reflected more positive responses. Significant perspective-taking effects in comparison with the control condition are marked with asterisks (*$p < .05$, **$p \leq .001$). Within perspective-taking condition, the simple self-esteem effect was significant for values not sharing a common subscript ($p < .001$).

Table 2

Predicted Values for Perceptions of Partner's Love, Spontaneous Negative Metaperceptions, Relationship Satisfaction, and Subjective Closeness as a Function of Self-Esteem and Perspective-Taking Condition (Study 2)

	Perspective-Taking Condition	
	Control	Imagine-Other
Perceptions of Partner's Love		
Lower Self-Esteem	7.36$_a$	6.02$_a$***
Higher Self-Esteem	7.45$_a$	7.90$_b$
Spontaneous Negative Metaperceptions		
Lower Self-Esteem	-0.22$_a$	0.51$_a$ **
Higher Self-Esteem	-0.05$_a$	-0.28$_b$
Relationship Satisfaction		
Lower Self-Esteem	8.08$_a$	7.07$_A$**
Higher Self-Esteem	8.40$_a$	8.69$_B$
Subjective Closeness		
Lower Self-Esteem	8.18$_a$	7.46$_A$*
Higher Self-Esteem	8.25$_a$	8.70$_B$

Note. All scale items were answered on 9-point scales on which higher numbers reflected more positive responses. Spontaneous negative metaperceptions are the average of coders' standardized ratings. Significant perspective-taking effects in comparison with the control

condition are marked with asterisks (*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .005$). Within perspective-taking

condition, the simple self-esteem effect was significant for values not sharing a common

subscript (lower case $p \leq .01$, upper case $p < .001$).